



## Little Trees Early Learning Program Handbook

Children will discover the wonder and beauty found within the Arboretum's 1,700 acres as they play, learn, and come to know the natural world. Exploring nature through the changing seasons provides the perfect landscape for fostering adaptive life skills while laying a foundation for a continuous love of learning.

The mission of Little Trees is to help young children develop a deep and meaningful relationship with the natural world through outdoor play and emergent discovery. Our curriculum is seasonally-based and interest-driven.

Through natural curiosity, a child may wonder about the leaves changing color, the sudden appearance of a puddle, fresh animal tracks in the snow, or the appearance of migrating birds flying overhead.

Our daily explorations and provocations complement what is occurring within the natural environment, turning these phenomena into investigative themes. As young student scientists, children use field guides, tools and natural materials to delve into these topics while engaging in activities that build physical, social-emotional, and cognitive skills. This approach fuels organically created experiences—deeply resonant events born from the children's innate curiosity and connection to the natural world around them.



### Facilities

The Morton Arboretum provides an unparalleled location for nature-based learning. Children will discover the wonder and beauty found within the arboretum's 1,700 acres. The Arboretum is home to forests, creeks, savannahs, prairies, and lakes, all of which provide a rich natural environment for exploration and learning.

Experienced instructors trained in nature-based education will share their enthusiasm for the natural world with the children on their daily explorations through the varied environments. During outdoor exploration, children frequently have the opportunity to observe native wildlife, including white-tailed deer, red-eared sliders, sunfish, bullfrogs, red-tailed hawks, and monarch butterflies.

Little Trees has access to both outdoor and indoor classrooms that can serve as a home base providing space for learning stations, dramatic play, art, and science experiments.

## Arrivals

Our daily outdoor activities will start promptly at 9:00am or 9:30am. Children should be dressed appropriately for the weather as outlined in our Clothing section below. Little Trees' responsibility for the child begins when they are signed in. Little Trees is a drop-off program and parents are not permitted to stay with the program after drop-off. We recognize initial drop-offs can be difficult and we will share drop-off tips to help ease the transition so that our program can start on time for all participants. Instructors will be ready to receive children 5 minutes prior to class. Instructors are unable to accept children prior to 5 minutes before the scheduled program time, as they are preparing for the day. ***Please make sure that your child has had access to a restroom prior to the start of class.*** It is advantageous to not need to return to the building to use the restroom while on our explorations.

## Departures

We will not dismiss your child to an unauthorized person or someone not indicated on your Enrollment Form. You may add people to your list at any time. An email or a handwritten and signed note from the parent or guardian is required to add people to your list in lieu of a verbal conversation. For identification purposes, a driver's license may be required prior to departure.

Please be prompt when picking up your child. Children become worried when parents are late. If a parent is later than 15 minutes and has not called, the staff will begin to contact the child's emergency contacts. There will be a fee of \$15 per child for pick up 15 minutes late and \$1 per minute thereafter. A second late pick up within 30 days will result in a \$15 fee per child and a \$3 per minute rate thereafter, as well as a parent/staff meeting to emphasize the importance of establishing routine. A third late pickup in 30 days will result in a \$15 fee as well as \$5 per minute rate thereafter, along with a parent/staff meeting. Late fees are due on the child's next day of school.





## Daily Schedule

At Little Trees, we value spontaneity in activity and take advantage of the “teachable moments” that we are afforded through this program. We also know that young children who are experiencing regular activity away from home for the first time benefit from knowing what to expect as they are in our program. Although every day promises to be a new adventure for our class, we maintain a flexible, but structured schedule with predictable events throughout the day. The following is an example of a classroom schedule:

Arrival: Guardians will drop the children off at the Outdoor Classroom or the Visitor Center.

Free Choice Activities: Children may engage in dramatic play, fort building, sensory bin exploration, games, music and movement, arts and crafts, journaling, science experiments, or loose parts tinkering at our maker station. These activities will change according to the seasons and emergent interest.

Outdoor Exploration: Most days children will explore the vast trails or natural areas of The Morton Arboretum. They will discover the wonder and beauty of prairies, creeks, rivers and woodlands. While exploring, children could be climbing, fort building, digging, engaging in water play or acting out dramatic play. Many hikes are intended to enhance seasonal observations and focus on various interest-driven themes.

