



**DISCOVERY  
FOREST  
SCHOOL**

# **HANDBOOK AND POLICIES**

**2024-2025 School Year**

**Director – Heidi Limmer**

**Edness K Wilkins State Park**

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*Join us on our nature-filled adventure to preserve the wonder of childhood and instill a love of lifelong learning!*

Dear Parents,

We are thrilled you have joined us for Discovery Forest School! Many of you may be wondering, what is Forest School? While this schooling concept has been implemented for decades in Europe, it is a much more recent concept in America. Some of the first forest schools in the U.S. began around 20 years ago, with a huge uptick in popularity following the COVID pandemic. Forest School has several key elements. It is a child-led, place-based and nature-based method of learning that happens predominately outdoors in a natural environment. It occurs in all types of weather and is such a wonderful model to help children grow into competent, confident, problem-solving, resilient humans.

My journey with Forest School began several years ago when I first read about Thrive Forest School in Louisville, KY. I was able to go observe this school in action in the spring of 2023 and knew I wanted to pursue opening a Forest School in Wyoming. I attended Forest School Teacher and Director Certifications through the esteemed Forest School Teacher Institute in Chattanooga, TN under the leadership of Dr. Jean Lomino, a pioneer in outdoor education. Through a partnership with Edness K Wilkins State Park, our inaugural class is starting in 2024. We are the first and only Forest School in Wyoming, but hopefully the idea will spread! The whole essence of Wyoming is wrapped up in our wonderful outdoor opportunities. With children spending less and less time outside and more time on screens and devices, we are seeing a decline in so many areas, physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

We believe that Forest School can offer much of the remedy needed to turn those statistics around, and it's our endeavor to grow and learn and explore with your children!

Thank you for joining us on our mission to preserve the magic of childhood!

## Location

Discovery Forest School meets in our outdoor classroom at Edness K Wilkins State Park (EKW). EKW requires a paid entry to the park, but because we are an educational organization that fee is waived for parents while they are participating in preschool activities. A parking pass will be issued for the year to each family and is valid on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. This pass is not valid for other days or activities. Discovery Forest School is operated underneath the umbrella of Discovery Depot Preschool, located at 411 S. Walsh Dr. at the Restoration Church building. During inclement weather, we will be meeting at this indoor classroom.

The area of EKW where our class site is located is known as Eagles' Nest. There is an outhouse located close by, as well as a water spigot. We have a three-sided shelter at our class site, and a fire pit and picnic table.

## Student/Teacher Ratio

We maintain a classroom ratio of 6 students to 1 teacher. We cap our group size at 12 students. Video and/or audio monitors shall not be used to fulfill staff supervision requirements.

## Hours

Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 1:00-4:00 pm. Students who attend our morning program have the option to stay with the teachers from 8:30 am – 4:00 pm. They will need to bring a packed lunch from home (refrigerator and microwave are available for use) to eat between the morning and afternoon programs. We will not provide milk for consumption, but parents are welcome to send milk if desired.

## Tuition

A **\$60 non-refundable registration fee** is due for each child upon enrollment. This helps cover the cost of supplies needed. **In addition, the first month's tuition is due by August 5<sup>th</sup>.** This payment will be applied toward September's tuition and is also non-refundable. Subsequent tuition payments are due by the **5<sup>th</sup> of each month**. A late fee of \$10.00 will be applied to any payment made after the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, as well as to any returned checks. If tuition payments are consistently late, another student may fill the position in our program. No reimbursement will be given for sick or vacation days. We accept cash, checks, ACH drafts, and credit cards (a small service fee applies to online transactions). Please make all checks payable to **Discovery Depot Preschool**.

## Tuition fees

- **\$225/month**
- **Transportation fee \$40/month (optional)**

A 10% discount will be given off the tuition of each younger sibling attending. A 5% discount will be given if the year's tuition is paid in full prior to the start of the school year.

If parents desire to withdraw their child during the school year, the director must be notified by phone or written notice 2 weeks prior to withdrawal. If no advance notice is given, tuition for the month will still be charged.

### **Transportation**

Transportation is an optional service offered to our Forest School families whose children also attend our morning program at Discovery Depot. Those who utilize this service must provide a car seat for the teacher to use, as well as sign a transportation waiver.

