Sprouts Nature School - Behavior Guidelines & Policies

At Sprouts Nature School, we value kindness, curiosity, safety, and respect for people, nature, and community. These guidelines help ensure a safe, positive, and inclusive environment for all children, families, and staff.

1. Core Expectations

Children are expected to:

- Treat others with kindness, compassion, and respect.
- Listen to teachers and follow safety instructions.
- Stay with the group unless given permission.
- Use safe hands, safe bodies, and respectful language.
- Care for nature, wildlife, and outdoor spaces.
- Use equipment and materials safely and responsibly.
- Communicate their needs, feelings, or worries to staff when they feel comfortable.

2. Safety Guidelines

To keep everyone safe, children must:

- Stay within sight of a teacher at all times.
- Follow boundaries set for parks, trails, and indoor locations.
- Walk - never run - near fires, stoves, tools, or ice.
- Use kitchen tools, including peelers, knives, cooking stoves, and handheld blenders, as well as matches and fire-tending materials, only with direct teacher supervision.
- Keep hands, sticks, and objects to themselves unless invited into safe, mutually agreed-upon play.
- Not engage in play involving weapons, guns, or violence, including pretending sticks or other objects are weapons.
- Wear weather-appropriate clothing and gear. Additional layers or other available gear may be offered if a child arrives under-prepared for the day's conditions.

Weapons and personal items: Real weapons and toy weapons, including toy guns and water guns, are not allowed at Sprouts. Any personal item that could reasonably cause injury, such as a pocketknife or fishing pole with hooks, must receive advance written approval from Sprouts before being brought to a program.

Missing child: If a child leaves the group or designated program area without permission, staff will begin searching immediately while maintaining supervision of the other children. Parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as reasonably possible, and emergency services may be contacted if the child cannot be located promptly or circumstances create an immediate safety concern.

3. Communication & Conflict Resolution

We recognize that conflict is a normal part of play, relationships, and learning. Sprouts teachers:

- Support children in using calm voices and listening to one another.
- Help children express feelings, needs, and boundaries clearly.
- Model respectful communication, problem-solving, empathy, and repair.
- Facilitate conversations between children when appropriate.
- Encourage children to respect another person's "no," "stop," or request for space.
- Recognize that children may need time to regulate before discussing or resolving a conflict.

Children will not be required to apologize, hug, or participate in a conflict-resolution conversation before they are ready. Staff may instead help children identify what happened, repair harm when appropriate, and practice safer choices for the future.

4. Behavior Redirection Process

When unsafe, disruptive, or harmful behavior occurs, Sprouts educators use a calm and supportive process appropriate to the child and situation.

Step 1: Gentle Reminder
A teacher reminds the child of the expectation and provides support or clarification when needed.

Step 2: Redirection
The child may be redirected to another activity, tool, location within the group area, or supportive adult to help interrupt the behavior and reset.

Step 3: Regulation Break
A child may take a brief break with the support and supervision of an educator for calming, grounding, or regulation. Regulation breaks are not intended as punishment or isolation. Children will not be humiliated, shamed, or left unsupervised.

Step 4: Parent Communication
Parents or guardians will be contacted when behavior is repeated, escalating, significantly disruptive, or creates a safety concern.

Swearing or other inappropriate language will generally be addressed first through reminders, discussion, and redirection. Parents may be contacted if the behavior continues despite repeated conversations or becomes targeted, threatening, or harmful.

Step 5: Support or Safety Plan
Sprouts may work with the family to create a short- or long-term plan designed to help the child participate successfully and safely. This might include:

- Specific calming strategies
- Changes to transitions or routines

- Additional preparation before challenging activities
- Clear behavioral expectations
- Increased communication between Sprouts and the family
- Strategies that have been successful at home, school, or other programs
- Reasonable accommodations when appropriate and feasible

Step 6: Program Pause or Dismissal
If significant safety or behavioral concerns continue, a temporary pause or dismissal may be necessary. See Section 9.

Throughout this process, Sprouts staff will never use physical punishment, humiliation, threats, withholding of food or water, or denial of bathroom access as a disciplinary measure.

5. Emergency Safety Intervention

Sprouts does not use physical restraint as a routine behavior-management technique or simply because a child is upset, refusing directions, or having difficulty regulating. However, there may be rare situations in which an educator must physically intervene to prevent immediate physical harm to a child or another person. Examples may include:

- Blocking a child from entering a road or other immediate hazard
- Separating children during an active physical fight
- Preventing a child from continuing to hit, kick, bite, or otherwise physically harm another person
- Moving or guiding a child away from an immediate danger when less restrictive directions or interventions have not been effective

When physical intervention is necessary, staff will:

- Use only the amount of physical intervention reasonably necessary to address the immediate danger.
- Use the least restrictive response reasonably available under the circumstances.
- End the physical intervention as soon as the immediate danger has passed.
- Continue supporting the child in calming and regulating afterward.
- Never use physical intervention as punishment, retaliation, intimidation, or to force compliance with an ordinary instruction.
- Notify the child's parent or guardian the same day when a significant physical safety intervention occurs.
- Create a brief written record of significant incidents.