Gathering Circle: Children may take part in thematic conversations, listen to stories or poems, sing songs, or engage in group activities.

Snack: This is a great time for social interaction, practicing table manners, and good health and safety practices. Only healthy snacks are allowed at Little Trees. Please send in either a fruit or a vegetable in reusable containers. Snack is not intended to be a meal, but rather a small snack. Please send in a small water bottle in your child’s backpack. The bottle will need to be securely sealable as we may carry these on hikes.

Community Responsibilities: Children are encouraged to take ownership in tasks that help the classroom community. Examples could be watering plants, composting, leading hikes, or classroom cleanup.

Departure: Children will be ready for pickup at the Outdoor Classroom or Visitor Center.



## Bug Spray and Sunscreen

If you wish your child to have bug spray or sunscreen, the parent or caregiver must apply it before class. Instructors are not permitted to apply these to the children. If your child has been exposed to poison ivy, staff will apply Tecnu to the affected area. If your child is having a non-life-threatening reaction (welt) to a bug bite, staff will apply an ice pack and/or benzocaine. In either case, staff will let the guardians know upon pick up.

## Communicable Diseases







The parents of any child that develops a communicable disease must notify the classroom teacher. A notice that maintains privacy will be sent home with students in that classroom to alert parents to observe for symptoms. Further steps will be determined based on state and health agency guidelines for the specific disease. In a disease outbreak, or after exposure to any of the diseases for which immunization is required, we may exclude children who are not vaccinated in order to protect all students.

## First Aid and CPR

The staff at Little Trees is fully trained in First Aid and CPR procedures. If your child gets injured while at Little Trees, the instructor will administer first aid and you will be notified at pick-up or by phone after class for minor accidents. For major medical emergencies, we will contact you or your emergency contacts right away to come pick your child up or to alert you to emergency treatment. Should emergency treatment be required, staff will have your medical information on hand and follow the procedures. An accident report will be filled out by a staff member and kept on file. First Aid equipment will be on hand at all times during class.

We rely on every family's help to keep the program environment safe. **Keep your child home if they have:**

- a temperature greater than 100°F. Children must be free of a fever for at least 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicines, before returning to the program
- a respiratory illness, excessive drainage, recurrent cough, shortness of breath, or lethargy.
- been vomiting or have had diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- a rash with itching and/or fever
- lice
- an inflammation/discharge of the eyes.

Sick Kids: When to Stay Home from School					
FEVER A temperature of 100° or higher	COUGHING THAT WON'T STOP Or other problems with breathing	DIARRHEA OR VOMITING Within the past 24 hours	RASH Body rash with itching and/or fever	HEAD LICE Itchy head, active head lice	EYE INFECTION Eye is red and oozing a yellow or green discharge
					
When to Return to School					
Fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen	Cough is mild and infrequent and evaluated by doctor if needed	Free from diarrhea and/or vomiting for at least 24 hours and evaluated by doctor if needed	Free from rash, itching or fever and evaluated by doctor if needed	After first head lice treatment	24 hours after starting antibiotic eye drops or ointment

## Absences

If your child will be absent from class, please contact the Program Supervisor and your child's teacher via Storypark group message. No refunds will be issued for any sick days.

## Daily Screening of Illness

If your child displays obvious signs of illness, a decision will be made on the advisability of the child remaining at Little Trees. The parent or guardian will be notified if the child needs to return home. Your child will be sent home if there is a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, frequent coughing, shortness of breath, lethargy, or if they are not participating or unable to walk during outdoor hikes and require a lot of extra attention from an adult. Our main goal is to keep the children healthy by preventing unnecessary spreading of illnesses.

Proper hand washing is a simple and extremely effective way to stop the spread of unwanted germs. During class, we practice hand washing habits before snack and after using the bathroom. Portable handwashing stations or hand sanitizer will be available throughout the class.



## Medicine Administration

The Morton Arboretum employees, volunteers and/or agents administer or supervise the administration of medication in accordance with the routine described under the Administrative Procedures for the Administration of Medication at The Morton Arboretum. Please note that medication must be in an original container with pharmacy instructions. Please refer to the Medical Authorization Form for further details.

