

Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center (BEEC)

Nature Explorers Youth Programs

Family Handbook: Information and Policies

Please also see [BEEC's Youth Programs COVID-19 Policies here](#).

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This handbook is reviewed annually and updated when needed. Last review/update: Feb 2025

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Mailing address: PO Box 2318, West Brattleboro VT 05303

ABOUT OUR PROGRAM

Nature Explorers youth programs are for the young person who enjoys the natural world. Our goal is to foster children's love of nature in a fun, safe, and supportive environment. Children spend most of each day outdoors, in small groups, exploring the forests, meadows and waters of BEEC's 60 acres. Hands-on activities, non-competitive games, stories, art projects, music, free play, and sledding or water-sliding at the end of the day add to the Nature Explorers Camp experience. Many children return year after year, excited to visit special places such as Grandmother Tree, Mossy Rocks and Frog Pond. They also return knowing that there is much fun to be had! Children investigate the lives of their wild neighbors, learn naturalist skills, explore wildlife habitats, develop sensory awareness skills, venture off-trail, and discover a sense of magic and wonder in the Great Outdoors! Families are welcome to visit and meet program staff and facilities.

Day Camp Hours

- All camps begin at 9:00 am and end at 3:00 pm.
- Drop off: Children may be dropped off between 8:45 and 9:00 am.
- Pick up: Children may be picked up between 3:00 and 3:15 pm
 - During Summer Camp aftercare is provided until 4:00 pm.
- If you are late there will be a charge of \$1/minute.

A Typical Day at Camp

8:45 Arrival
9:00 Morning Circle & Snack
10:00 Outdoor Adventure
12:00 Lunch & Free Play
1:00 Nature Choice
2:00 Closing Circle
2:15 Waterslide / Sledding / Games
3:00 Pick-Up

Camp Location

- BEEC's physical address is 1221 Bonnyvale Rd, West Brattleboro, Vermont.
[Directions and trail map here.](#)
- In the event of a snowstorm or other extreme weather that could impact driving conditions to and from camp, staff will be in close touch with families.
- BEEC's outdoor spaces include a yard, meadows, forests, woodland seeps, a small pond, a hilltop view, and a variety of outdoor shelters and classroom spaces.
- BEEC's Farmhouse Learning Center provides indoor spaces including a classroom, multipurpose meeting room, two bathrooms, and is ADA accessible.
- BEEC's land is part of the Earth Bridge Community Land Trust. BEEC is located within the homelands of the Abenaki people, who have lived here for thousands of years. We express gratitude for the example of their ongoing reciprocal relationships with the Land.

About Our Staff

Get ready to have fun with a great team. Youth program staff include some of our year round BEEC staff, as well as other people who are eager to participate. [Learn about our staff here](#). Throughout the year, youth programs are supported by high school students, college students, graduate students, and other volunteers from our community. Each summer we hire several fantastic additional staff, folks with backgrounds and experience in education and natural science. All staff and adult volunteers have background checks before working with our programs. All staff go through training, and full-time staff are First Aid and CPR certified.

What to Bring to Camp

You will be emailed information specific to each program. Please note the list of what to bring to camp will change according to the season and specifics will be emailed prior to the program.

- Water bottle (screw top or canteen style, no straws please).
- Hearty snack and lunch that do not require heating or refrigeration.
- Proper footwear. Summer: We recommend bringing one sturdy closed-toe pair for hiking and running, and one pair that can get wet/muddy. No flip flops, please. Fall/Spring: Waterproof mud boots. Winter: Waterproof and insulated winter boots.
- Change of clothes: shirt, pants, underwear and socks.
- Outdoor gear suitable for the weather. Spring/Summer/Fall: Rain jacket and rain pants. Winter: Waterproof and insulating mittens, snow pants, snow jacket, and extra warm insulating layers such as wool or fleece.
- Backpack that fits and is comfortable to wear, to bring lunch out to the woods.
- Hat: with brim for sun protection or warm hat for cold weather.
- Sunscreen and insect repellent (please apply daily before arrival to spring & summer camp).
- Hand sanitizer, a small bottle for individual use through the day.
- No toys or candy, please.

Camp is primarily outdoors and all kinds of weather are a part of nature. With the right equipment even rain and snow can be great fun and safe. Participants are expected to “dress for the weather.” If a child comes to camp without what is needed to be outdoors for the day, a parent/guardian will be notified and we will request that needed items are brought to BEEC as soon as possible.

Scholarship Fund

Camp days are often the highlight of a child’s year, opportunities to learn and explore in an environment very different from school. BEEC is dedicated to making our programs accessible to all! BEEC has a Scholarship Fund which provides a limited number of partial scholarships, allowing families with limited means to send children to camp. If you need financial support to send your child to camp, you can apply with your registration.

