

A photograph of four young children playing on a large, dark, rounded rock in a forest. The children are dressed in casual outdoor clothing. One child in a grey hoodie is sitting on the left side of the rock, another in a brown hoodie is standing on top, a child in a green shirt is sitting on the right side, and a child in a light-colored shirt is climbing the front of the rock. The forest is dense with evergreen trees and some deciduous trees with yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the ground and the rock.

RISK-BENEFIT ASSESSMENT FOR OUTDOOR PLAY AND EARLY LEARNING

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Licensed with Child Development Dayhomes of Fort McMurray

Introduction:

The Curious Sparrow Dayhome Forest & Nature Programming:

Outdoor programming is offered at two primary locations:

“Secret Spot”, located on Lynx Trail, near the bottom of Loutit Road. Site Risk Assessment Completed March 17, 2025. Site is visited multiple times a week and is a 10 minute walk from the dayhome.

AND

“Sandpiper Hill”, located behind Sandpiper Road. Site Risk Assessment to be completed during spring 2025. We do not visit the site regularly during Fort McMurray winters because we can not return promptly should a child become cold and be at risk of frostbite. The site is a 5 minute bus ride or a 30 minute walk from the dayhome.

THE TEMPLATES FOR TOOLS USED FOR ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF RISK IN THIS DOCUMENT ARE ADAPTED FROM “RISK-BENEFIT ASSESSMENT FOR OUTDOOR PLAY: A CANADIAN TOOL KIT.”

Gill, T., Power, M., & Brussoni, M. (2019) Risk Benefit Assessment for Outdoor Play: A Canadian Toolkit. Ottawa: Child & Nature Alliance of Canada

<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Risk-Benefit-Assessment-Toolkit.pdf>



Required Risk Management Forms

1. INFORMED CONSENT
2. STANDARD OF CARE CHECKLIST
3. PROGRAM RISK-BENEFIT
ASSESSMENT
4. SITE RISK ASSESSMENT
5. INCIDENT REPORT

Informed Consent:

Program: The Curious Sparrow Dayhome, full day early learning and childcare, with daily outdoor and forest play and learning (Ages 2–8 years old)

At The Curious Sparrow, we support children in becoming confident, capable people who have a sound sense of their abilities and interests, and the ability to take age-appropriate responsibility for their own safety. Adult anxieties about children can lead adults to overprotect them. This makes it harder for children to learn the consequences of their actions and makes learning less engaging. Furthermore, educators, public health professionals, and child development experts are concerned that children today spend less time playing and learning outdoors, with damaging results for them and society. For this reason, unstructured outdoor play and learning are central to this program and experience.

The Curious Sparrow takes reasonable steps to manage and balance risks, while at the same time allowing children to play freely. Program participants acknowledge inherent risks of harm and personal injury. While minor injuries like bruises, bumps and scrapes are not uncommon, serious injuries are rare, and life-changing injuries and fatalities are unlikely in the extreme. Still, as with most any activity, indoors or outdoors, it is impossible to guarantee that they will not happen. You are required to accept this as a condition of your child's participation.



Risks:

Below is a list of some of the more significant risks:

- injuries from executing strenuous and demanding physical activities
- Injuries from heat, such as butane stove utilized during cooking
- injuries resulting from presence of harmful plants, natural loose parts, wild animals, and ticks
- changing and inclement weather, including storms, high winds, and lightning (please see Child Development Dayhomes Parent Handbook for description of weather policy)
- the possibility that your child may not heed safety instructions or directions given to the group or delivered individually
- injuries arising from the actions of other children
- negligence on the part of other participants

In unstructured, outdoor play, and learning experiences, children freely choose which experiences and forms of play they are comfortable engaging in. Your child is under no obligation to participate in all experiences and may choose not to participate at any time during the program.



Risk Acknowledgement:	Initial
<p>I/WE have read the risk-benefit assessment summary for the program/experience</p>	
<p>I/WE have reviewed the risk-benefit summer with my/our child and have explained to the child that they need to listen and follow instructions provided</p>	
<p>I/WE are aware, that alongside the benefits, participation involved risks, dangers, and hazards, including but not limited to those referred in the risk-benefit assessment summary, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freely and voluntarily assume risks, dangers, and hazards inherent in participating , including including all those described in th risk-benefit assessment summary and the possibility of personal injury, and the remote possibility of fatality. • being satisfied that the participation in suitable for my/our child, I/we give my/our permission and consent for him/her to participate 	
<p>I/WE will notify you if my child suffers from any medical or health condition that may cause injury to themselves or others, or may require emergency care during their participation.</p>	

<p>Child/Children's Name:</p>	
<p>parent/guardian name (PRINT):</p>	
<p>parent/guardian signature:</p>	
<p>date:</p>	

Standard of Care Checklist:

Program/experience risks and benefits:

- have risks and benefits been identified (Program/Experience Risk-BenefitAssessment)
- have decisions about the needs for action/controls been justified
- has appropriate action been taken?

