



HUMAN
NATURE
SCHOOL

Youth Programs Handbook 2021



Dear Families,

Thank you for taking part in HNS programs this year! We are looking forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones as we journey through the seasons together.

As we headed into our 11th year, our passion for Deep Nature Connection programming has only strengthened. We are honored and happy to be a helping hand for your children as they build and strengthen their relationships with nature as well as their mentors and peers. We are also grateful to be able to make space for them to explore their passions and gifts as well as brush up against their edges and challenges in a safe way.

Parents are a part of this process too! We are happy to offer support and suggestions for ways you can create more space for nature connection within your daily routines and practices for you and your children. We're always happy to explore questions about natural mysteries and we've loved getting to know and meet so many thoughtful, caring and inspiring parents over the years. It's also important for us as mentors to have open and honest communication with you about your children. When challenges arise with the kids, we have found it is most effective to work together with parents to find good solutions. And if your child is having a challenge with a staff member or an aspect of our program, please communicate that with us during the program so we have an opportunity to learn, grow and resolve whatever needs tending.

With Gratitude,

Matt and Kriya Miller,
Co-Executive Directors



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A. Mission, Vision, and Core Values

Mission: The Human Nature School was created to foster Deep Nature Connection and Whole Human Development within our community, and so within the world.

In this way, we are working to regenerate a holistic culture built upon an essential balance and harmony that benefits the highest good of all beings. Our primary purpose is that of connecting people to people, people to nature, and people to themselves.

Vision: We envision a world full of healthy, joyful human beings living harmoniously upon a planet of immense ecological diversity: a Web-of- Life that overflows with beauty, balance and dynamic abundance. Each individual thrives as an integral and cherished part of the whole— empowered within their unique and creative purpose: whether they be human, otter, water, mountain, wolf, wind, fire, spider, snake, lake, bird, bee or tree. All life upon this earth is honored.

OUR CORE VALUES

01.

DEEP NATURE CONNECTION

We find primary importance in helping to awaken greater awareness and appreciation for nature within our community. Both the nature that exists all around us, as well as that which lives deep within. We believe that this connection is an essential element of the human journey.

02.

HOLISTIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

In the context of the wilderness, our highest human potential becomes available to us like no where else within the world. It is in this most original setting that we, as mentors and teachers, are able achieve our most essential purpose: facilitating the development of Whole Human Beings.

03.

CULTURAL REGENERATION

Our work naturally provides a dynamic support and structure for the restoration of vibrant, nature-centered culture. We emulate and utilize the common threads of wisdom that weave between a number of deep-rooted, indigenous societies whose lineages still carry the necessary ingredients for living in harmony with the earth and all of life.

04.

PEACEMAKING

We actively work to cultivate peaceful relationships throughout our entire web of connection: beginning with ourselves, our organization, and the student body; extending from there out into our greater community. We believe in a more peaceful future for our species and this planet, and are grateful for all the tools and teachings we have been given to help make it so.

05.

HANDS-ON STEWARDSHIP

We seek to improve ecological well being through our work, and so too with the way that we live our lives. Humans, with our hands and hearts, have the ability to bring balance and abundance to the entire natural world in profound and immediate ways—Restoring this flowering earth to a pristine state of wellbeing.

06.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

We love to create opportunities that amplify harmonious connection and empowerment within the many levels of our community: holding gatherings and offering activities that bring people together upon common ground. We seek alliances with other organizations that have similar values, and enjoy working collaboratively to achieve our shared goals.

07.

ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE

We honor the living ancestral story upon this planet: that of both the myriad human cultures, as well as the brilliant ecological patterns that have been unfolding since time immemorial. In seeking the stories and songs of the ancients, and learning of the old ways, we gain so much— including an amazing perspective of who we are, and where we have come from... and so, a clearer vision of where we are going.

08.

FUTURE GENERATIONS

We consider the impacts of our decisions upon all future generations— our collective grandchildren, yet to be born. In this way, all of our actions, thoughts and words are measured beyond the timespan of our own lives. We are actively “planting trees under whose shade we know we shall never sit.

