



# **Family Handbook Summary**

## **2025 - 2026**

## Mission of Airie Forest School

Our mission is to inspire creativity, resilience, and lifelong learning through immersive, nature-based education, empowering learners to innovate, collaborate, and advocate for thriving communities and a sustainable world.

### *Our Vision*

Airie Outdoor Academy will be a transformative leader in early childhood education, where children thrive in a nature-immersed, play-driven environment that nurtures holistic development, sparks lifelong creativity, and fosters a deep connection to the natural world.

### *Airie Approach*

Our children are given the freedom to embrace a life infused with fresh air and wonder. The Airie Approach strongly emphasizes children spending their time immersed in nature, where play is the primary conduit for inquiry-based learning. This intentional engagement nurtures the development of essential life skills, laying the groundwork for the learning journey ahead.

### *We Deliver our Mission by Providing:*

- **Immersive Outdoor Experiences:** Hands-on activities such as hiking, gardening, and wilderness skills training that foster personal growth and teamwork.
- **Reggio-Inspired Learning Hubs:** Children are invited to express their discoveries as they explore open-ended provocations derived from their inquiries.
- **Multidisciplinary Curricula:** Literacy, math, science, art, humanities, and health and wellness instruction are woven into daily activities and seasonal projects.
- **Personalized Support:** Our small class sizes enable our skilled instructors to tailor experiences to meet the diverse needs of learners, from youth to adults.
- **Partnership and Inclusion:** We partner closely with families, honor diverse learning styles, support risk-taking and emotional growth, and welcome all children with compassion and care.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Commitment to low-impact outdoor activities that model environmental stewardship.

## Children's Rights

- Children have the right to play.
- Children have the right to make mistakes, solve problems, and try again.
- Children have the right to discover their identity.
- Children have the right to explore their ideas.
- Children have the right to be seen, heard, and valued.
- Children have the right to be immersed in nature.

## Dress Code and Gear

### General Dress

Children learn through messy play. Due to the dynamics of outdoor play, please send your child to Airie in clothes they may get muddy, wet, painted, torn, spotted/dotted and in general...*dirty*.

### General Gear

Research has shown that learning in nature generates a long-lasting sense of purpose, personal growth, and environmental awareness (Braun & Dierkes, 2017). Making sure your child is dressed appropriately for the outdoors is critical to their success of our program. We adhere to the motto:

*“There is no bad weather here when you wear outdoor gear.”*

## Discipline Policies:

At Airie, we believe discipline means teaching—not ~~punishing~~. The word *discipline* originates from the Latin *disciplina* meaning instruction or learning. Over time, however, discipline has become misassociated with control or punishment. At Airie, we reclaim its original meaning by guiding children with care, curiosity, and connection. Our approach is proactive, responsive, and rooted in relationships.

### Creating Connections

Children thrive when they feel seen, safe, and supported. That is why every educator at Airie is committed to developing strong, nurturing relationships with each child and family. Our work with children is rooted in attachment and trust. The deeper the connection, the more secure a child feels and the more they can learn and grow.

### Rules of Care:

- 🌱 We care for ourselves.
- 🌱 We care for others.
- 🌱 We care for our environment.

### Three things are true:

1. Children are good inside.
2. Children can make mistakes and have hard times.
3. Behavior is communication

## Social and Emotional Safety

We believe that social and emotional health is the foundation of all learning. Strong, connected relationships foster emotional safety that enables children to thrive. During the day, children grow across all areas of development through our innovative educational practices. We place the strongest emphasis on social-emotional learning as this is an area of learning that must be securely in place for deep learning to occur. While physical and academic skills can be practiced in many settings, social skills and emotional regulation can only be developed through lived experiences in real moments of play, conflict, repair, and connection.

## Calendar

Children thrive in a dynamically balanced learning environment. This balance is achieved through the natural ebb and flow of recreation and rigor, growth and rest. You can find the current year’s detailed calendar on our website.