Kids Need Nature! If you would like to help share the experience of BEEC’s youth programming with another child, please contribute to BEEC’s Scholarship Fund when registering your own child, or [donate online here](#). Thank you!

POLICIES

We look forward to seeing your child at camp! To help us with our planning and staffing, and to keep programs affordable and accessible for all, we have the following policies.

Registration & Payment Policy

- Our programs have open registration until full. Spaces are limited! When full, we maintain a wait list.
- A deposit of either \$20/day or \$80/week, depending on the program, is required with your registration to reserve your child's space in camp. This can be adjusted if you are receiving financial assistance with CCFAP and/or a scholarship.
- Once you have made your deposit you may change the program your child is enrolled in depending on availability and at the discretion of the camp director.
- Payment in full is due:
 - Four weeks before a program starts, or
 - With your registration, if within four weeks of the program.
- Payments may be made online or by sending a check. You can make a [payment online here](#).
- The [online Medical and Release Form](#) needs to be completed for each child. Please complete this when you register. If a child comes to more than one program, the form needs to be resubmitted once a year.
- Registration, payment in full, and a completed medical and release form are required prior to participation in a program.

Refund Policy

- Deposits for programs are non-refundable.
- Refunds will be given according to the following schedule.
 - If requested at least one month before the first day of your child's camp, you will receive a full refund (less the deposit).
 - If requested between one month and two weeks before the first day of your child's camp, you will receive a 50% refund (less the deposit).
 - If requested less than two weeks before the first day of your child's camp, we will be unable to issue a refund.
 - Exception: if the spot can be filled from a wait list you will be refunded in full (less the deposit).
- Every year, unfortunately, children are turned away from our camps due to lack of space. The more notice we have of cancellation, the better our ability to offer that space to another interested child.
- No refund or reduction in fee will be made for a child who arrives late, leaves early, or attends only part of a session.

Cancellation Policy

BEEC reserves the right to cancel a program due to insufficient registration or other extenuating circumstances. Should this happen all registered families will be notified and will receive a full refund. We will provide at least one week's notice if there is the need to cancel a program.

Sign In / Out

- At drop off, a guardian must connect with staff to sign in a child.
- At pick up, a guardian must check in with staff to sign out a child.
- Children are not allowed to sign themselves in or out, regardless of age.
- A child will not be released to someone who is not his/her parent/guardian or listed on the Medical Form.

Safety and Behavior

- We expect children to abide by BEEC's rules and guidelines. We foster a culture of respect and care for ourselves, each other, and all that is around us. When disrespect is shown, staff provide positive guidance and facilitate conflict resolution. We promote a culture of using our words to solve problems and to alert staff if a child is hurt by another child or otherwise needs help.
- At day camp, it is not possible for us to work one-on-one with children. Some children who struggle in a school setting can thrive in a BEEC setting, so please reach out to us to discuss any thoughts or concerns. We have designed a general policy to be used with all camp children regarding how staff will handle disruptive and aggressive behavior, please contact the camp director if you would like to know more.
- One of our primary goals at BEEC is to provide a safe and positive environment for all of the youth who participate in our programs, all of the time. We hope to be inclusive and accessible to all, but recognize there are limitations in our programs to accommodate certain individuals. If the staff team does not believe they can incorporate an individual without detracting from the health of the whole group and program, a participant may be asked to leave.
- BEEC staff will take the utmost care and precautions to maintain the safety of the children. Children will explore different ecosystems, and learn how to look at, interact with, and take care of the natural world. Participation in outdoor programs and recreational activities involves an inherent risk of physical injury.
- Staff are trained to identify and manage risks and hazards. While some risks, with proper supervision and support, can be learning opportunities (fire building, tree climbing, etc.), we work to avoid and actively limit exposure to hazards (lightning, freezing temperatures, etc.).
- Camp is primarily outdoors and all kinds of weather are a part of nature. With the right equipment even rain and snow can be great fun and safe. Participants are expected to "dress for the weather." Please note the list of what to bring to camp that is shared with you prior to each program. In the event of severe weather, such as thunder and lightning, very cold temperatures, or poor air quality, we will move inside.
- BEEC encourages the use of sun and tick protection for all, including wearing wide brim hats, long sleeves and pants, insect repellent and sunscreen. We request that sunscreen and insect

repellent be applied before camp. If necessary, and if permission is given, staff can reapply both sunscreen and insect repellent during the camp day. We will do frequent simple tick checks throughout the day. Please remember to do a full body tick check at the end of the day. (For additional information about ticks see the note on page 10.)