Whenever reasonably possible, staff will first use verbal direction, environmental changes, redirection, increased space, or other less restrictive strategies.

6. Non-Negotiable Safety Behaviors

The following behaviors require immediate staff intervention. Staff will first stop the behavior and make sure everyone is safe. A parent or guardian will then be notified as soon as reasonably practical, generally the same day. These behaviors include:

- Intentionally hurting another person physically, including hitting, kicking, biting, or similar behavior
- Repeated disregard for safety instructions involving fire, tools, water, roads, vehicles, or program boundaries
- Running away from or intentionally leaving the group
- Bullying, harassment, threats, or targeted exclusion
- Dangerous use of sticks, rocks, tools, or equipment
- Bringing a real or toy weapon
- Bringing a potentially harmful personal item that did not receive advance written approval from Sprouts
- Behavior that substantially interferes with a teacher's ability to safely supervise the group

Depending on the severity of the situation, staff may begin at a later stage of the Behavior Redirection Process rather than starting with a gentle reminder. A serious safety incident may result in immediate parent pickup, a temporary program pause, or - in rare circumstances - dismissal.

7. Inclusivity & Respect

Sprouts Nature School is committed to maintaining an inclusive and affirming environment. Discrimination, harassment, slurs, or targeted exclusion based on race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, language, culture, or family background are not tolerated.

Children are not expected to already understand every identity, culture, family structure, disability, or difference they encounter. Questions, curiosity, and mistakes can be part of learning. Staff will respond through age-appropriate education, redirection, and conversation.

Repeated or intentionally targeted discriminatory behavior will be treated as a significant behavior concern.

8. Parent Partnership

Strong communication between families and Sprouts helps us support children successfully. Please let us know about relevant circumstances, strategies, accommodations, routines, or support approaches that may help your child participate safely and comfortably at Sprouts. This may include information about:

- Major transitions or sources of stress
- Sensory needs
- Social or emotional needs
- Communication differences
- Effective calming strategies
- Common triggers or situations that are especially difficult

- Strategies or scripts that work well for your child

Families are welcome to share relevant information from an IEP, behavior plan, school support plan, therapeutic setting, or other provider when they believe it would help Sprouts support their child. Families are not required to provide complete school, medical, or therapy records simply to participate in Sprouts programming.

Sprouts will notify parents or guardians the same day when their child is injured beyond a routine minor scrape or bump, is involved in a significant behavior or safety incident, or requires a significant safety intervention. Teachers maintain brief written records of significant incidents when appropriate.

To protect children's privacy, Sprouts will not disclose unnecessary identifying information about another child when discussing an incident with a family.

9. Program Pause or Dismissal

Sprouts makes reasonable efforts to help children participate successfully through redirection, communication with families, individualized strategies, and reasonable accommodations when appropriate. A temporary program pause or dismissal may become necessary when:

- A child's behavior presents a continuing or significant safety risk to themselves, other children, staff, or members of the public;
- Repeated significant behavior concerns have not improved after reasonable attempts at support and collaboration with the family;
- A child repeatedly leaves or attempts to leave the group or designated boundaries;
- A child's behavior substantially prevents staff from safely supervising the remainder of the group; or
- The child's needs cannot be safely supported within Sprouts' outdoor group setting and available staffing, even after reasonable support strategies or accommodations have been considered.

In most circumstances, Sprouts will communicate concerns with the family and attempt appropriate support strategies before ending enrollment. However, Sprouts may require immediate pickup, a temporary pause, or dismissal following a serious incident or when an immediate or substantial safety concern makes continued attendance unsafe. A child may also be required to pause attendance while Sprouts and the family determine whether an appropriate safety or support plan can be developed.

Tuition, refunds, and credits associated with a program pause or dismissal will be handled according to Sprouts Nature School's Payment and Cancellation Policy.

10. Communication

Questions, concerns, and relevant information about a child's experience at Sprouts are always welcome. Families are encouraged to contact Sprouts when concerns arise so that they can be addressed promptly.

Ilsa Spencer
Sprouts Nature School
ilsa@sproutsnatureschool.com

608-320-9279