### **Supplies**

Students should come each day with a backpack containing:

- Extra set of clothing (underwear, socks, pants, shirt)
- Water bottle
- Sunscreen/bug spray (not needed during cold months). Please apply this before dropping off at Forest School. Teachers will reapply as needed throughout the afternoon. We will also have sunscreen/bug spray available at Forest School if you do not have a preference as to which brand is used.
- Rain gear and boots (fall and spring) **OR** Winter gear and boots (winter) – see clothing recommendations

Children will need this with them as we will meet at a parking area and then hike to our class site. We all know how quickly weather can change in Wyoming and we want to be prepared to have an enjoyable time at Forest School.

### **Pick-Up and Drop-Off**

Forest School begins at 1:00 pm. Drop off can occur between 12:40 – 1:00 pm at the designated parking area. Pickup will be at 4:00 pm promptly at the same designated parking area.

### **Enrollment Requirements**

- **Child must be 4 years of age by August 1<sup>st</sup> of current school year**
- **Child must be potty-trained.**

### **Enrollment Process**

- 1) Before enrolling, we like to meet our prospective students and parents. We are available for tours on a case by case basis.
- 2) Fill out application and pay enrollment fee.
- 3) Upon enrollment, acquire current copies of child's immunization records.

- 4) Schedule a developmental screening with the Child Development Center (CDC) at (307)235-5097 to be completed before the beginning of school, if possible. Please send us a copy of the screening.

### **Brightwheel App**

Our program utilizes an app called **Brightwheel** for check in/check out procedures, teacher to parent communication and online payment options. Detailed instructions will be given at the time of enrollment. Please download the app as it is our primary source of communication with parents. Staff will also check in and out via Brightwheel.

### **Weather**

A main component of Forest School is that we meet outside in all kinds of weather! Sunshine, rain, snow ... all of these elements are doable with the right kind of gear. Alfred Wainwright once said, "There's no such thing as bad weather conditions, just bad clothing." A detailed clothing guide can be found at the end of the handbook.

However, we all know that Wyoming can have extreme weather! It is always our goal to make sure students are safe and not at risk of injury or frostbite. Our general rule is that we will be at EKW unless:

- Temperatures drop below 0 degrees F with the wind chill
- Sustained wind speeds exceeding 40 mph
- Severe weather alerts are issued for that afternoon (thunderstorms, tornadoes, etc.)
- Air quality is too poor to be outside (happens occasionally during fire season)

If any of these conditions exist, you will receive an alert via Brightwheel to meet at our indoor classroom located in the Restoration Church building at 411 S Walsh Dr.

When temperatures are between 15 – 0 degrees F, students must wear a face mask that covers their face up to their eyes. During these conditions, we have the option to utilize an enclosed cabin on EKW's property if we need to warm up.

Hand warmers will also be available for use as needed.

### **Toileting Policy**

Children must be completely potty trained and function independently to enroll in all preschool programs. Please send your child in underwear, not pull-ups. Although we expect that very young children may have occasional accidents, parents will be notified in the event of frequent potty accidents. Frequent accidents will require a meeting with a teacher or Director to assess your child's needs. We cannot clean clothing that has been soiled. Children will never be disciplined for toileting accidents. **All children should have a complete set of spare clothing at Forest School in case of an accident.**

### **Swimming/Wading Policy**

EKW has a small lake used for swimming. If we have a swimming day, parents will be notified ahead of time. We will also reduce our student:teacher ratio to 4:1. Each child will be wearing a life jacket and a certified lifeguard will be on duty. Swimming days may happen a few days per school year but will not be regular occurrence.

Aside from swimming, students will have the opportunity to play in the sand by the lake, without swimming, and there is also a wetland area that we will utilize from time to time. Students will always be supervised when given access to these areas.

### **Fire Safety**

At EKW, we can use a fire pit during cold months. If there is a county fire ban in place, we will utilize a propane fueled fire pit to provide a little extra warmth. Any time there is an active fire in the fire pit, it will be attended by an adult over 18 years of age, and students will have to maintain a safe distance from the flame. Only adults are authorized to add fuel to the fire. A water source and/or shovel will be within reach to extinguish the flames if necessary.