### ***Airie Outdoor Academy Calendar***

At Airie, we intentionally design our year around what is best for the children. Therefore, our calendar is balanced with four ten-week sessions, separated by four vacations of varying lengths (e.g., 2 to 5 weeks). This cyclical structure ensures we meet the traditional requirement of 180 instructional days, while still prioritizing family time, rest, and seasonal alignment.

### ***Airie Forest School Calendar***

Airie Forest School (AFS) is a branch of Airie Outdoor Academy (AOA) that supports children aged three (3) to grade three. AFS operates on a ten-month calendar from August to May that is infused with the AOA twelve-month balanced calendar.

## **Educational Resources**

### ***Learning Materials***

Process art is the superpower in the enhancement of creativity. As learning is an experimental process, art is an expression of project-based learning. Our Atelierista takes the crucial time to teach the children what supplies can be torn, cut, glued, or painted versus what can be used for reusable play. To support the creative process, Airie asks for a learning materials (e.g., supplies) fee each semester.

### ***Curricula***

- Airie practices inquiry-based learning supported with an emergent curricula framework. Our teachers observe, document, discuss/reflect, and negotiate learning with the children. The teachers design provocations based on this data.
- Educational materials and resources (e.g., books, hand tools, art supplies, magnifying glasses) will be used to further the children's interest in a topic.
- All students will engage in learning through play-based, Forest School experiences that embed literacy, mathematics, arts, humanities, the natural sciences, and wellness.
- The Academy students will have additional curricula to enhance their academic time. Some of the curricular supports that are included, but are not limited to:
  - Literacy: *Logic of English*, *Words Their Way*, and *Jumping into Literacy*
  - Math: *Dimensions of Math*, *Wild Math*, and *Jumping into Math*
  - Sciences: *Project WILD*, *Forest School Adventure*, *Early Elementary Science Education*, and *Teaching STEM in the Early Years*

### ***Airie Outdoor Academy Assessments***

Children are not one simple list of boxes to check. They are evolving and have their own learning styles and differences. Therefore, Airie Academy teachers meticulously observe each student to create:

- Individual Learning Portfolios (ILP) for K-1 students.
- Informal checklists and rubrics to assess milestones for PK students.

## **Family Partnerships**

### ***Making Learning Visible***

Families may expect informal communication during the arrival and farewell processes. Documentation of learning will be communicated through weekly updates in *Storypark*. Formal communication and concerns may be shared through email, phone call, scheduling a meeting, or during your child's milestone or ILP meetings.

## Connection Days

Airie Outdoor Academy students have the opportunity to participate in Connection Days—flexible learning days designed to support continuous growth even when in-person attendance isn't possible. Connection Days may occur when:

- A faculty workday is scheduled.
- The weather conditions are unsafe for outdoor learning.
- Your child must be absent due to travel or family needs.

These days will count toward the required 180 instructional days and are intended to maintain momentum and engagement in a developmentally appropriate way. AOA families will partner with teachers to access:

- Suggested home-based learning activities
- Simple materials and prompts
- Parent-friendly guidance to support meaningful, hands-on learning at home

Connection Days are built around the same values we uphold in person: curiosity, connection, and creativity. Whether in the forest or at the kitchen table, learning continues—rooted in relationship and wonder.

## Weather Policies

### Going Outside

A foundational element of Airie is to learn in and from nature; therefore, every effort will be made to spend the majority of our time together outside. Research has found that children who play and spend long periods of time outside have improved language development, mathematics, environmental science, social studies, gross motor skills, adaptability, curiosity, creativity, confidence, autonomy, risk assessment knowledge, resiliency, empathy, problem-solving, and leadership skills (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019; Dankiw, 2020).