09.

REVERENCE FOR ALL LIFE

We walk in awe of this great mystery that is life. Each day is an unknown wonder, enriched by the multitude of different beings with whom we share this gift. Our practices bring conscious awareness and connection to the bigness of it all, and help us to truly appreciate and honor each and every one within the whole.

B. Logistics

Each Program is designed with the general flow of the day as seen below. Within this pattern, each class day is different from the next. Each class is planned out in advance and at the same time we prepare ourselves to let go of that plan as needed in order to take advantage of what’s happening in nature and with the students as things transpire. For instance, if we come across some great tracks, we might just totally drop our plan to study navigation and get fully into tracking if the students are showing a lot of excitement. If we notice a great example of bird language we’ll point that out wherever we are and whatever we are doing. If the students are really pumped about building shelters and could care less about learning fire by friction, we’ll build shelters and build them well! We utilize nature as a classroom and we truly value the passions of each student and we look to these inputs to constantly adjust the plan and take full advantage of ripe teaching opportunities. In this way no program is ever exactly the same, it’s always a new experience.

General Flow of a Day
Games and Sign-In
Opening Circle (intros, song, story, snack)
Brief break and snack
Break into Groups and head off for Focused, staff led activities and games.
Lunch
More relaxed, child led activities activities and games
Meet back up to share stories with one another about our day
Sign-out

C. Curriculum Overview

CURRICULUM

THE PATH OF THE NATURALIST

Knowledge of place. This aspect of study empowers students to intimately learn about the ecology of their bio-region, developing a rich understanding of flora and fauna through identification and scientific classification. Our focus is mainly upon the natural history of North America.

HOMESTEADING SKILLS

Strategies for living sustainably; off-the-grid living, natural building, responsible water use, humane care of domestic animals, fermentation and preservation, mushroom cultivation, perennial gardening, and food forestry, just to name a few!

THE SCIENCE OF TRACKING

Unraveling the mysteries of tracks and sign left behind by wildlife. This part of the curriculum is designed to give students a holistic grounding in the art and science of animal tracking. Emphasis is placed on the development of accurate track and sign identification and interpretation, as well as applications for tracking in biological research.

WILDCRAFTING

Gathering and preparing wild plants to use as food, medicine and tools. This aspect of the curriculum is a hands-on study of the diverse use of plants and trees. Students learn field identification, edible and medicinal preparations, and the how-to’s of plant technology. This aspect also covers basic principles of forest stewardship and habitat restoration.

NATURE CONNECTION MENTORING

Understanding of our powerful educational model and mentoring techniques. This part of the curriculum teaches students the principles of our nature-based approach to education, mentoring and community development. Students come away with the knowledge and experience necessary to work as effective instructors, leaders and mentors for both youth and adults.

VILLAGE BUILDING

Creating the container for harmonious community living. This includes both the physical provisions, as well as the invisible cultural structures. Providing a better life for one's people: whether that be at the family, community, or societal level. Primitive gardening and horticulture, long term shelter, village design, tending the wild, caretaking the edges, sustainable living patterns, advanced primitive skills and technologies.

WILDERNESS SURVIVAL

Technologies of the primitive survivalist. This component of the curriculum engages students in the practice of indigenous wilderness living skills, focused on the key elements needed to survive in the outdoors, unaided by modern tools. Students learn to build shelters from natural materials, locate and purify wild water, create fire-by-friction, and many other essential skills.

WILDERNESS AWARENESS

Lucid awareness within one's environment. Students practice techniques that build greater sensory acuity, including bird language and the ability to move with quiet grace within the forest. This element is not something to be explained, only experienced.

Developmental Goals/INDICATORS of awareness: Each student naturally embodies some of these attributes while having challenges with others. We track these within the kids and seek to provide experiences to help them to continue to develop these attributes from within. Most often, the simple work of connection to nature, community and self is all that is needed to ignite these within us all.

COMMON SENSE

Good judgment, based in experience. An ability to respond appropriately to any situation. The individual becomes a reliable source of safety for the community.