### **Immunizations**

All children enrolled in our program need to have a copy of their current immunization records on file, or a waiver for medical or religious exemption signed and notarized from the Wyoming Department of Health. Waivers can be found on their website at <https://health.wyo.gov>.

### **Illness Policy**

To prevent the spread of sickness and disease, please keep your child home if he/she is sick. Out of courtesy to our children and families, please notify the preschool if your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease (pinkeye, chickenpox, strep throat, COVID, etc.). The parent will be called to pick up their child under the following circumstances:

- Fever over 100 degrees (must be fever-free for 24 hours)
- Excessive diarrhea (must stay home for 24 hours after last episode of diarrhea)
- Vomiting (must stay home for 24 hours after last vomiting episode)
- Hives or unexplained rash
- Severe coughing, sore throat, or other severe cold symptoms
- Any other communicable disease (such as but not limited to; chickenpox, head lice, strep throat, conjunctivitis/pinkeye, COVID, etc.)

After parent or emergency contact is notified, the child will be isolated from the other students (within sight of a staff member) until he/she is picked up. Discovery Forest School does not administer medication to children, but we will reapply sunscreen/bug spray as needed.

Staff who become seriously or suspiciously ill with a communicable disease during the hours of operation for preschool will also be isolated from students and will not provide care or be used

to meet staff ratios until their symptoms have cleared, and/or they have been examined or treated by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner and verified to be non-infectious to others.

### **Medication Administration**

Medication (excluding sunscreen/bug spray) will not be administered to students by Discovery Depot Preschool staff. If a student has a special medical need, please provide appropriate documentation for any emergency medication (inhalers, epi-pens, etc.). Any such medication must be in the original prescribed container with the child's name printed on it and the appropriate dosing information. Staff will work with parents of children with special health needs to develop a written health plan.

### **Sanitation Procedures**

Hand sanitizer will be used frequently after toileting and before eating. A hand washing station with soap and water is also available for use if necessary.

### **School Schedule**

Discovery Forest School will operate according to the Natrona County School District Calendar (NCSD) except for the starting and ending date. Details regarding the calendar will be available upon registration.

### **Inclement Weather**

Discovery Forest School may be closed due to weather in conjunction with Natrona County School District. Please watch the local news or listen to local radio stations for these updates during inclement weather. There will be no makeup days for snow days.

### **Belongings**

We are not responsible for any stolen, broken, or lost toys brought from home. We ask that you leave personal toys and belongings at home.

### **Birthdays**

We love birthdays at Forest School! If you would like to provide a special birthday snack for the class, please coordinate it with your child's teacher. Please do not bring party favors. If your child has a birthday that falls on a holiday break or during the summer months, we will celebrate a "pretend birthday" sometime throughout the school year. Every student will get a chance to be celebrated at school!

### **Snacks**

All children will be provided with a snack mid-session. Snacks will be healthy, wholesome, nutritious, and low in sugar. Please inform us if your child has food allergies. All children with food and other allergies should have an emergency care plan in place. For food allergies, the plan shall provide detailed instructions about which food(s) the child is allergic to and what to

do if an allergic reaction occurs, including the names, doses, and methods of administration of any medications that the child should receive in the event of a reaction. The plan shall also include specific symptoms that would indicate the need to administer one or more medications. The same shall be developed and in place for children with any other allergy. All persons who come in contact with the children who have a plan for emergencies shall be fully aware of the plan and the plan shall be followed. Menus are posted in the classroom and available for parent review on Brightwheel. We do not serve meals at Discovery Forest School.

### **Special Health Care Needs**

All children with special health care needs (i.e. asthma, seizures, diabetes, etc.) who require scheduled daily medication or medications to be given on an emergency basis (Benadryl, Epi-pen, rescue asthma inhaler, etc.) shall have a care plan. Care plans shall have clearly stated parameters, directions, and symptoms for giving the medications. Care plans shall be updated as needed, but at least yearly. All persons who come into contact with the children who have a plan for emergencies, shall be fully aware of the plan and the plan shall be followed.

### **Animals and Pets**

We will be observing wildlife in its natural habitat at Forest School. No dead animals will be handled or touched, and handwashing or hand sanitizer will be used if handling a live animal (ex. frogs or tadpoles) Birds will not be touched at any time to mitigate the threat of exposure to avian flu. If a domestic pet comes to Forest School (Ms. Heidi's dog may visit us from time to time) it will be current on all vaccinations (where applicable) and not demonstrate any aggressive or dangerous behavior.