Site Risks (Site Risk Assessment Form:

- Have site risks been identified and assessed?
- has appropriate action been taken?

Staff Training and Certification:

- Are staff certifications up to date (outdoor play qualifications, First Aid, risk-management training)
- What child protection training and certification are needed?

Compliance with Internal Procedures:

- Does the program comply with policies and processes (Dayhome standards manual for Alberta and Child Development Dayhomes policies)?
- Have relevant safety standards been followed, and were audits of records of compliance maintained?
- Is the paperwork involved proportionate and appropriate for its purpose?

Incident Monitoring:

- Are incidents recorded as they arise?
- Have reasonable mitigation strategies been implemented when appropriate?

Knowledge and risk-related information sharing:

- Has information been provided to parents/caregivers about the risks and benefits of engaging in a program?
- Have informed consent been used?
- Is there reasonable cautionary signage on the play site to inform users of risk?

Program Risk-Benefit Assessment

Program name & experience	The Curious Sparrow Dayhome, outdoor unstructured play
Assessor Details (name, position, date):	Meaghan Smart, Owner Operator of Dayhome Early Childhood Educator Level 3 Certification for Forest and Nature School Practitioner (in process) March 22, 2025
Site Location:	First Loop on Lynx Trail at the Bottom of Loutit Road and Grebe Road
Date for Review:	April 30, 2025
Benefits:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased balance, body awareness • strengthened fine and gross motor • physical health/obesity prevention • Improved social skills, emotional regulation, language, problem solving, critical thinking, imaginative play, attention span, self-motivated learning about world/nature • Increased emotional well-being, improved mental health • learning about local wildlife, how to prevent wildlife encounters and how to respond safely during wild-life encounters to prevent injury. • learning about personal safety when in proximity with dangerous elements, such as heat, flame etc.
Risks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • risk of injury due to tripping/falling during walking/running uneven ground, sticks, stumps and other debris on ground • risk of injury from stick play (being hit, falling with a stick) • risk of injury from falls during climbing • risk of injury due to falls from balancing on fallen trees • risk of injury from branches and bushes that are on eye level • risk of injury due to unsafe garbage left by community members • risk of illness/disease from contact with animal feces • child running away and getting lost while off licensed

	<p>property</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● rough play resulting in injury to other child ● risk from injury from contact with wild animals (bears, coyote, fox, moose, deer etc) ● risk of burns while utilizing butane stove for meal preparation
Site factors worth noting:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● municipal land therefore we can modify area to increase safety, such a tree trimming ● We have been visiting the site regularly since September 2023 and we are very familiar with the boundaries, features such as tree health, fallen trees etc. ● This site has few visitors, most trail uses pass by and do not interfere with the children who are involved in play or learning experiences.
precedents/comparisons:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children have over 18 months of time visiting site regularly and have built cohesive relationships with each other, the lead Educator and the students who participate have all completed 2 semesters or more of practicum hours to build capacity for outdoor learning and have built relationships to support children in their care and learning.
Decision:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Off-site free play will occur daily as long as no immediate safety concerns have been identified.
Actions taken:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remain within licensing mandated educator:child ratios for supervision and include extra experienced ECE's for supervision when possible ● ELCC practicum placements are established to build capacity of students to provide outdoor programming, develop assessment skills for management of risk, increase supervision and outdoor enhance programming. ● re-visit safety rules frequently (i.e. staying together) ● walk to off-site location with a childcare rope to keep rope ● re-visit wild-life safety frequently, engaging in wildlife encounter prevention actions. Lead Educator will stay informed about recent wild-life encounters in the vicinity and adhere to public warnings from the Department of Fish and Wildlife to avoid high-risk areas where problematic human/wildlife interactions have been reported. ● constant supervision for fall-risk activities, such as