ALIVENESS AND AGILITY

Healthy, awakened bodies channeling vital energy into meaningful activity and connection. The individual is experiencing heightened reflexes and overall physical ability.

INQUISITIVE FOCUS

Bright curiosity and an inclination to gather information. The individual is using reason and intuition to create theories, and to test them out; discerning and tracking natural patterns; listening deeply; expressing an inspired desire to pursue learning.

CARING AND TENDING

Conscious awareness of the physical/mental/emotional wellbeing of others; The individual is experiencing true empathy and acting upon their sense of what is needed to bring balance and harmony.

SERVICE TO COMMUNITY

Desire to play a meaningful role in service to community; The individual realizes their own unique gifts and abilities, as well as how to utilize them for the betterment of all; seeking out what one can do to be truly helpful in any given situation.

RADIANT HAPPINESS

Exuding the Joy of Life from within. This is one of the most essential indicators for us as mentors and teachers. When the energy of unconditional love can be sourced from within, a person is truly free. Their cup "runneth over." The individual can be seen to nearly shine. All people have this Light within them.

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Creatively problem solving and adapting to any given situation using whatever resources are available– without complaining or wishing for things to be different; The individual has cultivated a storehouse of relevant skill and technical knowledge; internal strength and resilience; ability to protect the whole community; capacity to endure through hard times.

QUIET MIND

Comfort being calm and still– the ability to act and observe from a deep inner peace. The individual readily enjoys periods of time in silent observation and quiet presence: whether out alone in nature, or in the company of other people.

D. Agreements for Behavior

- Respect for Nature: picking up after ourselves, harvesting and gathering only what we need, ensuring future growth, kindness and gentleness towards animals
- Respect for Self: Eat/Drink when needed, go to the bathroom when needed, dress for the weather, rest when tired, ask if you need help, speak up if you're having a boundary
- Respect for others: Respect Boundaries, kind words and kind actions.
- Stay where we can see you/hear you: with the exception of hiding games when boundaries and permission is given.
- Ask First: before eating a wild edible, climbing a tree, throwing sticks or rocks, going in the water, using your knife, ask first so we ensure it's done safely.

Expectations

Children are expected to be able to honor the above agreements for behavior. If there is concern of a child causing harm to nature, community or self, we will work with parents towards a solution. If after our best attempts, the issues still remain, we will work with parents to find an alternative solution which could be, coming back to try again the next season.

Natural Consequences:

We seek to hold our boundaries in a way that is kind, clear and helps to connect the children to their surroundings more and the effects they have on those surroundings. So if they hurt someone with a stick accidentally, we'll take a moment to look at how that happened, make sure the person is okay, and if it's a repeated issue, we'll simply just take a break from sticks for the day and try again tomorrow.

At HNS we do our best to maintain a compassionate and connected approach to holding to agreements with the kids. We avoid yelling, shouting, shaming, punishing, threatening or projecting bad intentions on to the kids. We will never leave a child alone, deprive them of food or water, verbally or physically abuse them.

E. Nuts and bolts information

Where We Are:

Winter Programs are held at the Optimist Club, just South of Traverse City near Chums Corners.

Equipped with a big fire pit, outdoor shelter, cabin & an outhouse, this wildlife corridor is tucked away into a beautiful river valley, framed in by wetlands, woodlands, cedars and pines.

Spring, Summer and Fall Programs are at the Grand Traverse Commons:

We have walkable access to hundreds of acres of beautiful woodland and wetland conservation area and wildlife habitat. We will spend most of our class days outside but in bad weather we may retreat to the natural shelter which the students have built themselves or to our indoor space in nearby building 50.

The Human Nature School Property: In the near future, we intend to open an additional program site at Human Nature School's own, 143 acre property, just 10 minutes west of Traverse City. This property was a gift to the school in 2018 and we have since been working toward preparing the site to open for year round programs as well as to expand our curriculum into Regenerative Agriculture and Natural Building. Rolling meadows, creeks and wetlands, woodlands and pines all converge on this beautiful land we are grateful to call home and excited to learn and grow together on, in community. Contact us to learn more or get involved!

