



NATURE CENTER
AT SHAKER LAKES

Pre-K Explorers

Family Starter Guide

Hello Families!

This weekly drop-off program gives your junior naturalist (ages 3.5-5) the opportunity to explore, create, and play all while making new friends and enjoying nature.

Families can register for our fall and/or spring semesters. Program meets for 2 hours/week. Please review this family guide first. Then, if you think this program would be a good fit for your junior explorer, follow the link below to register.

Register: <https://shakerlakes.doubleknot.com/event/pre-k-explorers/3108983>

- Financial Aid Available: <https://forms.office.com/r/RdmFDXrNvu>
- Nature Center members enjoy \$50 off registration with code **Explore50**. Please enter your member ID when prompted. If you're unsure of your member ID, please contact Cara Anderson at cara@shakerlakes.org.

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Getting Ready for Pre-K Explorers:

Key Details

Pre-K Explorers meet once a week on Thursday mornings from 8:30am-10:30am.

This program is for children ages 3.5-5. Register for one or both semesters.

(\$595/semester; \$50 membership discount with code, “Explore50”).

- 2026 Spring Semester: 2/5/26-4/30/26 (no class on 4/9/26)
- 2026 Fall Semester: 9/17/26-12/10/26 (no class on 11/26/26)
- 2027 Spring Semester: 2/4/27-4/9/27 (no class on 4/1/27)

Getting Ready for Outdoor Learning

We will be outside! Remember to prepare for the weather and put sunblock and/or bug spray on before drop-off.

Each day bring:

- Reusable water bottle
- Closed toed shoes (required always)
- Outdoor wear (jackets, boots, snowpants, etc.)

Please label all items with your student’s name and pack them in a backpack. The Nature Center is not responsible for lost or misplaced items.

Drop-Off and Pick-Up

The Nature Center is located at 2600 South Park Blvd. Shaker Heights, OH 44120. Drop-off and Pick-up happen in our Exhibit Space.

- Drop off is at 8:30 am. Pick up is at 10:30 am.
- If driving to the Nature Center, please park and walk your camper to the main entrance. The building is closed to visitors this early, so our team will be waiting for your arrival. If we miss you – please ring the doorbell.
- After dropping off your student, we appreciate adults promptly leaving the Nature Center to help facilitate the student's transition.
- If your student is going to be absent, please send an email to prange@shakerlakes.org.
- Anyone picking up a student must show a photo ID and be listed on the approved pick-up list. No exceptions.
 - Please remind your approved pick-up people to have their ID ready.
 - Notify Education Director Erica Prange (prange@shakerlakes.org) as soon as possible if someone needs to be added to the approved pick-up list.
- If the pick-up person is running late, please call the Nature Center or email Erica as soon as possible to let them know.

Welcome!

Please use this document to learn what to expect this year and to determine if our programming is a good fit for your student. This document is intended to be a guide to our Pre-K Explorer program, answer questions, and ensure educators, students, and parents are all on the same page. Please reach out to Erica Prange, Education Director, at prange@shakerlakes.org if you have any questions.

Philosophy

The mission of the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes is to conserve a natural area, connect people with nature and inspire environmental stewardship.

It is our goal as an organization to make sure that we provide a safe, welcoming, and inclusive outdoor space so that all people can connect with nature on their own terms and without fear, discrimination, or violence. ([Read the Nature Center's DEI statement](#)).

We aspire to reflect the diversity of our habitats and the communities we serve by honoring the unique differences among our staff, volunteers and campers and providing equitable access to nature for all people. Our students will end their year with a deep love and respect for nature, themselves and others as well as grow their academic skills.

Ages

This program is based on the Early Childhood Education Standards and geared towards students ages 3 1/2- 5 years of age. Students must be 3 1/2 by the first day of the program.

Goals and Objectives for Student Development

We strive to create an experience where your student can explore the natural world in a setting that allows them to grow, learn, and connect with others.

Each session is designed to:

1. Provide opportunities that stimulate the development of each student's confidence and sense of self.
2. Help each student appreciate their natural surroundings and take an active role in the stewardship of our environment.
3. Provide situations for each student to set goals and challenge themselves while discovering his or her own skills and abilities.
4. Allow each student to experience cooperative play or teambuilding through group activities and experiences.
5. Begin to practice the Ohio Early Learning Standards through nature-based play.

Behavioral Expectations

To help promote a positive experience for all, we need each student to follow the behavior expectations listed below. (Parents/guardians will need to agree to these during the registration process).

Students are expected to:

- Be fully potty trained (bathroom independent).
- Listen to personal cues for when a bathroom is needed.
- Clean themselves independently.
- Be able to dress/undress independently.
- Potty chairs are not permitted.

**Staff are not permitted to assist students in the bathroom.*

Students are expected to:

- Always follow instructions. This includes staying with the group and responding when their name is called.
- Respect nature by staying on designated trails and leaving what you find.
- Respect fellow students and staff. Causing emotional or physical harm, such as bullying, hitting, kicking, biting or punching is grounds for immediate dismissal.
- When a problem between students arises, notify the educator. Educators are always ready to listen and assist in problem solving.

Outline of Corrective Action

As misbehavior occurs, NCSL staff will practice positive reinforcement and remain professional when implementing corrective action.