The Little Trees program staff will not administer prescription and non-prescription medications under any circumstances other than the following:

- Medications that may be administered with physician instructions and parental consent include and are limited to inhalers to treat asthma; epinephrine pens, Benadryl, and other similar treatments to address severe allergies and/or allergic reactions.

## Allergy Information

Here at Little Trees, students will come in contact with many different allergens in the natural world. We have a vast arboretum to explore and **numerous chances to come in contact with tree nuts, egg shells, shellfish (crayfish), pollen, seeds and grass.** If your child has allergies to these things or anything else, you must make the Program Supervisor aware of this issue **prior to Family Orientation**. While we are always vigilant about your child's safety, due to the nature of outdoor education, we may not always be able to prevent accidental contact.

## Safety

All teachers have undergone a thorough background check through the State of Illinois and have received training in CPR and first aid. Firearms are prohibited on Arboretum premises. Weather and safety drills will be practiced throughout the school year.

## Clothing

Clothing should be kept simple, comfortable and washable. Students will be involved in many different types of activities while at Little Trees and should be dressed accordingly. Active exploration of the outdoors is encouraged during class time and children will be permitted to splash in mud puddles, dig in the soil, make mud pies, and play with paint. We encourage sending your child to school in clothes that can get dirty. Children should wear clothing that they can manage themselves in a washroom. Shoes should be comfortable, protective and have gripping soles for climbing, running, and jumping. Sneakers or hikers are best during dry weather. Rain boots are best during wet or cool weather. Snow boots are recommended for temperatures below 50 degrees. Flip flops are **not** acceptable footwear for trails and are deemed a safety hazard. Long pants should be worn in all weather due to poison ivy and ticks. Rain pants, rain jacket, thick wool-blend socks, snow pants, winter jacket, hats, and waterproof mittens are all essential for outerwear at nature-based programs. Outdoor gear tips will be discussed at orientation as we go over appropriate gear for all types of weather.

FALL & SPRING		WINTER	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jacket/Sweatshirt</li><li>• Waterproof Mittens</li><li>• Hat</li></ul> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long underwear/top and bottom</li><li>• Waterproof mittens</li><li>• Scarf/neck cover</li><li>• Hat</li></ul> 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rain jacket with hood and rain pants/bibs</li></ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• OR one piece rain suit</li></ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Warm, water resistant winter coat</li><li>• Snow pants</li></ul> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• OR one piece snowsuit</li></ul> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rubber boots (rain boots)</li><li>• Wool/fleece socks</li></ul> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Insulated Boots (snow boots)</li><li>• Wool/fleece socks</li></ul> 	

All clothing **must be labeled** including boots, mittens, snow pants, coats, etc. Although staff members will do their best to keep track of clothing, many look the same and Little Trees is not responsible for lost articles of clothing. \*Please do not send an umbrella with your child.

## Class Cancellations and Weather Conditions

Since your child's safety is our priority during class, we will not explore the outdoors in unsafe or uncomfortable conditions. Our goal is to inspire children to go outside not because they are forced to, but because they enjoy it. The instructors at Little Trees will make judgment calls directly prior to class time as to whether or not the children will be taking a hike or engaging in outdoor activities that day. Several factors go into making that decision such as temperature, wind, sunlight, rain, lightning, and heavy winds. For example, if there is a light rain without lightning or heavy winds, we may go on an expedition or stay indoors depending upon the instructor's discretion. Arboretum rangers will alert us via radio if any dangerous weather is in the area. We follow the [NOAA wind chill chart](#) for frostbite guidelines and students will not be out in dangerous temperatures. We advise that you dress your child for the weather as specified in this Handbook.

Severe weather may cause cancellation of Little Trees. Appropriate conditions for cancellation include blizzard conditions, extreme cold, significant snowfall, and other severe weather causing flooding or road closures. The National Weather Service will be the meteorological source used to inform weather related closings.

Little Trees will post all cancellations on our parent communication platform, Storypark. No refunds will be issued for weather related closings nor will any additional days be added to the school calendar.

### Wind Chill Chart

Scaled down NOAA Wind Chill Chart\* representative of winter temperatures in Illinois.