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> balancing fallen trees, climbing trees ● constant supervision during stick play and prompts for safe play ● adult removes animal feces in play area ● constant supervision by experienced individuals of the butane stove while in use, creating a safety circle around the stove, no running/standing in close proximity of the stove, butane removed from stove and stored safely away from children after use. ● We do not visit the site during high winds due to the risk of falling trees. After storms or high winds we reassess trees on the site. ● when children with higher needs are in attendance, extra ECE's are hired when necessary, for one on one supervision of children who are at risk for wandering/getting lost (for example, a child with Autism attends weekly and extra precautions are required to manage wandering behaviours and inability to follow safety rules off-site.
Ongoing management/monitoring:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● engage in dynamic risk assessments daily, involve children and practicum students in identifying risks during dynamic risk assessment.
sign-off signature:	Meaghan Smart

The risk assessment will need to be reviewed as the snow melts as there are different risks during the seasons. During the winter, there is less risk for injury from the sticks and debris on the ground when children fall, as they are protected from their thickness of their snows and clothing underneath. During Spring, Summer and Fall, we see more injuries, such as scratches and bruising on the legs and arms, as children attend wearing shorts and t-shirts and more of their body is exposed.

Also, risks for wildlife encounters increase during the summer living in a densely populated bear forest.

Air quality is something we monitor closely as a risk for children as we enter wildfire season. During times that wild fire risk is higher, increased precaution to stay informed of active fires and risk to the community is required and parents are informed of any contingency plans should an evacuation of any part of the community becomes necessary and programs are required to close immediately.

Site Risk Assessment

Location: Lynx Trail, near bottom of Loutit, "Secret Spot"	Assessment carried out by: Meaghan Smart Signature: 	Date: March 17, 2025
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SITE CHECKED FOR	HAZARD & RISK	LEVEL OF RISK	ACTION PROPOSED	NEW LEVEL OF RISK
CANOPY LAYER	Silver birch predominantly, with some fir trees. Canopy is bare. Forest is generally healthy with few older trees at risk of falling. Risk of injury due to falling trees.	Low-medium	Re-assess site after wind storms or heavy snow. Report any dangerous trail conditions to municipality. Follow weather policy and avoid the wooded area when wind or gusts are 29km/hr or more.	Low
SHRUB LAYER	Heavily covered in snow. Invisible hazards such as sticks/stones due to being covered by the snow. Risk of injury from tripping and falling.	Low	Visible hazards, such as larger sticks that are frozen to ground and exposed, will be avoided. Children will be directed to engage in higher risk activities, such as running, away from those hazards.	Low
FIELD LAYER	Heavily covered in snow. Invisible hazards such as sticks/stones due to being covered by the snow. Risk of injury from tripping and falling.	Low	Visible hazards, such as larger sticks that are frozen to ground and exposed, will be avoided. Children will be directed to engage in higher risk activities, such as running, away from those hazards.	Low
GROUND LAYER	Heavily covered in snow. Invisible hazards such as sticks/stones due to being covered by the snow. Risk of injury from tripping and falling.	Low	Visible hazards, such as larger sticks that are frozen to ground and exposed, will be avoided. Children will be directed to engage in higher risk activities, such as running, away from those hazards.	Low
ACCESS TO SITE	Paved trail from entry to the site. The trail is groomed and maintained year-round, providing vehicle accessibility. Ice patches create risk for injury due to slipping/falling. Snow accumulation at	Low-medium	From the site, we can see the main gate. In the case of a medical emergency, it would only take a few minutes to arrive at the gate and we bring a wagon & Thule bike trailer and could transport a child to	Low

Site Risk Assessment Cont'd

Location: Lynx Trail, near bottom of Loutit, "Secret Spot"	Assessment carried out by: Meaghan Smart Signature: 	Date: March 17, 2025
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SITE CHECKED FOR	HAZARD & RISK	LEVEL OF RISK	ACTION PROPOSED	NEW LEVEL OF RISK
BOUNDARIES AROUND THE SITE	The boundary is the trail that lops around our site. Risk of child wandering or running away and becoming lost in the forest.	Medium-high	ratio 6:1, increased supervision with ELCC students Sept-June, partnership with dayhome co-educators, hire ECE or have parent volunteer. Increased supervision for younger children/higher needs due to	Low-medium
OTHER PEOPLE USING THE SITE	Community members use trail for recreation. Risk of verbal/physical aggression, contact with litter/unsafe materials, animal feces.	Medium-high	Avoid engaging with individuals who appear aggressive, report aggressive behaviour to RCMP, complete scans of site and pick litter and animals feces.	Low
STRUCTURES	Illegal fort building nearby, risk for injury if the fort collapses if playing inside or next to.	Medium-high	Report illegal structures to municipality for removal. Avoid play in this area.	Low-medium
ANIMALS ON SITE	Leashed/unleashed dogs increase risk of injury from bites or being mauled. Urban forest is home to many animals, including bears, coyote, fox, moose, deer. Wildlife creates risk of injury due to unpredictable	Low-medium	Instruct children to keep a distance from domesticate and wild animals. Educators will complete wildlife and bear awareness to include entry routines to prevent encounters, be prepared to respond to	Low
OTHER	Insect bites increase risk for allergic reaction, swelling, infection, etc. Plants (toxic, thorns, those that cause allergic reaction) can cause injury, poisoning, rash or other harmful reactions requiring medical attention.	Low	Re-assess when snow melts/seasons change.	Low

