



# RIVERBANKS NATURE PRESCHOOL

## Family Handbook 2023

1300 Botanical Parkway, West Columbia, SC 29169

[riverbanks.org](http://riverbanks.org)

## IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

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## IMPORTANT DATES

School breaks and holidays are listed below.

Please mark these on your calendar for future reference.

**September 5 | First day of school**

**October 13 | No School**

**November 20-24 | No School**

**Dec 18-Jan 2 | Winter Break**

**January 15 | Holiday**

**February 16 – No school**

**February 19 | Holiday**

**Mar 29-Apr 5 | Spring Break**

**May 21 | Last day of School (celebration in the evening)**



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**Children are naturally curious about animals, plants, water and the world around them. At Riverbanks Nature Preschool, we use this natural interest for nature as the context for student learning. Nature Preschool shares the same child development goals of a more traditional preschool but has committed to meeting these goals through experiences in and with nature and has an added goal of fostering care and concern for the natural world.**

## **Riverbanks Nature Preschool Mission**

Riverbanks Zoo and Garden creates connections, inspires action, and impacts conservation. Riverbanks Nature Preschool seeks to provide an environment that meets the developmental needs of the whole child while nurturing a meaningful relationship with the natural world.

## **Program Philosophy**

At Riverbanks Nature Preschool we foster a caring and positive environment where children can learn. We integrate environmental education into our curriculum – not as a separate subject, but as a core element of language and literacy development, math, science, art, music and dramatic play. The nature-based curriculum supports the development of a child's social, emotional, cognitive, creative, and physical abilities. Most of all, we strive to teach children to love and value themselves and the world around them.

Riverbanks Nature Preschool encourages child-directed exploration and play in nature. Through play, students will learn to make sense of their world by exploring, solving problems, and working with their peers and teachers. Riverbanks Nature Preschool teachers carefully create and prepare the learning environment to nurture children's natural curiosity—then provide the language, skills and tools for the students to make sense of the themes and concepts presented.

## **Riverbanks Connection**

Riverbanks Nature Preschool will utilize the inspiring spaces and resources of the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden campus for student activities. The Norman and Gerry Sue Arnold Learning Center at Riverbanks Botanical Garden serves as a beautiful indoor space for activities, but most exploration, play and learning occur in our forest classroom.

## **Community of Learners**

Children will be members of a community of fellow students and teachers that work and learn together. They will learn the value of collaboration and how to support their fellow members in a positive way. They will also learn to view mistakes as learning opportunities and to communicate honestly with one another. Each member will be treated with respect and given time to reflect on his or her own learning journey.

## General Information

- **Staff/Volunteer:** Any person whose duties include direct care, supervision, and guidance of minor children (“Participants”) in an education program setting. An individual meeting this definition will undergo a background check.
- **Intermittent Volunteer:** An individual parent, grandparent, or aid provided by the family of the Participant infrequently assisting with the Program activities without compensation and who is supervised by RBZG Program staff at all times. RBZG will not obtain a background check on an individual meeting this definition.
- **All Riverbanks Zoo and Garden (“RBZG”) staff** are first aid/CPR/ AED certified and have been trained in the use of EpiPen.

## Behavior Guidance

In preschool, students are still learning how to express themselves in an effective and socially appropriate way. Each time a child has challenges interacting with peers, staff will provide support and provide tools to practice self-regulation. Every interaction is an opportunity to learn. Our staff will use these techniques to deal with behavioral issues:

- **Re-direction**—Staff guide a student into an acceptable activity when they are engaged in an unacceptable activity
- **Logical and natural consequences**—The child will be made aware of the results of their actions.
- **Limit Setting** - Staff establish and state boundaries for particular situations.
- **Modeling** - Children are shown positive methods of interacting.
- **Choices** - Staff provide choices and children are encouraged to choose for themselves.
- **Positive Reinforcement** - Staff focuses on the desired behavior through encouragement and praise.
- **Corporal punishment will NOT be used as behavior management.**

It is expected that parents work with teachers in helping find solutions to persistent behavioral problems. In the rare event that a child's ongoing disruptive behavior does not improve despite the best efforts of the staff and this behavior has a continuing negative effect on the classroom climate, the Preschool Director may determine that the preschool program cannot meet the child's needs and the child may be dis-enrolled from the program. We do not dis-enroll children due to normal developmental struggles such as pushing or name-calling, unless they are associated with other issues we feel require additional support and resources that we cannot provide.

