

NATURE-BASED ONGOING GROUP PROGRAM PLAN 2023-2024

The Nature-Based Ongoing Group's vision is to nurture children and their families' awareness and respect for the interdependence and interconnection of all life. Our efforts support individuals in making choices that protect, conserve, respect and honor the earth and all living beings. Through service, study, play and work we create opportunities for the members of our community to make a difference in the world we share.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants include homeschooling families and teachers interested in participating in a nature-based program that fosters respect for the earth and a deepening awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. Since a primary focus of the program is on social-emotional development and community building, families are asked to make a year-long commitment to the program, including participating in seasonal celebrations and campouts.

On NBOG days, the whole family is invited to enjoy time in nature at the park while separately, the teachers and parent volunteers focus on facilitating the richest possible experience for enrolled children. Parents and siblings of children in the Younger Group (K-2) are invited to join the group activities. However, if a sibling is distracting to the group process, parents are asked to redirect the sibling by removing him/her from the circle or activity so that enrolled children can practice listening, speaking and following directions with minimal distraction. Parents and younger siblings of enrolled children are encouraged to join with other parents and siblings to create a nature experience appropriate for preschoolers separate from the main groups.

Parents of children in all groups are asked to commit to assisting the teachers 3 days per enrolled child per year. During this time, other arrangements need to be made for siblings since, for that day, the teachers and kids will want your full attention and participation. The exception to this is the Younger Group where siblings are welcome to join on parent help days. Parents of children in the Younger Group often spend the day with their children beyond the 3 required parent help days. You are welcome to do this. Participating in class

provides a great opportunity to observe how your child interacts with other children, teachers and the natural world. Outside of scheduled parent help days, we will only ask parents to accompany their children to class if we see that the child needs extra support in order to have a safe and satisfying experience.

Parents will be expected to stay with children who are not ready or able to follow basic safety guidelines or who are not yet willing to participate in group activities until the teacher determines that the children are able to participate in the group safely and appropriately without parent accompaniment.

We also ask parents to participate in all Festival Days (4) and Campouts (1). Parent help days and Festival Days will be scheduled before classes begin to help with planning. The campout will be scheduled for late May as soon as we can secure campground reservations (usually in November).

Note for kids with learning challenges:

Dyslexia: Although we do a small amount of reading, writing and math at NBOG, it is always applied and embedded in context. There is plenty of adult support for children who need it. We can easily accommodate children with dyslexia and many other learning challenges.

That said, the following learning challenges are difficult for us to accommodate given our context:

Auditory Processing Challenges: Because we are outdoors, with no obvious boundaries to our classrooms (i.e. walls), for safety and

efficiency all children need to be able to clearly and quickly respond to verbal direction from the teachers and parent helpers. Children with auditory processing challenges may not be able to participate safely and effectively in NBOG.

Sensory Integration Challenges: Since we are outside, there is a lot of sensory input. We'll be experiencing a variety of hot, cold, wet, dry, wind, raingear (crinkly clothes), and sights and sounds that may be unfamiliar to kids who don't spend a lot of time in the woods. Children with sensory integration challenges may be so overwhelmed with stimulation that they might find it hard to focus on class themes and activities. If your child has auditory processing or sensory integration challenges, but you still think that NBOG would be a good program for them, then let's talk. We may be able to arrange for your child to participate in a couple of trial classes to see if NBOG is a good fit.

General Challenges: **Any** child who is having trouble participating safely and effectively in NBOG will need to have their parent participate in class with them until they are able to function smoothly on their own. NBOG teachers and parents care deeply about inclusivity. We do our best to support a successful and satisfying experience for any child who wants to participate. In rare cases, we may be unable to accommodate a student or family. At that point, the student would end their participation in the program and pay no more tuition for the remainder of the school year.

PROGRAM / ACTIVITIES

The kids love to be together as one large group, but we also recognize that this is a broad developmental spread. On most days we typically divide enrolled students into four age-alike groups: K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11. These groups may change depending on enrollment and student needs. Final decisions about groupings will be made by the teachers in August. It is not uncommon for two groups to meet for part or all of a given day to participate in activities together.

