



General Safety and Behavioral Guidelines

Merry Lea develops specific safety protocols for its individual programs. Those documents are tailored to specific audiences across partners, parents, educators and other stakeholders. The purpose of this document is to capture the overall guidelines that educators may consider or implement in their own nature-based activities.

Risky Play Philosophy

All programs that incorporate a forest school approach provide an environment for supported and appropriate risk taking. As children engage in emergent play outdoors, they learn to assess and navigate risk. This is otherwise known as risky play: a feature of holistic development.

Common risks encountered in Kinderforest and Nature Preschool settings may include using tools, balancing on logs, building campfires and climbing trees. Encounters with risk help children learn how to manage those challenges, encouraging critical thinking, self-confidence, social skills, and fine and gross motor skills development. The reasons for any safety rules or modifications in safety guidelines are clearly explained and discussed with the students.

As with all guidelines, individual programs must identify what level of risk is appropriate for their setting.

Safety Guidelines for Facilitating Appropriate Risk

1. Climbing trees

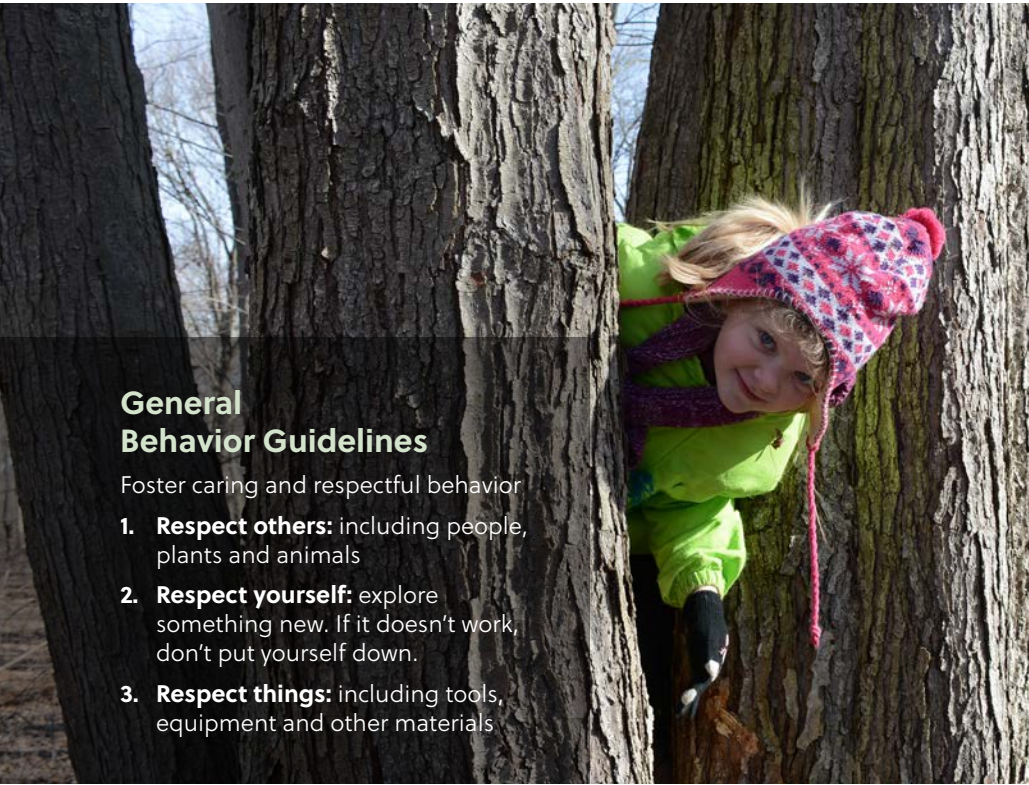
- Climb only as high as the educator can reach while they stand on the ground.
- Look around where you are climbing or playing - stop if someone is playing directly below you! Stop if someone is climbing above you!
- Watch for branches that are dead or might break.
 - Listen for cracking sounds, look for branches without bark or leaves.

2. Sticks

- Use walking feet when holding sticks.
- Carry sticks vertically in front of you.
- The size of the space around you determines appropriate stick size.
 - If you're in a large space — when other people are farther away — larger sticks are allowed.
 - If you're in a small space — when other people are very close — only small sticks are allowed.
- Engage in respectful stick play.
 - Guns aren't allowed at Merry Lea, so please do not use sticks as guns here. Respect other people, plants and other living things.

3. Stay together as a group

- Kids need to see an adult at all times, and the adult needs to be able to see the kids.
 - Adults need to purposefully communicate with each other when students divide into multiple groups or are in separate spaces.



General Behavior Guidelines

Foster caring and respectful behavior

- 1. Respect others:** including people, plants and animals
- 2. Respect yourself:** explore something new. If it doesn't work, don't put yourself down.
- 3. Respect things:** including tools, equipment and other materials

Weather

Weather is dynamic — Merry Lea staff monitor weather conditions on an ongoing basis to make informed safety decisions. Merry Lea staff rely on resources from the American Red Cross, National Weather Service, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

We support safety in all weather through daily routines, including:

- Daily checks for appropriate clothing.
- Monitoring and encouraging the **use** of appropriate clothing during program times.
- Conducting site checks for safety hazards. For example: the potential for falling dead tree limbs, high winds or ice concerns.
- Monitoring individual students' behavior and needs in response to weather when making decisions about weather safety.

1. Overall weather policy

- Merry Lea maintains a clear process for determining when to cancel programming due to weather concerns. Several factors are considered when making this decision, including: program activities, group size and makeup, program location, and current and forecasted weather conditions. Participant well-being is a priority consideration in this process.
- Coordination and communication between participating schools and Merry Lea are critical in ensuring a safe setting. Participating schools also maintain agency to cancel programming due to inclement weather.

2. Severe weather

- In the event of thunder or lightning, we wait indoors until 30 minutes after last hearing thunder.
- In the event of high winds, Merry Lea may choose not to conduct programming.

3. Cold weather

- If the wind chill is at or below 0 degrees Fahrenheit, we do not conduct outdoor programming due to potential for frostbite or hypothermia.

4. Hot weather

- If the heat index is at or above 103 degrees Fahrenheit (National Weather Service: "Extreme Caution" category), we do not conduct outdoor programming due to heat stroke and heat exhaustion concerns.



Merry Lea
*Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College*

PO Box 263
Wolf Lake, IN, 46796
goshen.edu/merrylea