- Shoes will be worn at all times while outside, except during summer water play in the courtyard.
- Children who are comfortable bathrooming in nature are allowed to do so. We ask children to notify a staff member before they leave the group, “go” in an approved location, stay within earshot of the group, use Leave-No-Trace principles, and wash/ sanitize their hands when they are finished.
- Activities are supervised by two staff members whenever possible, typically this is a lead instructor plus an assistant instructor and/or a volunteer/intern/leader-in-training. A child will never be left unsupervised or left alone. A staff member shall always have at least two participants or another staff person with them.
- While BEEC is a public location, staff will keep children separate from any persons who are not a part of camp. Any adults that are unrecognized persons will be asked not to interact with children at camp.
- BEEC staff are mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect.
- BEEC has established a written Emergency Response Plan to respond to a range of emergencies both natural and manmade. We will communicate with you by email and text when a situation arises. If an evacuation of the premises is required children will walk 1 mile to Wild Strawberry Forest School, 346 Akley Rd, Brattleboro, to be reunited with their families. Please contact the camp director if you would like to know more.

Health Care Policy

- BEEC program director will determine if a child is needing a brief rest, or is too ill to participate in usual daily activities and will call the parents/guardians to come pick up their child if needed.
- In the event of a serious illness or injury, if the parent/guardian cannot be reached in time, the child may be transported to the nearest hospital for immediate care and treatment.
- When you keep your child at home at the first sign of a communicable disease, you are protecting your sick child from other health problems. You are also protecting other children and staff from exposure to the disease. If your child becomes ill with a communicable disease, contact your doctor to determine proper care, and then notify the camp office. It is in the best interest of your child’s well-being to keep them home if they are in an infectious state. A sick child cannot participate effectively in camp in a meaningful way. Keeping a sick child home prevents the spread of illness in the camp community and allows the child an opportunity to rest and recover. If in doubt, please keep your child home an extra day.
- Please keep your child home when fever, vomiting, diarrhea are present, and afterwards for 24 hours with no symptoms. Please keep your child at home if they are experiencing discomfort with a cold, cough or other injury or illness that would interfere with their ability to participate. At a minimum we will follow Child Care regulations Signs and Symptoms of Illness Chart.
- This policy helps protect all BEEC participants and staff from sickness before it spreads, and enables us to maintain a healthy, happy community. Your help is greatly appreciated!

Food Policy

- Parents/Guardians are required to provide snacks and lunch for their child/ren each day, along with a water bottle. If a child comes without their snacks and lunch, a parent/guardian will be notified and we will request that snacks and lunch are brought to BEEC by 10 am.
- We often eat out in the woods and are not able to provide refrigeration for packed lunches & snacks. If you will be packing perishable foods, ice packs need to be sufficient to maintain perishables at safe temperatures.
- Staff encourage children to drink water often throughout the day. Students bring their own water bottles and drinking water is available for refilling bottles.
- At snack and lunch times, staff and children eat together.
- Children eat their own food brought from home, or snacks given by staff only. Children are not allowed to share food or drinks.
- All staff and children wash their hands before eating.
- BEEC recognizes that food allergies, in some instances, may be severe and even occasionally life-threatening. The foods most likely to cause allergic reactions are peanuts, tree nuts, dairy products, eggs, soy, wheat, fish, and shell-fish. Although most food allergies produce symptoms that are uncomfortable, persons with allergies to the above-listed foods can suffer serious consequences.
- Parents of children with life-threatening allergies must provide BEEC with emergency medications and a written medical treatment protocol for their child for addressing allergy-related events. BEEC will keep medication and epinephrine (EpiPen) provided by the child's guardian in a BEEC first aid kit where staff can access it when necessary. Information pertaining to a child's allergies will be shared with all staff that have contact with the child, but otherwise will be kept as confidential as possible.
- If there is a child with a severe allergy participating in a program, BEEC will ask all families to provide lunches and snacks that are free of the allergens of concern to ensure the safety of participating children. Notification will go to families when all medical forms have been received. Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns regarding the restrictions. BEEC asks all of our families to help camp be an allergy aware and inclusive program. With your support we will bring a high level of awareness and make our programs safer for all children. Your help is greatly appreciated!
- If we become aware that an allergen of concern is at camp, we will take the necessary precautions of having children eat separately and washing hands after eating.
- Though BEEC is committed to safety, we cannot guarantee that a child will never experience an allergy related event while in our care, and therefore have created this policy to reduce the risk that children with allergies will have an allergy-related event.

INCLUSIVITY

We strive to make BEEC camp a place where all children, families and staff feel welcome, safe, and able to be their full selves.

We value that at BEEC camp children, families and staff come from many backgrounds! This includes families who are LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, etc.), BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and mixed race, as well as family structures that are single parent, grandparent, non-monogamous, foster, adoptive, and many others. We avoid making assumptions and do our best to use inclusive practices and language.

Cultural Inclusivity

We seek to employ a diverse staff and to ensure that camp feels supportive and inclusive for children of all cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. And, as an organization that has historically had a mostly white staff, we recognize that we have more work to do! While we may make mistakes, we will keep listening, learning and adjusting our approach as needed.