		Actual Air Temperature (°F)												
		Calm	40	35	30	25	20	15	10	5	0	-5	-10	-15
Wind Speed (mph)	5	36	31	25	19	13	7	1	-5	-11	-16	-22	-28	
	10	34	27	21	15	9	3	-4	-10	-16	-22	-28	-35	
	15	32	25	19	13	6	0	-7	-13	-19	-26	-32	-39	
	20	30	24	17	11	4	-2	-9	-15	-22	-29	-35	-42	
	25	29	23	16	9	3	-4	-11	-17	-24	-31	-37	-44	
	30	28	22	15	8	1	-5	-12	-19	-26	-33	-39	-46	

#### Frostbite Guide

Low risk of frostbite to exposed skin for most people.

Increasing risk of frostbite for most people within 30 mins of exposure

High risk for most people in 5-10 minutes of exposure

#### Notes:

Wind chill describes how a human being would feel in the wind at the ambient temperature. Wind chill is also referred to as the "feels like" temperature.

The wind chill index does not take into account the effect of sunshine. Bright sunshine may reduce the effect of wind chill (make it feel warmer) by 5-10 degrees.

\* Find complete chart at [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)

## Personal Belongings

We understand that your child's personal belongings are special. Because we do not wish that their items are lost or damaged, we ask that all personal items be left at home.

## Bathroom Time

**Please make sure that your child has recently used the bathroom prior to drop off.** Indoor bathrooms and/or portable toilets will be available for you to use with your child when you arrive. When starting our day outside, it is convenient for outdoor exploration that we don't interrupt the play or hike to return for bathroom visits.

Make sure that your child's clothing is conducive for easy care in the bathroom. Elastic waist pants are great. If your child has pants with zippers, snaps or buttons, make sure that they are able to do this on their own. This will give the child a feeling of empowerment and independence.

Potty training is required for participation in Little Trees. Diapers or Pull-ups may not be worn to class. Please note that if a child has several toileting accidents within a short time frame, the staff will evaluate the child's toileting skills and speak to the parents and may suggest the child's withdrawal from the program until they have mastered independent toileting skills.

## Behavior Guidelines

At Little Trees, we believe that optimal learning occurs in an environment where exploration and freedom of discovery are combined with structure that ensures the physical and emotional safety of all participants.

To achieve optimal learning conditions, we employ the following strategies:

- We will establish clear expectations for the children in the program to take ownership of rules that ensure their day to day experience is one of kinship and care with the freedom to engage in exploration.
- Our daily program is structured to provide time for play. With plenty of active learning opportunities, children tend to expend their energy in positive and appropriate ways.
- Little Trees staff promotes social emotional development by encouraging children to work through social issues towards conflict resolution. When interpersonal issues occur, staff will intervene in developmentally-appropriate ways such as:
  - Communicating clear expectations
  - Planning ahead to prevent issues before they occur
  - Modeling appropriate communication skills
  - Rewarding positive behavior & self-regulation
  - Taking the perspective of others (“putting yourself in others’ shoes”) and promoting empathy
  - Redirecting toward other appropriate activities
  - Explaining natural consequences

These methods help the child see a connection between behaviors and consequences.

It is expected that parents will work with teachers in helping find solutions to persistent behavioral problems. If the behavior continues despite the best efforts of the staff, parents will be encouraged to seek professional advice on how the program can safely and adequately meet the child's needs. Any child who, after attempts have been made to meet the child's individual needs and whose presence is detrimental to the group, shall be discharged from the facility. Tuition will not be refunded.

## Discharge Policy

The program reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of a child for any of the following reasons:

- Physical or verbal abuse of children or staff by a parent or guardian;
- Failure of the parent or guardian to observe the rules of the program;
- Failure of the parent or guardian to complete and return all required forms; and
- After reasonable efforts on the part of the program staff and the child's parent or guardian to integrate the child into the program, the child's participation may be terminated if there are behavioral or developmental concerns beyond the scope of what the program is able to reasonably accommodate.

## Program Fees

All section fees will be received via digital payment links. Enrolled families always receive priority registration for the next section of the program. If you have any questions, please call the registrar at (630) 719-2468. All program fees are billed to a single payer. Fee is per child and per section. This program is exclusive to Arboretum members. Maximum 12 children per session with 2 instructors.