Routine Actions: Staff will model correct behavior, provide verbal reminders and give positive reinforcement.

Occasional Actions: If the misbehavior seems to be a pattern, NCSL staff will have a conversation with the parent/guardian at the end of the day where strategies to help improve behavior will be determined and implemented.

Dismissal may occur if a child's behavior is unsafe for themselves and/or the group regardless of how frequently the behavior has been observed. Once dismissed from class, tuition is forfeited for the remainder of semester, and registration in any subsequent semesters for that season may be canceled. No refunds are given if a student is dismissed due to safety or behavior concerns.

Cancellation Policy

All cancellations incur a fee of 20% of the cost of the session. “Cost” is defined as the total amount the purchaser is responsible for paying (semester fee minus the membership discount and/or financial aid). Cancellations made less than 2 weeks prior to the start of the program will not be refunded at all.

All cancellation requests must be made in writing, by emailing the Education Director at prange@shakerlakes.org

Note - Registrations made after the cancellation deadlines or families who are waitlisted and accept an open spot are subject to the same cancellation policy.

If the Nature Center Team cancels a class:

The Nature Center reserves the right to cancel a class session. Potential scenarios include, but are not limited to, illness impacting staffing, power outage, emergency scenarios, etc. In these cases, a prorated refund will be issued to families reflecting the total days cancelled and the cancellation fee will be waived.

If your student is dismissed from a day:

All participants and their parents/guardians must agree to the behavior expectations listed during registration. Dismissal may occur if your student’s behavior is unsafe or if your student consistently fails to follow class behavioral expectations. No refunds are given if a student is dismissed due to safety or behavior concerns.

Health and Safety Philosophy

We believe in providing a safe, healthy and fun experience for all our students, staff and volunteers. While we do not have full-time health staff on site, we follow best practices from the ACA, CDC and Ohio Department of Children and Youth and review recommendations with trained health professionals. All staff are trained in CPR/First Aid/AED through the American Heart Association. We also ask parents to take an active role in communicating with staff regarding any health concerns and needs of their campers. This includes but is not limited to completing all parts of our medical form and informing staff of any injuries or physical/mental health conditions that may impact how educators assist them.

Communicable Disease Prevention

These guidelines were written based on current CDC, ACA and Ohio Department of Health recommendations. NCSL continues to monitor best practices and may modify these procedures at any time.

- 1) Students or staff must stay home if they have experienced:
 - a) A fever within the last 24 hours
 - b) Vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours

- c) Severe cough and/or sore throat

Students may be sent home if there is a health concern impacting their ability to safely continue the day. Parents are expected to pick up their child promptly. Please see cancellation policy for more information.

- 2) If a student or staff contracts a communicable disease (including, but not limited to, hand, foot, and mouth disease, COVID-19, measles, Mononucleosis, and Chicken Pox), the education director must be informed immediately.
- 3) If the Nature Center becomes aware of a potential exposure of any communicable disease, the following protocol will be followed:
 - a) Notify all families.
 - b) Disinfect classroom spaces.

Note: If staffing ratios are unable to be maintained due to ill staff, class for that day may be canceled. Please see the cancellation policy for full details.

Inclement Weather

Pre-K Explorers at the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes spend considerable time outdoors. When the weather does not cooperate, we have policies in place to keep campers safe. In the event of rain (with no thunder or lightning) students should still plan to be outside. If there is thunder, lightning, a severe weather alert, or the like, we execute the best judgement possible for the safety of the students. This extends to air quality alerts and heat advisories as well.

Activity Risks and Considerations

Please consider whether this camp suits your child's abilities and interests. Please note, we do not have registered health staff onsite.

Activity	Semesters	Potential Risks and Considerations
Hiking	All	<p>Risks: Trips/Falls</p> <p>Consider: Hikes are daily depending on weather. Terrain includes a mix of ADA accessible trails, dirt paths, stairs and hills.</p>

During registration, please inform us of any accommodations your student may need in the “emergency medical form” section.

Injury Communication

Should a student become injured during the day, and not require emergency medical attention, NCSL staff will provide the parent/guardian with a written description of the incident at pick-up, including any first aid administered (band-aid, ice, etc.).

The following injuries result in immediate parent/guardian notification:

1. Head injury
2. Apparent or suspected broken/fracture bones
3. Apparent or suspected sprains
4. Rashes and swelling
5. Deep cuts that cannot be appropriately remedied with basic first aid (ex. require a tourniquet.)
6. Injury of any kind that impedes the camper's mobility or ability to communicate

If emergency services are required, the educator will call emergency services immediately (or perform the alternative preferred action steps provided by the parent/guardian on emergency medical form).

Special Activities

Creek Walking

- If an educator plans to take their students creek walking, families will be notified ahead of time.
- The day of the creek walk, students need to come prepared with creek shoes (any closed-toed shoes that can get wet that secure the child's foot. Crocs, flip flops, and sandals are NOT allowed) and a full spare pair of clothes.

Important Phone Numbers:

Nature Center at Shaker Lakes: 216.321.5935

Erica Prange, Director of Education: 216.321.5935 x243

***Cuyahoga County Health Department: 216.201.2000**

***Cuyahoga County Children and Family Services: 216.431.4500**

**The State of OH asks us to share these numbers with you in case you have concerns about NCSL's programming and want help outside our organization.*