As a staff we commit to:

- Valuing and respecting all children for who they are.
- Reflecting on our own identity, privilege and biases.
- Avoiding assumptions and making space for different perspectives and experiences.
- Considering how race, culture, class and other factors may affect a child's level of comfort and experience with different activities in nature.
- Centering the work of diverse naturalists, scientists, authors, artists and community members as much as possible.

Gender Diversity

Children of all genders are welcome and celebrated at camp!

- Children who are comfortable do most bathrooming outside in the woods. We also have bathrooms/ changing rooms. These are single-stall and not gender-specific (no separate "girls" and "boys" bathrooms).
- Children are not grouped by gender and we use non-gendered language to address them collectively (i.e. chickadees, bobolinks, friends, campers, children, nature explorers, etc.).
- We do not assume gender or pronouns of children or families based on appearance.
- Staff take care to refer to each child by their correct pronouns. If we slip up, we will acknowledge it and use the right pronouns thereafter.
- We actively avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Addressing Bias

Unkindness between children sometimes arises and will be addressed. Forms of bias rooted in historical injustice - such as racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and ableism (discrimination against people with disabilities) - can be particularly harmful. These biases may limit childrens' ability to feel seen, safe and free - and to have a good time together!

- As a staff we are committed to intervening thoughtfully if children express bias.
- We believe that when adults ignore prejudice, it sends a message that this behavior is acceptable.
- Studies have shown that a "color-blind" approach in which adults refuse to talk about race and insist that we are "all the same" can make the topic seem taboo, and make it harder for children to recognize discrimination.
- We are committed to answering children's questions and engaging thoughtfully around questions of cultural difference.

Access & Ability

We strive for a world in which all people can connect with the natural world. We recognize that while BEEC camp will be accessible for many children, it won't be for *all*.

- Staff maintain a daily routine for children. While the activities will vary day to day, children will generally know what to expect.
- Activities are adapted to meet different ages, needs, and abilities, providing all children opportunities to participate.
- A typical camp day includes walking 0.5 - 1.5 miles, and an elevation gain of ~100 feet. Trails are unpaved and there are roots and rocks throughout.
- While on a hike, groups will take breaks as needed for water, rest and play.
- Children are typically outside in the courtyard, fields and forests for most of the day. When there is inclement weather we move activities indoors.
- Families provide the clothing and outdoor gear their child needs for the day, but we do have extra rain ponchos and winter mittens for when they are needed.
- Children are expected to be able to take care of their own basic toileting and changing needs, and when needed we offer verbal guidance while providing privacy.
- Please let us know if you have any thoughts or questions to discuss with us so we can best meet the needs of your child.

TICKS ~ More Information

Greetings!

We are looking forward to having your children join us at BEEC camp!

Along with the standard requests for dressing appropriately for all kinds of weather, we also encourage you to follow these tick prevention suggestions.



How to dress for being outdoors:

- Wear light colored clothing so that ticks will be more easily seen.
- Wear fabrics with a fine weave that are harder for ticks to latch onto.
- Wear long sleeves and long pants.
- Tuck pant legs into socks, and shirt into pants, to create a barrier to the skin.
- Apply tick repellent to clothes and/or exposed skin.
- Check for ticks periodically while outdoors, and before going indoors.

When you get home:

- If possible, place clothes directly in clothes dryer for 15 mins on high heat (without washing them).
- Take a shower and do a full body tick check every evening.

Ticks are active when temperatures are over 28 degrees Fahrenheit. Using repellents, doing frequent tick checks while outdoors, and instituting an every twelve hour full body tick check routine, can help us feel less anxious about ticks and the possibility of becoming infected.

Recommending repellents is a challenge since the information on safety and efficacy is often conflicting. What we do know is that Lyme disease can be a serious and debilitating illness, especially if not detected right away. There are insect repellents that use DEET, and repellents that use essential oils, and clothing can be treated with permethrin. Please contact your health care provider for their recommendations.

We will do many frequent simple tick checks throughout the day, with the hopes of finding ticks crawling before they have a chance to attach. If we find an attached tick, we will remove it, and save it if you would like to send it to a lab for testing. At home, if you find a tick that is attached, remove it using tweezers or tick-pulling apparatus by grasping the mouthpart of the tick close to the skin and pulling firmly straight out. For the next 30 days, keep watch for rash and any flu-like symptoms. Contact your health care provider about tick testing and regarding any symptoms.

If you will be using repellents, please help or have your child apply them before dropping them off at camp. If you will be doing this at BEEC, please do it outdoors and away from other people. Your child is welcome to have their own repellent in their backpack and we can help them re-apply repellent later in the day.

We are looking forward to exploring, imagining, and playing with your children at camp, and to safely enjoying our natural world together. Feel free to be in touch with any questions.

Best, *BEEC Staff*