



Forest Fridays at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve

A nature program based on free play and wonder-filled exploration for ages 3-5.

Clothing Requirements 2022-2023 School Year

Goal: *To keep your child warm and dry, so that she/he/they can thoroughly enjoy the experience of playing and exploring in the natural world.*

General Information

We learned a lot about dressing children for the weather in our first year of forest schooling at the KVR! Helping your child dress well for the weather is one of the most important things you can do to ensure your child's success at the Forest Fridays. It can also be an overwhelming task, but we want you to know that we are here to help you! In order to prepare yourselves for our program, **PLEASE READ THIS WHOLE DOCUMENT THOROUGHLY!**

Your child will get wet and dirty! Engaging deeply with the natural environment is one of the most important aspects of our curriculum. When children engage deeply they are not thinking about staying clean and dry. They stir mud, climb trees, roll down hills, jump in puddles and lie on the ground. We believe and see that this full-body engagement is deeply healthy and educational, and so, unless it is dangerous, we do not stop them. We never say, 'Don't get dirty!' As a result, by the end of the day, your child may have mud on their face, dirt in their hair, muddy wet knees and dirt under their fingernails. They may also rip and stain their clothing. Coats and snow pants will get ripped and show wear over the course of the year. This is to be expected and we will not judge you for sending your child to school with a duct tape patch. Additionally, excessive washing of waterproof gear can cause it to lose its waterproof quality, so a reasonable amount of dirt and staining is totally acceptable. Dried mud usually rubs off once children start moving around on a dry day and you can always send your child out to roll in the snow or dance in the rain to help clean gear up.

Wool is amazing: If you are going to invest in special clothing for school, we highly suggest buying a set of wool base layers and scouring thrift stores for wool sweaters and vests. Wool does an amazing job of maintaining body temperature and makes winter adventures vastly more comfortable.

Getting dressed is a big job: There are several very important pieces to this process. First, we have found that we can be vastly more prepared for each day if we check every child's layers when they arrive at school. We always want to make sure that they have on what they need before sending them to the forest. We hope that you will not feel judged or offended if we recommend that they add to or change their layers, as our recommendations come out of deep care for our student's well-being and a lot of experience with what works best in our school environment. Though there are many aspects of free choice in our curriculum, wearing the appropriate clothing for the weather is not one of them. We expect all children to wear rain gear when it is raining and hats and mittens when it is cold etc. Second, getting dressed and undressed is a wonderful opportunity for children to gain fine and gross motor skills and develop sensory organization and resiliency, practice responsibility and independence and learn organizational skills. Giving your child the time and direction to practice taking on and off outdoor gear will help them be successful at school. We allow plenty of time and give lots of guidance to our students to help them become more and more independent in this area. When dropping your child off at school, please encourage them to put on their items independently. And third, we recognize that taking on and off all the necessary layers is taxing and intense. We feel it too and we have compassion and patience as each child moves through the ups and downs of being prepared for Wisconsin weather.

Extra clothing: Each child should bring a set of seasonally appropriate extra clothing in a backpack, to the KVR for Forest Fridays.

Brands and Accessibility: We struggled with whether to recommend specific brands of outdoor clothing, because we do not want to promote brand awareness in our students. However, in the end we decided **to** recommend certain brands because we also see that the quality of outdoor gear has the potential to make weather immersion more comfortable. Our main objective is that, whatever the brand, your child's gear helps them be as warm and dry as possible. We have access to several pro-deals/volume discounts that we can pass along to families when purchasing gear for our program. We will also have gear that can be lent to students. **We want to make sure every child has access to quality gear. If you feel it is going to be difficult to afford or find quality gear, please contact Jonel Kiesau (jonel.kiesau@wisconsin.gov) ASAP so that she can make sure we have appropriately sized items to lend you.**

Gear Recommendations

Footwear: The best spring and fall footwear is insulated rubber boots such as "Bogs" or another kind of flexible rubber boots with wool socks. No open toed-shoes or sandals. In winter, boots with removable felt liners are recommended because the liners can be removed and dried each night, or even during the day.