## Inclusion

- Program staff seek to make accommodations for Participants with special needs to insure their successful participation.
- Guardians are required to provide Program staff information about physical, mental, emotional, sensory, or communication limitations and accommodation requests that would allow a Participant's successful engagement in the Program.
- RBZG is not staffed to provide one-to-one aids for Participants. If a Participant requires a one-to-one aide, Guardians will be required to provide an aide, at Guardians' expense. RBZG Program staff should be notified at registration that an aide will be attending.
- All aides should arrive and depart with Participants at regular check-in and check-out locations and times unless prior arrangements have been made. Aids must be on the approved authorized pick up list to sign out a Participant.

## Tuition Payments

Your monthly tuition payment is due in full by the 15th of the prior month. It will be automatically drafted from the card on file. If you need to change the payment method, please log in to your account and change your information, or contact Riverbanks education department. A \$25 late fee will apply to all payments received after the 29th of that month. If you become two tuition payments behind, your child would not be able to attend until the past due amount is paid in full.

While tuition is paid on a monthly basis, it is not based on a daily or monthly fee, but an annual tuition that is divided up for your convenience. Therefore, the full tuition is due each month regardless of holidays and breaks.

## Schedule

Preschool will operate on a traditional school year schedule, September to May, 8:30am to 11:30am or 9am to 12pm each school day. Every day will include group circle time, snack, small group interaction, outdoor play and exploration.

### Daily

#### GROUP 1:

8:30 - 8:40am | Drop-off in the Garden parking lot  
8:45 am | Group Circle Time  
9:15 -11:15am | Student activities in Forest classroom  
11:15am | Closing Circle Time  
11:30 -11:40am | Pick-up in Garden parking lot

#### Group 2

8:50 - 9:00am | Drop-off in Garden parking lot  
9:00am | Group Circle Time  
9:30 -11:30am | Student activities in Forest classroom  
11:30am | Closing Circle Time  
11:50am -12:00pm | Pick-Up in Garden parking lot

Each day there are opportunities for students to explore and express themselves through art, music and movement, language, math, dramatic play, and hands-on science and creative activities. Lessons include read-aloud's, songs, games, exploration and play as well as practicing calming and self-soothing techniques. All daily activities are age appropriate and engage the young learner in fun and exciting ways.

## Drop-Off and Pick-Up

Student drop-off and pick-up will be in the Garden parking lot at 1300 Botanical Parkway, West Columbia. The children will ride in a golf cart to the indoor classroom where we will begin our day. At the end of each class, we will ride in the cart back to the Garden parking lot where the instructors will sign out the children to authorized adults.

If you need to arrive late or pick up early, you will need to park in the main Garden Parking Lot (1300 Botanical Parkway, West Columbia) and walk your child to or from the classroom areas. The ticket booth staff can call the instructors on the radio and find out the location of the group at the time of your arrival.

## Keeping Your Child Safe

Riverbanks Zoo and Garden requires that all children are properly signed in by an adult each day. At the end of the program, we require children to be signed out by an authorized adult for the same reason. At the start of the year, every child must have a list of adults approved for pick-up.

It is our responsibility to see that your child leaves with the appropriate person each day. Please be prepared to show identification at pick-up. Please do not be offended. This is done with the child's safety in mind. If there is a change of pick up, please submit that information in writing to one of the instructors at the beginning of the day.

## Late Pick-up Policy

Riverbanks Nature Preschool has a late pick-up fee for any child left longer than 15 minutes at the end of class. The late fee is \$15.00 after this courtesy time and \$1.00 per minute, thereafter. Late fees are payable by cash, check, or credit card at the time of pick-up.

Repeated late pick-ups may result in additional charges. After the third instance of late pick up there is a charge of \$25 for each time your child is picked up more than fifteen minutes past dismissal and an additional \$25 will be charged for every 15 minutes you are late beyond that.

## Parents at Nature Preschool Must Understand and Agree that:

- Children will get wet and muddy, often requiring changes of clothing.
- While we always do our best to return your child in perfect condition, your child may occasionally experience small scrapes, scratches, bumps and bruises.
- Perpetual lateness disrupts your child's learning experience, impacts the entire class, and may interfere with the teacher's ability to plan and prepare for the next class.
- Young children who are new to social situations may experience conflict. This can be stressful, but it is also an important part of learning how to interact with others.

# Absence, Medical and Emergency Procedures

## Absence Policy

If your child is unable to attend school for any reason, please contact the Riverbanks Nature Preschool staff by 8:30am or as soon as reasonably possible. Please also notify us of any contagious illnesses as appropriate.

## Illness Policy

If a child becomes ill at school the parent will be notified immediately and the child should be picked up at once, to decrease the spread of illness.