INCIDENT REPORTING:



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INCIDENT REPORT

Dayhome Educators are responsible for reporting incidents to the child's family. If a child is injured in your dayhome and the injury does NOT require an ambulance, contact the family and they can decide if they will take their child for follow-up medical care (i.e.: stitches, x-rays, etc.). Send pictures when necessary, so that they can make an informed decision. Complete the incident report and submit it to your consultant via email as soon as possible. Educators must inform their consultant immediately upon learning a child was taken for follow-up or if a family plans to take the child for follow-up. **If a child is seen by a medical professional as a result of an incident (e.g., medical center, dentist, family doctor, hospital, etc.), it becomes a Reportable Incident to Licensing and must be reported to Licensing by the agency within a specific time frame. If the incident occurred outside of Agency hours, you can call our emergency line number at (780) 715-1166, ext. 0.**

Name of Child: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Date of Incident: _____ Time: _____

Educator's Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Name of Parent/Emergency Contact Notified: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Phone Number: _____

How was the parent/emergency contact notified? Phone in writing in person

Details of Incident:



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Where did the incident occur:

What first aid was administered:

By Whom? Specify:

Was there anyone else present at the time of the incident? Yes No

If yes, then who?

Were the Authorities contacted (E.g. police, ambulance)? Yes No

If yes, then who?

Additional information / comments related to the incident:

Name of Agency Personnel notified: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____

Educator Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

Dynamic Risk Assessment

The way we interact with children as they engage in risky play can instill fear and reduce their confidence. Language during our interactions should be solution focused and enhance children's ability for problem solving. Blurting out "be careful" is a knee jerk reaction we have all experienced, and likely with regret, when we realize that it is not helpful for children as it provides no clarity around what the risk is nor does it offer solutions to approach the risk safely. Becoming more aware of language during risky play can help guide Educators support children in navigating risks more independently, which supports problem solving skills.

Educators carry the responsibility of creating environments where children's basic right of play is honoured, finding the balance of what acceptable risk looks like for each child, and honouring each child's need for time and space to have freedom to pursue play and learning experiences that are engaging, interesting and motivates them (Gill et al, 2019, p.28). Play is dynamic and so is the need for assessing risk in dynamic ways that acknowledges that our play spaces change by weather, season, human impact, development and unknowns such as wildlife and animal encounters. How we assess risk for each child is influenced by children's changing abilities, their health, what captures their desire to engage in risk and it can change from moment to moment.

In Communication prompts section of the Risk Assessment for Outdoor Play: A Canadian Toolkit, a few prompts stood out as ones I would like to include in our daily routines:

- "Please give each other lots of space so that no one feels like they need to push and no one gets knocked over by accident"
- "Check in with each other, is everyone having a good time"
- "If you need to run, meet me at the next trail marker"

The reason I chose those prompts, I think it acknowledges challenges we might have with certain behaviours or risks that increase chances for harm in a neutral tone where the children are treated with respect, learn how to think about consequences of their actions, and their needs behind certain behaviours are honoured and met so that we can reduce risk of harm/injury.



7 RELATIONSHIPS OF AN ETHICAL FOREST AND NATURE SCHOOL

An important and daily responsibility of a Forest and Nature School Practitioner is assessing and mitigation of risk to an acceptable level to each child in our care.

We strive to create environments where children can play, learn, challenge themselves and engage in an intimate relationship of getting to know themselves, their strengths, capabilities and interests.

Working in a licensed environment, risk and liability is often at the forefront of Educators minds and is the strongest influence in our daily practices.

Having tools available to inform parents of risks inherent in outdoor play, assessing and mitigating risk, and as Educators challenging ourselves to travel beyond the enclosed indoor and outdoor spaces that too often confines children, will reap undeniable benefits for children that can not be attained in traditional childcare environments.

In having daily outdoor play and learning that occurs in all 4 seasons of Northern Canada, in rain, shine and snow, not only inspires many types of play, risk taking and learning, but it builds on children's resilience and develops a strong connection to the land, each other and self that can not be replicated indoors.