



# WILDERNESS AWARENESS SCHOOL

Youth Programs  
Family Handbook 2025 - 2026

# Programs at Wilderness Awareness School

**Safety is our Top Priority.** Children's physical and emotional safety is of utmost importance. This informs how we manage the environment, how we conduct ourselves and the community agreements we establish.

**Optimal Learning balances perceived safety and perceived risk.** While your kids will always BE safe to the extent we can control the world, they may find themselves in situations that don't feel comfortable. We embrace opportunities that stretch kids beyond their comfort zone into opportunities for growth. We aim for mutual trust in order to effectively support our students. We believe that expanding comfort zones creates children who are more resilient and grounded.

**Learning requires opportunity for mistakes and failures.** Kids crave the opportunity to reach for more than they are currently capable of, which will always involve some successes, and some failures. Our message is always consistent: Celebrate Healthy Experimentation and Challenge—No Shame—Nothing Wrong With Failing—What Did You Learn? We hope to help kids learn to be flexible and gracious in both success and failure.

**Kids Need Unsupervised Time in Nature!** We are committed to kids getting what they need, like exploring the world without constant direction from adults. To achieve this, we utilize two kinds of supervision:

- **Direct Supervision:** Instructors are in direct visual contact with students and will stop physically or emotionally unsafe behaviors.
- **Indirect Supervision:** Instructors are in close physical proximity (and can immediately respond should a student need help) but are not always in direct visual contact with all students. Examples of this include unstructured play and hiding games.



**Mentoring And Community**—At Wilderness Awareness School, our teaching style goes beyond providing information. We work to understand our students' passions, gifts and edges in order to help them learn and grow into their true selves. To represent this, we use the term "mentoring" or "Coyote Mentoring." However, what we are actually able to provide is "mentoring moments" as contrasted with fully-focused one on one personal mentoring. Likewise, we have a "learning community" which may be different from a community in your personal life. Staff are available within the context of our programs and our scope of practice.

# Policies and Procedures

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

We value respect for the whole human family in its wide diversity. This includes the uniqueness we bring into the community as influenced by our nationality, ethnicity, gender identity, spirituality, sexual orientation, body shape or size, economic status, or physical ability. We are committed to widening the circle of accessibility in nature connection and culturally responsive learning environments. Please see our full Equity Statement in your welcome packet.

## **Student Code of Conduct & Dismissal Policy**

At the beginning of each year, students and staff establish their community agreements or “House Rules.” You can support your child’s experience at WAS by asking them about these expectations. In general, we strive to create a space for children to learn from mistakes or incidents in a supportive, growth-focused way. Whenever possible, we work with students to understand the situation and have a conversation about how to best proceed. See below our different strategies for a typical challenging interaction.

That being said, there are certain behaviors that are not acceptable at Wilderness Awareness Youth Programs. Violations of any of these expectations could result in dismissal from the program.

### **1. Incidents that may result in dismissal:**

- a. Displays of violent, harmful or abusive language or behavior.
- b. Exclusive or romantic behavior including inappropriate physical affection or touch.
- c. Use or possession of illegal substances at program. Use of prescription drugs or over-the-counter medications requires prior arrangement with instructors.

### **2. Ongoing behavior that is not improved with intervention and support:**

- a. Refusal to respond appropriately to the directions of instructors, apprentices and volunteers, especially when it presents a safety concern or is negatively impacting the rest of the group.

## **Problematic Behavior**

We aim to be empathetic and responsive in addressing challenging behavior and will include a broad spectrum of strategies. There are two basic stages of intervention implemented to support students at program, outlined below.

### *Stage One: Living and Learning*

Our staff are committed to supporting students by using firm, but respectful boundaries, reminders, and redirection to respond to problematic behavior. Instructors and support staff will remind students of expectations and provide verbal warnings of logical consequences. If the behavior continues, or if it was a single incident that was more serious, instructors will communicate the event(s) with parents and ask for parent support to reinforce the established expectations.

### *Stage Two: Suspension*

Suspension will be used when the time and energy required to manage the behavior is no longer fair or reasonable to devote to one student. The problematic behavior may be having a significantly negative impact on the program. At this point, a more formal approach is implemented, which can include meeting with parents and suspension from the program for a specific period of time. Ultimately, the unacceptable behavior will resolve during a probationary period or the student will be dismissed from the program.