Older Groups (grades 3-9+):

A "typical" daily schedule for the Older Groups is

as follows (recognizing that the group will flow with opportunities that arise, varied location, group energy, weather, etc.):

9:45am	Parents arrive with kids, unload cars, free play time, etc.
10:00-10:30am	Opening circle with all community members which may include music & movement. (Parents and sibs are invited to join in the morning circle!)
10:30-10:50am	Hike to Outdoor Classroom (may change from day to day).
10:50-12:15pm	Curriculum-focused meetings, skill building and projects.
12:15-1:00pm	Lunch and play.
1:00-2:00pm	Topical read-alouds, storytelling, quiet reflection (observing, drawing, writing, etc.), group process discussions, project continuation/sharing.
2:00-2:40pm	Group games, self-chosen challenges, productive play, or more curricular activities.
2:40-3:00pm	Hike back to parking lot.
3:00pm	Parents pick up kids.

Younger Group (grades K-2):

The Younger Group meets from 10:00am to 2:30pm. After the morning music circle and snack time, the teacher of the youngest group facilitates activities which may include singing, storytelling, awareness games, nature exploration, art, forest-centered play and more.

After lunch, the teacher may narrow the focus for a story, sharing, sensory awareness and nature investigation activities which could include journal drawing/writing. Supporting compassionate communication and inclusion between group members is a top priority as

the kids deepen their relationships to each other, the forest, and the river. At the end of the day many families choose to stay and participate in parent supervised play until older siblings return at 3:00pm.

All Groups:

Included throughout the year will be discussions of safety and care of each other, the environment, and oneself in an outdoor setting. Parents of children having difficulties following common-sense guidelines may be asked to participate with their children to help ensure the smooth functioning of the group as a whole. We consider conflict resolution and group harmony to be very important parts of the curriculum that would take precedence over other curricular plans. We are inspired by the work of Non-Violent Communication, Focusing, Building Consensus, and Speaking and Listening from the Heart, and strive to implement and practice these Emotional Intelligence skills whenever possible.

For comfort and safety we ask that each participating child be outfitted with the following equipment:

- Sturdy, comfortable hiking shoes
- Complete raingear (top and bottom, please wait until October to purchase)
- Sun hat & cool weather hat
- Water shoes, towel, and a change of clothes (for river days)
- Water bottle with a full day's water supply (water, not juice)
- Extra water for hand washing (for older groups)
- Premade lunch and snacks (in reusable containers as much as possible, no candy)
- Trash bag (for end-of-the-day clean-up)
- Comfortable daypack that fits your child's body (large enough to hold everything)

Teachers will provide:

- Toilet paper kit
- Journal
- Pencils, pens, colored pencils, crayons
- Emergency whistle and bandana
- Mesh bag (older groups)

LOCATION & WEATHER

Our primary meeting location will be at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton. For blocks of several weeks we may decide to meet at a different location. Some locations we've used in the past are: Palo Alto Baylands, Almaden Quicksilver Park, New Brighton State Beach, UC Santa Cruz and Fall Creek State Park. We will give plenty of advanced notice before we change locations so that parents can adjust carpooling arrangements to accommodate the changes.

Since we meet primarily in state parks, most families purchase a 12-month pass which permits the holder free entry into most state parks for one year from the date of purchase. The best deal is the Golden Poppy Pass which costs \$125. You can purchase the pass at any state park or via the state parks website: <https://store.parks.ca.gov/golden-poppy-annual-day-use-pass/>

Please do not drive into the park without paying the entrance fee and risk an expensive ticket. **Please do not ask for permission from the park staff to drop off or pick up your child without paying!!!**

If you forget your pass, please park your car outside the entrance and call the cell phone of one of the teachers or other parents (contact list provided at the beginning of the year). One of us can drive out to help transport you and your children into the park. **It is of utmost importance that we maintain positive relations with park staff by not bending park rules.** The park is our home and we don't want to lose permission to meet as a group.