Children at Airie explore outside every day for long periods of time, even on resiliency days. **Resiliency days**, as defined by this family handbook summary, are days with precipitation, temperatures above 95°F, or below 32°F. Every effort will be made to provide time outside during the most comfortable times of the school day excluding the following dangerous weather circumstances:

- Air quality is 101 ppm or higher.
- Heat index above 110°F
- Wind chill below 10°F
- Lightning
- Wind speeds (i.e., gusts) greater than 45 mph
- Freezing rain, sleet, or snow/rain mix

### Flexible Delays

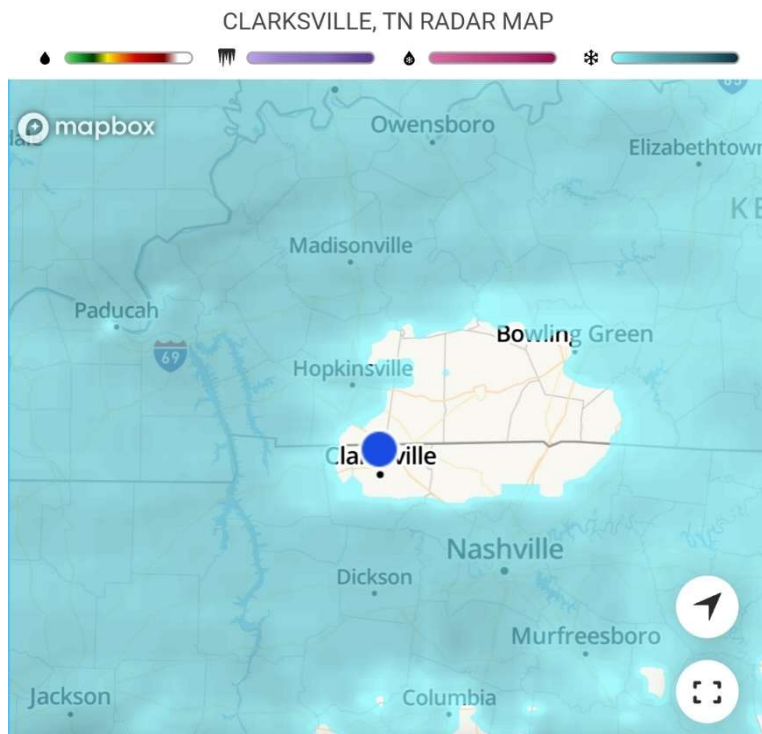
Airie utilizes flexible delays to remain open as consistently as possible. *Flexible delays*, as defined by this handbook, are Airie's decision to open and close around the predicted weather conditions. For example, on a cold and snowy day we may operate from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for those who can **safely drive** to the site.

### School Closures

Due to the unpredictability of Clarksville's weather patterns, closures will most often be issued by **7:00 a.m.** the morning of school. Airie will close if conditions are predicted to remain dangerous for more than half of that specific day.

If severe weather warnings are issued during school hours and it is apparent that the dangerous weather will continue for the remainder of the school day, parents will be notified to pick up their children early.

- Tornado warnings that are issued for Montgomery County and the Clarksville area will result in classes being delayed or closed according to the timing of the warnings.



### Illness Policies

Your child must be fever and vomit free for 24 hours before returning to school. As defined by this family handbook summary, a *fever* is:

- Forehead: 100.4 °F
- Oral: 100 °F
- Armpit: 99 °F

### Immunization

Airie aligns with the Tennessee Department of Health requirements for children attending various schooling environments. We honor religious and medical exemptions. While we respect each family's autonomy in making health decisions, we do recommend that children receive the tetanus vaccine, given the potential exposure to environmental risks. Your child's safety and well-being are central to our program, and we are committed to working collaboratively with families to meet both health and personal needs.

### Risk Assessment

At Airie, the safety of our students is a top priority. While nature includes inherent risks, we believe children can safely explore when those risks are assessed, managed, and mitigated with care and intention. The Nurture Center is routinely assessed for safety, and ongoing risk assessments are conducted for the various expedition sites.

## Food and Drink Policies

Airie promotes well-balanced nutritional practices. Our food and drink policies are as follows:

- Airie allows the children to eat and drink as they need in the designated eating zones. Our educators will encourage the children to take care of their bodies throughout the day as part of our wellness instruction.
- Children should bring a filled water bottle and have access to their water throughout the day.
- Any suitable produce from the learning gardens or foraged will periodically be offered to the children to enjoy.
- A day of exuberant play can make children very hungry and having a full belly helps them regulate their body temperature, which will be especially important on resiliency days. Therefore, Airie requires families to provide their child with a nutritionally dense lunch and snack.

**Thank you!**