Conference/Communications

Instructors are generally available for the first and last 10 minutes of a class day to discuss information pertaining to that day. Staff will make themselves available for any major concerns to be addressed through a scheduled meeting or phone conference. Also, staff will let you know at drop off or pick up times if they need to meet with you about something specific.

Please do not hesitate to call your child's Lead Instructor to discuss matters regarding your child's experience in program. If there is an issue that extends beyond the scope of the lead instructor, then please contact the Executive Director. If you have a question or feedback about a program feel free to contact the Executive Director.

Emergency contact numbers

If you need to reach us out in the field or before or after class, you can call Matt's cell phone at 231-649-1906 or Kriya's cell phone at 231-883-1903. Either Matt or Kriya will be present during all youth programs.

Drop off and Pick Up

We do appreciate when everyone is able to start the day together which means children need to arrive on time. No later than 9:10 ready to go. If you are going to be later than 9:10 please call 231-649-1906

We ask for you to pick up your children on time at 3:00pm and we promise to make every effort to have your child ready to go at that time in the pick-up area. If you are going to be late please call 231-649-1906.

Inclement weather:

When local public schools are closed due to severe weather Human Nature School is closed. For cancellation information call 933-1955 (Central Grade School), check a local TV station, or listen to a local radio station.

We will also do our best to anticipate possible closures, at least 1 day before. We'll typically send out an email titled "weather watch" and try to give folks an extra heads up if possible.

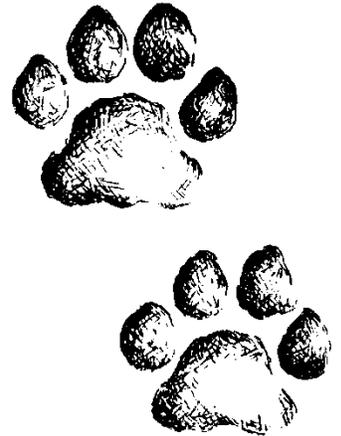
We try and stay outside as much as possible but if uncomfortable or hazardous weather occurs during class, instructors will get students to a safe shelter. If weather deteriorates and becomes severe, class may be cancelled, and parents will be called and asked to pick up their children early.

WE STRONGLY REQUEST that parents do their best to send their children with clothes appropriate for the weather so we can be comfortable outside **AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE**.

Makeup Days: If there is a class cancellation due to weather we will offer a makeup day. We will work with each programs participants to select a make up day that works best for the group. (Often times we simple add an extra day to the end of the session.)

What to Bring or Wear each day

- A substantial lunch-careful about bringing anything that will spoil and be sure that there is a good amount of protein and/or fat. Our bodies need protein and fat to keep us warm whether it's 50 and rainy or 15 and sunny.
- A substantial snack-Please no candy, heavy sugar items, or just chips. Exploring the woods takes a lot of energy and students need good food to keep them going.
- At quart of water or juice, preferably two. (No soda please). On an average low energy day we use up to 2 qts. of water that needs to be replaced. When we exert ourselves we lose a lot more water. Water is the key to our brain functioning, and when we get dehydrated we get irritable, so please send water.
- Day pack or Back pack to carry lunch, snack, water bottles, and other small items.
- Footwear: Sturdy sneakers, rain boots, hiking shoes, or winter boots. Whatever is appropriate to the weather.
- Clothing: We do get dirty, so wear clothes that can get dirty. Students will also appreciate wearing earth tone clothing that will help out in games involving hiding and camouflage.



Clothing Recommendations for staying warm and dry, for more detail ask your Lead Instructor.

Warm clothing in cold or wet weather: (NO COTTON)

- Outer Layer: Wool or fleece. Wool hat(s), socks, and glove as needed.
- Insulative Layer: wool, fleece, or synthetic.
- Inner Layer: Merino wool, under armor, polypropylene, silk, or synthetic.

Extra set of clothes-to change into just in case

Rain jacket or poncho

Shoes that can get wet or rain boots

Rain/Sun hat

Sunscreen

Medications

If your child will require medication to be administered during a program please request and complete a "Student Medication Form". The Legal Guardian of any student whom requires medication to be administered during programs is required to complete this form. Medication(s) is held and dispensed by the Lead Instructor as indicated by that Form.