- **Roots Session** (3-yr-olds): Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (must be 3 by September 1, 2024)
  - **Section A** (8 weeks): August 26-October 18 **\$800**
  - **Section B** (8 weeks): October 21-December 20 (1 week off for fall break) **\$800**
  - **Section C** (8 weeks): January 6-February 28 **\$800**
  - **Section D** (8 weeks): March 3- May 2 (1 week off for spring break) **\$800**
- **Saplings Session** (4-yr-olds): Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (must be 4 by September 1, 2024)
  - **Section A** (8 weeks): August 26-October 18 **\$1,125**
  - **Section B** (8 weeks): October 21-December 20 (1 week off for fall break) **\$1,125**
  - **Section C** (8 weeks): January 6-February 28 **\$1,125**
  - **Section D** (8 weeks): March 3- May 2 (1 week off for spring break) **\$1,125**
- **Trees Session** (4 & 5-yr-olds): Mondays through Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (must be 4 by September 1, 2024)
  - **Section A** (8 weeks): August 26-October 18 **\$1,400**
  - **Section B** (8 weeks): October 21-December 20 (1 week off for fall break) **\$1,400**
  - **Section C** (8 weeks): January 6-February 28 **\$1,400**
  - **Section D** (8 weeks): March 3- May 2 (1 week off for spring break) **\$1,400**

All fees are non refundable and non transferable. A full refund will be issued in the event that The Morton Arboretum cancels a class session for any reason. Refunds will be issued to the same credit card used to make the original payment.

## **Birthdays & Celebrations**

Birthdays are very important for most young children. Because we would like to participate in the celebration of your child's life, the students will join together for a special birthday ceremony during class where your child will receive a birthday bag to take home, explore, and return. Our educators will let you know ahead of time when we plan on celebrating your child. Due to allergy restrictions, please do not send in birthday treats. Our program celebrates seasonal events: fall equinox, winter solstice, and spring equinox. While we do not celebrate religious holidays, we do want to honor each family's traditions through an invitation to share your cultural pride. We welcome families to bring in stories, interests, food (allergy friendly), pictures, or games to share.



## **Caregiver Participation**

We recognize caregivers as the primary educators and influencers in a child's life and as such, we value working with you as a team for the benefit of your child. This is why we have included several opportunities for families to participate in our program. There will be seasonal events, tram rides, creek hikes, art shows, and fundraising events.

## **Communication**

Communication between staff and parents benefits the educational experience of children. Due to limitations on conversation during arrival and departure time, our primary means of communication will be through email, phone calls, parent-teacher conferences and Storypark. Photos will be posted to Storypark every week. These forms of communication should keep you current with the happenings in your child's classroom. If you have any

additional questions, please message your child's teacher via Storypark. We ask parents to keep staff notified of significant events and changes in their children's lives. Visitors, moving, new babies, illness, divorce and death all affect a child's life at home and at Little Trees.

## **Change of Address or Phone Number**

Please notify the staff when you experience a change in address or phone so that your emergency information can be updated.

## **Important Contact Information**

To leave a message for the staff at Little Trees, call 630-719-2462. In an emergency situation only, call or text the Little Trees Program Supervisor, Meg, at 630-391-2686 or call the Registrar Department at 630-719-2468 between 9:00-4:00 PM M-F.

Your comments, questions and concerns about the program are very important to us. Please feel free to contact the Program Supervisor and share your input. We are always looking for ways to improve our program and provide an excellent educational experience for your child.

## **License Exemption**

Please note that the Illinois Child Care Act of 1969 exempts from licensure programs conducted on an organized and periodic basis by organizations, such as The Morton Arboretum, that operate under state and federal charitable organization laws. As such, this program and facility are not licensed or regulated by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services.

Nevertheless, the Arboretum complies with Illinois Department of Human Services Rule 50.820 Staff Qualifications for License Exempt Providers that all staff members have the appropriate level of professional and educational qualifications and experience to work with youth, as well as with Illinois Department of Human Services Rule 50.830 Training Standards for License Exempt Providers which addresses facility staff members' initial orientation and annual trainings. The Department of Children and Family Services also reviews the Arboretum's Emergency Preparedness Manual, employee and volunteer criminal history background investigation procedures, and first aid kit and emergency contact procedures on a biennial basis during its determination of our exempt status.