**If a student is expelled from a program due to problematic or unsafe behavior, there will be no tuition refund.**

It is our intention to find the most effective way to support our students, allow them to learn from behavioral challenges, and continue to participate in our programs. We also acknowledge that it is not possible to serve all students, and all kinds of behavior, within our programs.

### **Emergency Contact**

**It is crucial that we have a way to contact parents at all times** when a child is at our program. If for any reason you will be unreachable while your child is under our care, **let the instructor know at drop-off, and provide contact information for another responsible adult** (grandparent, legal guardian, etc) who will be available to contact should there be an emergency.

### **Transportation in School Vehicles**

We expect to continue to transport students in school vehicles during the 2025-2026 school year. In order to ride in our vehicles, students must follow policies that help everyone stay safe while driving, like staying in their seats, buckling up, keeping voices at a reasonable volume, etc.

### **Arrival and Departure Times:**

Staff are not available to supervise children outside of the drop off and pick up times. Student “clans” frequently head out for the day promptly after an opening circle. For this reason, late arrivals and early pickups are unlikely to be accommodated. If you anticipate a need to arrive late for drop-off or early to pick-up, please coordinate ahead of time with your child’s Lead Instructor or Monthly Site Director. With that said, we will not always be able to accommodate these requests.

If you know you are running late for pick-up, please contact the office at 425-788-1301 and let our Registrar know your estimated time of arrival. Please be aware that teaching teams need to head out for their debrief sessions promptly after pick-up. This planning time is critical to maintaining the integrity of our programs. If you are having consistent difficulties in picking up your child by the time of sign-out, please talk to your child’s Lead Instructor or the Youth Program Manager to help you find resources or assist you in finding solutions for prompt departure. Consistent late pick-ups without significant communication or that negatively impact staff meetings may lead to a late fee or dismissal from the program.

### **Inclement Weather Procedure**

During inclement weather, WAS Youth Programs Staff will contact parents through email the evening before or the morning of class. If class is in doubt the evening before, we will send a communication **no later than 7am the morning of class**. We will communicate specific information regarding change of location, cancellation, or early pick up. If class is canceled due to severe weather, we will not have a "make up" day, and refunds will not be given for these cancellations.

### **Health / Illness Guidelines**

We ask participants of Youth programs to stay home if they have signs or symptoms of Covid-19, flu, or other illnesses. Please see King County Health Guidelines for more specific guidance. In short, please stay at home from our programs until you are getting better overall. Contact a staff member if you are not able to attend a class or program day. You can email/call your program instructors or call 425-788-1301.

### **Lost, Found, and Reclaimed!**

Each class manages their own lost and found system. There will be a general lost and found bin on the porch of Cedar Lodge. It is helpful for you to check for missing items regularly at pick-up. We will donate lost and found items, generally once a month.

### **Communication with Instructors**

Youth Program Staff meet on Tuesdays to plan and prepare for programs. You can look for regular emails from instructors with updates and logistics on Tuesdays. If you need a more in-depth conversation than email can allow, please coordinate with your instructor to set up a meeting. If you have an urgent or very timely matter, please contact Susan Wepking by phone at 425-788-1301 or email [registrar@wildernessawareness.org](mailto:registrar@wildernessawareness.org), or Shivani Gogna, our Program Manager, by email [shivani@wildernessawareness.org](mailto:shivani@wildernessawareness.org).



# School Year: Required Gear

## Bring Daily:

- ✓ Backpack
- ✓ Bandanna
- ✓ 1-2 water bottles (min. 16 oz)—tight seal, no leaks
- ✓ Lunch & snacks
- ✓ Layers of weather appropriate clothing (labeled w/ name)
- ✓ Journal and pencil: (optional - Rite in the Rain notepad)
- ✓ Knife (Village, Foxes, Coyotes, Community School, Wild Within, and Ravens only)
- ✓ \*PLEASE NO MEDIA DEVICES, even for “naturalist” uses

**Gear Considerations** – *“There is no such thing as bad weather, only inappropriate clothing!”* Weather appropriate clothing is an absolute necessity. Please make sure that your child is well prepared for success with the following guidelines:

- **#1 Clothing Requirement: They can get dirty!** This encourages children to fully engage in their experience. Colors for camouflage can be especially fun.
- **#2 Clothing Requirement: They Can Handle the Weather!** Wool or synthetic fibers stay warm when wet. \*PLEASE NO COTTON IN THE WINTER (this includes socks, underwear, pants and outer layers, etc.) \*When cotton gets wet (and we will definitely be getting wet) it wicks heat away from the body, losing all insulation and making your child colder than they would be without it. **Rain gear and boots need to be waterproof**, water resistant is not enough to keep your child warm.
- **#3 Clothing Requirement: Layer to stay warm and dry!** This includes:
  - ✓ Two warm under layers (top and bottom - NO COTTON please!)
  - ✓ Two pairs of wool or synthetic socks (extra pair in backpack)
  - ✓ Waterproof (not “water-resistant”) boots, pants and jacket.
  - ✓ Waterproof mittens / gloves
  - ✓ Warm hat (wool or fleece is best, NO COTTON please!)
  - ✓ Scarf or neck warmer (wool or fleece)
  - ✓ For warm weather, cotton T-shirts and jeans are acceptable (quick drying clothes are preferred). Sunscreen and sunhat are crucial for those surprising sunny days. *Please have sunscreen already applied when you drop off your child.*
- **#4 Shoe Requirements: Closed Toed Shoes Always!** We require that all students have \*waterproof, close-toed shoes for class. We do allow students (with instructor permission) to go barefoot. \*Rainboots are top choice of kids! Tennis shoes and hiking boots tend not to be

waterproof enough. Warm weather water shoes MUST BE CLOSE TOED as we will also be walking around in the forest in them.

→ **#5 Knives (for Village, Foxes, Coyotes, Community School, Wild Within, and Ravens)**

Students of appropriate age (7 years and older) may *earn the privilege* of using a knife. This decision is one made by parents and instructors together. Knife requirements:

- ✓ Fixed blades only. NO FOLDING KNIVES, regardless of locking features.
  - ✓ Blade length: 2-3.5" is ideal with a maximum of 5" (adjust to size of child)
  - ✓ Hard / Rigid Sheath for storing in backpack.
  - ✓ No wearing knives on belts or externally on clothing or backpacks, or on neck lanyards. Knives must be stored inside the backpack when not in use.
- \*Our recommended knife can be purchased at the office or online in the registration process.  
\*Direct questions about knives to your Lead Instructor or Site Director!

**Recommended Other Gear:** We have a library of field guides and interesting books that students are able to use at class. They need not bring any to programs. We recommend that students have access to some of the essential field guides when they're at home. These are great gift ideas; ask your instructor for a recommendation! The [WAS Online Store](#) has links to our favorite field guides and other great resources!

## Our Philosophy

Coyote Mentoring empowers students to become healthy individuals and to serve as stewards, mentors and leaders in the movement to reconnect our culture to nature. Coyote stretches comfort zones; Mentor steers the raft. Our manual, *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature*, develops the Coyote Mentoring philosophy of education that makes our programs unique and vibrant. This approach honors individuality, encourages self-sufficiency in learning and awakens a kinship with nature. Our programs emphasize nature as teacher, routines to enhance awareness, engaging "child passions" through playing, questioning, storytelling, music making, using wildlife tracking as an interpretive tool and "bird language" as an awareness tool, and encouraging students to find their gifts and follow their passions.



# Our Core Values

## **Leading with Appreciation**

We aim to begin all interactions by sharing our appreciation for each other and the world around us. By acknowledging all we are grateful for, we cultivate peace and unity within ourselves and our communities, and foster the compassion and inspiration to powerfully enact our mission.

## **Empowering through Mentoring**

Through asking skillful questions and following curiosity, we empower our students and each other to become lifelong learners. Nature-based mentoring awakens health and vitality, nurtures personal gifts and talents, and cultivates devoted stewards and compassionate leaders.

## **Cultivating Inclusion**

We are committed to establishing a culture that recognizes difference, invites diverse perspectives, and acknowledges past and present inequities. We strive to cultivate an increasingly welcoming space, so that all may feel empowered to show up as their authentic selves.

## **Tending Relationships**

We encourage deep nature connection, humble service to community, and living in rhythm with natural cycles. When we honor our vital interdependence, we nurture the sense of belonging that comes from the understanding that we are all part of one web, one ecosystem, one whole.