If your child has any one of these symptoms, he or she may not attend:

- Fever: 101 degrees (F) or greater (100\* underarm)
- Cough: excessive cough or croupy or hoarse sounding cough
- Diarrhea (3-4 loose stools)
- Bloodshot, red or swollen eyes/eyelids
- Discharge from eyes, which is a sign of pink eye
- Head lice (including nits)
- Rash
- Sore throat
- Vomiting

Please do not bring your child to school until all symptoms have been absent for 24 hours without the aid of Tylenol or other fever reducers.

If your child is well enough to attend, he or she will participate in both indoor and outdoor activities.

## Medication Policy

Based on the preferences listed on each child's medical forms (submitted by the guardian at the time of registration), Riverbanks Nature Preschool staff may administer topical first aid such as antibiotic ointment, sting relief medicine, burn cream, or eye wash solution.

If oral medication or prescription medication needs to be administered to the child for any reason, then a signed and dated medical form needs to be submitted with the medicine to Riverbanks staff. The form should include when this medication is needed, the quantity to administer and frequency with which it should be given.

## Emergency Procedures

All instructors are trained in CPR and First Aid and carry a well-equipped First Aid kit at all times. Site assessments are done of the outdoor classroom each morning before students arrive to evaluate any potential dangers or hazards.

If a child is injured, staff will assess the injury to determine the extent. Staff will administer necessary first aid and complete an Accident Report Form to be shared with the authorized adult at pick-up.

If the injury requires more than staff administered first aid, staff will contact the parent or authorized adult and contact 911 if required with the support of Riverbanks Public Safety. A staff person will remain with the child until a parent or responsible person arrives including an ambulance ride if required.

Nature Preschool staff undergo training in how to handle medical and environmental emergencies. We have written Emergency Medical Plans and Evacuation Plans available for families to read. We will perform safety drills with the children a few times a year, in order to be prepared for a variety of emergency situations.



## Inclement Weather

In the event of inclement weather, Riverbanks Nature Preschool reflects the closures of the Richland and Lexington County School Districts. If Richland and Lexington County Public Schools are closed, Riverbanks Nature Preschool is closed. If the local counties have a delayed opening, Riverbanks Nature Preschool will open at 10:00. Dismissal times always remain the same.

Riverbanks Nature Preschool will notify families of closures due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances via email, text message or general phone message.

## Holidays and Celebrations

Riverbanks Nature Preschool has many scheduled parties, celebrations, student showcases, and family nights scheduled throughout the school year. We encourage parents and families to be actively involved in these special occasions.

These celebrations will not focus on religious themes, to ensure the comfort and inclusion of all children and families. We value the diversity of all families and encourage you to share your family's customs and traditions with the class throughout the year. We believe that learning about other cultures helps children develop a sense of appreciation and respect for differences. Your classroom teachers can provide you with more information on how to be involved.

### Birthdays

A child's birthday is an exciting and special event. Parents and guardians are always welcome to bring in a light snack to share for a child's birthday. Please limit these snacks to store-bought, nut free products with ingredients listed on the packaging.

For the safety of the children and the zoo animals, balloons are not allowed. We will all celebrate your child's special day in the classroom by singing "Happy Birthday" and providing them with a birthday badge to wear.

## Snack & Food Policies

Teaching about and modeling good nutrition in our classroom is an important element of our curriculum and mission as we are teaching children to take good care of their bodies as well as the environment. Water and a nutritious snack are provided every day in class. Riverbanks Nature Preschool will provide part of the snack and families will be asked to contribute as well.

A snack calendar will be distributed to the families at the beginning of September. Each family is asked to contribute to the snack for at least 2 weeks of the year. The snack contribution should be 2 items that are low in sugar and sufficient servings for 16 children. Snacks will be served family style to the group.

Below are snack suggestions, but the children love having a say in what their family brings.

Applesauce	Crackers	Mini Muffins	Vegetables
Animal Crackers	Fruits/Dried fruits	Pita chips	Veggie Straws
Cereal Bars	Goldfish	Popcorn	Yogurt tubes
Cheese	Graham crackers	Pretzels	

**PLEASE NOTE:** No nuts or any nut products will be served for snacks.

## Dressing for Nature Preschool

Children should be dressed for active indoor and outdoor play. Each day please select items that are washable and comfortable as some student activities are messy. Please select clothing and footwear that your child can put on and take off with no or minimal assistance.

We will be taking full advantage of our beautiful campus so children should be dressed appropriately for the weather. The only time we will not go outside is due to unsafe weather conditions such as lightning, extreme cold, extreme winds, etc.

Please invest in quality raincoat, rain boots, winter coat, scarves, mittens, hat, winter boots and closed toed shoes for walking. Dressing in layers will ensure that students are warm and dry during outdoor activities and can remove extra layers to stay comfortable during indoor activities. The temperature and weather can vary greatly throughout the day so please ensure your child is prepared.