### **Liability Insurance**

Discovery Depot Preschool carries liability insurance through Church Mutual Insurance.

### **Weapons Policy**

There are no weapons on the premises of our preschool and only those in law enforcement are allowed to bring weapons into our facility.

### **Discipline Policy**

At Discovery Depot, we model our discipline policy after a classroom management method titled *Conscious Discipline*. It utilizes creating a sense of responsibility for one's actions through choices and natural consequences. If you would like to find out more about this method, please go to [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com). *Conscious Discipline* classes are also periodically offered through Restoration Church.

Our goal in all discipline is to promote the child's ability to exercise self-control as part of a healthy development process and learn to become intrinsically motivated to make right choices.



If persistent, harmful behavior is consistently displayed at school, it will be documented by the staff involved and parents will be contacted. A staff/parent meeting will occur at this time. A child may be suspended for the remainder of the school day based on, but not limited to, continual hitting, biting, cursing at staff or other classmates, other types of inappropriate touching, destruction to school property, etc. If a child is repeatedly suspended, a referral to Child Development Center will be made for an emotional/behavior evaluation (parents may request a referral to a different counselor or facility if they wish) so that professional intervention can occur.

### **Suspension/Expulsion Policy**

At Discovery Depot Preschool, we strive to make every child's experience a positive and nurturing environment however sometimes behavioral issues may arise that create a difficult learning environment for children. If we find your child is continually exhibiting inappropriate and disruptive behaviors we will share our concerns as well as our intervention methods with you through written documentation and a phone call and/or conference. Every effort will be made to connect staff and families with local and national resources that address challenging behaviors prior to an expulsion/suspension.

### **Staff**

Director – Heidi Limmer\*

Assistant Director/Lead Teacher – Brandy Marshall

Substitute Teacher/Assistant Director – Jennifer Koslowsky\*

Substitute Teachers – Mary Raver, Sarah Hamilton, Kimberly Ritter\*

\*Teachers that have received a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and are licensed through the state of Wyoming.

A background check and fingerprinting has been conducted on all staff, and they are also certified in CPR and First Aid procedures.

EKW Superintendent – Linley Mayer

### **Non-Discriminatory Policy**

Discovery Depot Preschool admits students and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin, to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school in administration of its educational and admissions policies.

### **Religious Affiliation**

Discovery Depot Preschool is a non-profit, independently operated preschool. Though we are not owned by Restoration Church, we are affiliated with it and its core tenets of belief. In preschool, we teach various Bible stories and Bible verses that are widely accepted by the majority of Protestant Christian churches. Forest School will not have as much emphasis on a structured Bible curriculum, but it will be referenced throughout our days.

### **Complaints/Appeals**

It is our goal and greatest desire for your family to have an overwhelmingly positive experience at our facility. However, if a problem develops regarding your child's experience within Discovery Forest School and you feel it needs addressed, please follow our procedure to work towards resolution

- 1) Discuss you issue with our director, Heidi Limmer (307-277-0535) by scheduling a meeting either before or after preschool.
- 2) If your concerns are not resolved, contact one of the following board members to set up additional intervention.
  - Jennifer Koslowsky (Vice President) 307-267-9653
  - Randy Raver (Secretary) 307-235-9100
- 3) A board meeting will be called, and a determination will be made on your behalf.
- 4) If you feel your concerns merit outside intervention, contact Teddie Schrayner at the Department of Family Services (307-473-3964) to make a more formal complaint.
- 5) A complaint and compliance history of Discovery Depot Preschool can be viewed at [www.findchildcarewy.org](http://www.findchildcarewy.org). All inspections and visits from DFS, the Health Department, and the Fire Department are available for public inspection upon request.

As a licensed childcare facility, all staff of Discovery Depot Preschool are mandated reporters. Employees are required to report any suspected child abuse to the Department of Family Services for further investigation.

### **Emergency Plans**

In the event of an unexpected weather emergency (including but not limited to flooding, tornadoes, severe thunderstorms, and blizzards), staff and students will make their way to the EKW office/shop building, located in the southwest corner of the state park. Parents will be notified immediately to come pick up their children as soon as it is safe to do so.