Socks: Wool socks work best. We like "Smartwool" or "Darn Tough." We recommend having a good number of socks so that extra pairs can be left at school. "Oaki" (with whom we have a discount) has value packs of wool socks.

Hats: A sun hat for warm days in the fall and spring and a well-fitting wool hat with earflaps for winter. Please do not rely on a child's hood, they inhibit a child's ability to hear and see. We also recommend a merino wool or fleece balaclava because it covers the neck and ears and provides an extra layer on windy days. In the winter, a balaclava and wool hat should be worn together.

Neck: A neck warmer is preferable to a scarf as scarves can get caught in the underbrush.

Mittens: Mittens keep hands warmer and are easier to get on than gloves. A high-quality mitten with a longer cuff to keep out snow is required in the winter. We recommend “Columbia”, “Stonz” or “Reima”. It is good to have at least two pairs of mittens so that there is always a dry pair. Lightweight gloves or mittens are acceptable for fall and spring (check out Polarn O. Pyret or CeLaVi for wool ones). For very wet conditions we highly recommend waterproof over-mittens. We recommend “Polarn O. Pyret”, “Reima”, “Abeko”, or “CeLaVi”.

Layers: It is helpful to have a range of layers to keep your child warm and comfortable in various temperatures.

Base layer: thin layer of silk, wool or Capilene long underwear

Upper layer: a thicker layer of wool or stretch fleece on both top and bottom.

In the fall and spring you may find that a wool or fleece layer under rain gear is sufficient. During really cold months you’ll want to use a base layer *and* an upper layer under snow pants and a coat. Additionally, wool vests go a long way towards keeping the core warm!

Rain Gear: Rain gear is a crucial layer to keep your child comfortable and dry even when it’s not raining (the ground is often damp and we will regularly visit puddles and streams). Polarn O’Pyret and Didriksons make rain gear of excellent quality. Each child should have a raincoat and rain pants.

Pants: In the winter snow pants are required. It is crucial that snow pants have a closure (Velcro, elastic, cord) at the ankle to cinch the pants tight over boots to keep snow out. We recommend “Columbia”, “Lands’ End” or “REI” snow pants.

Coat: Layers are again important here. A fleece coat or a heavy wool sweater is a great layer that works in cool weather under a waterproof jacket. We require that your child have a very warm winter coat in very cold weather. We recommend “Columbia”, “Lands’ End”, “REI” type coats.

General Suggestions:

*Buy gear a little big so that your child has space to move and to grow.

*Sometimes children get very hot in the car on the way to school if they are dressed in all of their winter gear. In the winter, we recommend that for the ride to school your child wears boots and snow pants. They can put their coat, hats and mittens on upon arrival at school. This way they can avoid beginning the day sweaty, which will help them avoid becoming chilled.

*Please put your child in pants with elastic waistbands- no zippers, snaps, overalls, belts or suspenders as these complicate using the bathroom. Sweatpants are great!

*Washing: It is best with waterproof outerwear to not over-wash. It greatly reduces the waterproof quality. We recommend simply wiping or hosing off really dirty clothes and only occasionally machine-washing rain/snow coats and pants. Alternatively, you can just ask your child to roll in the snow to clean off gear! Do not put waterproof clothing in the dryer.

*Put your family name in each item of clothing

*Layers, layers, layers! The best way to keep your child comfortable as s/he plays in the woods is to make sure s/he is dressed in layers that are loose fitting so the child’s own insulating layer of body heat will not be constricted.

*Extra clothes: You are required to bring a full set of extra clothes in a backpack to the KVR. Please include extra mittens, a hat, long underwear, shirt, pants and fleece jacket or sweatshirt.

Lendable Winter Gear:

The KVR has a small amount of Columbia outdoor gear that can be checked out for each Forest Friday semester as needed. Please let us know at your earliest convenience if you will be needing to check out any coats, boots, pants etc., and the sizes needed.