Historically, participating parents have preferred to cancel class on days that were too rainy to comfortably meet. With this in mind, we have scheduled three extra class days in the calendar to accommodate cancellations. Notification of cancellation will happen via the NBOG Groups.io email list by 7:40am on the morning of the class. We will only cancel class if it appears that it will

rain for most of the day or the conditions are unsafe due to wind or smoke. We schedule three to four extra class days to accommodate for cancelations due to teacher illness or weather conditions.

It is difficult to predict the weather in our complex region of microclimates. Inevitably there will be some days that we call off class, and the weather turns fair. There will also be days that we hold class and end up in a downpour for a couple of hours. We ask your patience with and forgiveness for any errors we might make in weather forecasting. If the forecast is for showers or drizzle, we will go out. For this reason, we ask that kids come outfitted for the rainy season in full raingear to handle light rain, short storms and sitting on the wet ground.

FEES & RESPONSIBILITIES

There is a **\$50 enrollment fee** payable when you submit your child(ren)'s enrollment forms. Upon confirmation of enrollment, the fee becomes non-refundable (whether your child ends up participating in class or not) and will be applied to the campground costs for our end-of-the-year campout. In the event your child is on a waitlist and a space does not open up for him/her, your \$50 enrollment fee will be refunded. **Tuition for the class is \$2000 per year. There is a \$100 per semester discount for those who pay in full at the start of each semester.** Marcy Reynolds, program coordinator will let you know which teacher you will make payments to. Payments can be made by check or Venmo. All teachers work together to support all of the students so the teacher you pay may not be the one currently leading your child's age-alike group.

For students enrolled in Ocean Grove Charter School, the \$2000 tuition can be paid via school Instructional Funds. **Marcy Reynolds, the program coordinator will let you know which teacher/vendor you will create a purchase order for.** There is no "NBOG" vendor. The NBOG teachers are separate vendors. Program tuition includes 27 sessions of instruction, coordination, materials and guest teachers. We schedule 30-31 classes to accommodate cancelations due weather or

teacher illness. The tuition does not include entry fees for Henry Cowell (see Location section) or any additional backpacking/camping trips. Tuition payments can be made in semi-annual, quarterly, or monthly installments upon arrangement.

Participation in NBOG is a year-long commitment (Sept-May). The teachers commit to a year of supporting your family, and you, in turn, commit to supporting the teachers. This commitment includes paying the full-year's tuition regardless of the number of days that your child attends class.

Each family will be required to sign a **Parent Participation Agreement** which details the responsibilities as parents to help ensure a safe and productive experience for the NBOG community of families. This includes being fully available to volunteer for an entire class session 3 times (per enrolled child) during the school year, attending festival days (usually 4 per year) and campouts (usually 1 per year), joining the Groups.io email list, responding to surveys, and attending any necessary meetings (minimal). This helps keep a community feel to the program and helps ensure that all the kids will get to know all the parents, and visa-versa. NBOG feels like a family because parents participate!

You will also be asked to sign a **Release Waiver**, to fill out an **Emergency Card** (2 pages), and provide **proof of Medical Insurance Coverage** (a photocopy of the insurance card is enough). The Nature Based Ongoing Group holds no insurance itself, so **any needed medical care must be paid for by the child's family.**

SCHEDULE/CALENDAR

The class will meet from 10:00am to 2:30pm (Youngers) or 3:00pm (Olders) on Fridays.

Students will be asked to arrive at 9:45am to allow time for parent-supervised play and transition before the class begins.

Planned Schedule (to be confirmed in Aug.)

September 8	First Day of NBOG: End-of-Summer Festival Day
October 27	Fall Festival Day
November 24	No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday
Dec 22 – Jan.5	No Classes: Winter Break
January 12	Winter Festival Day
February 23	No Class: Presidents Day
Three-Four Days TBA	Class Cancelled: due to Weather or Teacher Illness
March 29	Spring Festival Day
April 5 & 12	No Class: Spring Break
May 17 - 20	Last day of NBOG: Family Campout