We will provide a large baggie which should be filled with a complete change of clothing (underwear, socks, pants, and shirt.) These clothes will be kept at preschool and you are responsible for changing out clothing with seasonal changes.

### Recommendations

**Our goal in all weather is to keep the children dry and comfortable.**

**BOOTS:** We strongly recommend a pull-on type boot with no ties, zippers, or Velcro.

**OUTERWEAR:** Waterproof bibs and jackets with hoods are best. The one-piece versions tend to be too warm and condensate on the inside. Jackets with zippers are best. The ones with snaps tend to get clogged with mud.

**MITTENS:** We strongly recommend mittens that extend beyond the wrist to make sure they stay on. Some good mittens to try are L-Bow mittens (<https://lbow.com>). They come in different styles for all seasons and they can be found on Amazon. Polarn O Pyret has long waterproof mittens as well.

**SHOES:** Good shoes for climbing, running and playing. Must be closed toe, since we will be in the forest most of the time.

#### **OTHER GEAR:**

- Fleece coats and puffy vests work well with the varying temperatures of the day.
- A knit hat that covers the ears
- Wool socks or material that wicks moisture away from the skin (not cotton). This is great for a base layer too.
- As the weather gets colder the children will also need to wear base layers to school under their clothing.

## Clothing Sources

<https://www.polaronpyretusa.com>

**Discount offered on all outerwear for families with Riverbanks Nature Preschool.**

Use this address for our school when you create an account to get the discount all year round: Riverbanks Nature Preschool, 500 Wildlife Parkway, Columbia, SC 29210

<https://tuffo.com/>

<https://www.puddlegear.com/>

<https://runwildmychild.com/best-rain-gear-for-kids>

## Gear Library

We have a limited number of fleece lined rain pants, jackets, and rain boots that we can loan families for the school year on a first come first serve basis. If you are in need of adequate outerwear for your child, please talk to the staff about borrowing our rain gear.

## What to Bring Each Day

Every child should bring a water bottle and a tote bag or backpack each day. While we may not use the bag every day, this is a great way to keep up with art, notes, and personal items for each child.

## Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

Please apply sunscreen and insect repellent as needed before sending your child to class. Riverbanks staff is not permitted to apply these items.

## Items Brought from Home

Please discourage your child from bringing toys to school. Toys from home can be inappropriate and unsafe for classroom play as well as create conflict over sharing. Please leave personal treasures at home or in the car. However, bringing in a special book to share with the class is welcomed and encouraged.

## Communication

Communication between teachers and parents is an essential part of our preschool program. Methods of communication may include classroom newsletters, daily/ weekly notes, emails, phone calls, individual conversations, and conferences.

We understand that the education of children is a partnership between parents and teachers and so we invite you to share your thoughts with us at any time. We will regularly keep you informed about your child's growth at school.

## Confidentiality

Information about the children will be kept confidential. This information will not be discussed among staff or with other families, nor will it be discussed in front of children. All personal information will be discussed in a private, professional manner, when necessary. This includes records, name, address, and other information that may identify a child.

## Parent Volunteer Opportunities

Parents and guardians are welcome and encouraged to participate in Riverbanks Nature Preschool through a variety of volunteer activities. Staff will communicate specific volunteer opportunities when they arise but please contact us with your specific interest.

Parents and guardians are always welcome to visit their child's preschool class, but the visits must not disrupt instructional activities or classroom routines. To schedule a visit, please speak with your child's teachers to identify a time and date.

## Complaint Procedure

If a guardian has a concern, a conference between parents and teachers will be arranged to discuss the issue. If the initial conference does not resolve the problem, a second conference will be arranged with Riverbanks Director of Education, guardians and teacher(s).

## Withdrawal Policy

Withdrawals must be received in writing by the 10th of the preceding month. The annual registration fee is non-refundable. Cancellations received after the 10th of the preceding month will be charged a month's tuition but will not be liable for future payments.

Exceptions to the withdrawal policy will be made for children still experiencing difficulties with toilet training. If a child is not ready to start school because of toileting issues, guardians should notify staff by August 14th. If a child begins the school year and staff determine the child is not independently able to use the toilet, parents will be notified by the director and a partial refund for previously paid monthly tuition will be issued. You will not be liable for any future payments. The annual registration fee remains non-refundable.

Preschool is a wonderful time in your child's life where they can learn independence, make friends and develop skills toward becoming a lifelong learner. Thank you for choosing Riverbanks Nature Preschool as the place for your child during this wonderful time in their life.



***If we really want children to thrive,  
we need to let their connection to  
nature nurture them.***



**Claire Warden**

International Educational Consultant  
and Nature Kindergarten Expert