Epi-Pen and Inhalers: If your child requires an inhaler or epi-pen for allergic reactions please request a Medical Action Form from the Lead instructor. A student may possess an inhaler or epi-pen during HNS programs for personal use during programs ONLY if HNS has an up to date and complete copy of the Medical Action Form signed by the parent and Health Care Provider (as required by Michigan DHS).

F. Risk, Safety, and First Aid:

At HNS we work to minimize risk while maximizing rewards. Whenever possible, we like to be able to say yes to a child's passion to connect with nature. And we work to minimize the risk.

- Tree climbing usually only as high as your head
- Water play when it's warm enough and not above knees
- Stick play is permitted in certain circumstances, as permitted and facilitated by staff

- Eating wild edibles only after you ask an adult staff
- Going Barefoot, only in certain places, when temps are above 50 and it depends on child's awareness. Projectiles such as arrows, atlatl darts and rabbit sticks always projected toward a target with instructor supervision.
- Knives, Ages 8 and up, keep in backpack until it's time to carve and learn all the safety rules
- Dress for the weather!

Hazard Awareness, we closely monitor, teach about and avoid these most common hazards in our park:

- Deadfalls
- bees
- litter
- stranger danger
- Weather: extreme heat or cold, lightening, strong winds, fire danger.
- poisonous plants: poison ivy, dolls eyes, parsnip, virginia creeper, deadly nightshade
- dogs

Other hazards we are aware of but have not encountered in the part thus far:

- Black widow
- rattlesnake
- poison hemlock
- bears/cougars
- ticks (this has not been an issue at HNS yet but ticks are on the rise and we recommend incorporating tick checks as a part of your bedtime routine (especially during mid May- mid June)

Illness or Just under the weather...infectious disease policy:

We ask you to use common sense on this one. If your child is not up for hiking/running/playing, do not bring them in. Rest! If they are likely to spread a real bummer of an illness, such as the flu, keep them home for the sake of others. Please call Matt at 231-649-1906 or Kriya at 231-883-1903 to inform us if your child will be absent due to sickness or if you're not sure whether to bring them in or not.

Knife/Tools Use Overview: We ask that students that have not yet been knife certified, summer camp students, and student under the age of 8 do not bring a knife to programs until the day knife training will be offered.

- Always ask before carving
- Always find a place to sit comfortably, out of reach of others, while carving
- Always carve away from your body
- Always be prepared to stop carving if someone enters your space.
- Keep your knife in your sheath and backpack until it's time for carving

G. Beyond the program day-continuing the learning

We encourage parents to engage their children and to find out what they're learning and also to encourage their children's curiosity for nature. Example strategies include:

- find out the latest mystery question from staff and encourage your child to do further research
- create a place in your home where your child can place special mysteries or crafts he/she brings home

- Create a naturalist library to encourage researching mysteries such as who is my nature name. Golden guides, Readers digest to North American Mammals, Peterson Field Guides, and Peterson first field guides are all excellent
- Have your child journal events from the day (drawing/and or writing)
- Have your children teach you or sibling's games, songs, or projects from the program.
- Have your child share a story from the day at bedtime
- Ask your child about the story share that day
- Check out Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature at the library or purchase the book!

H. Agreements

Human Nature School Provides

- Access to bathrooms and water during programs
- Emergency phone for contact during program
- Commitment for supporting staff, enrichment, and training
- Organization and facilitation of community celebrations and gatherings.
- Mediation and support of conflict resolution wherever it may occur among staff, students, and parents.
- Background checks and training of all staff

Staff Provides

- Safe learning experiences in HNS curriculum in a community context.
- Clear communication with parents about what is happening in the program and with their children).
- Clear communication about the needs of the program and staff to provide for a successful learning experience.
- Uphold the agreements and policies set up by HNS including agreements with landowners.

I. Administrative matters (such as forms, payment, notices, etc.)

Contact Information

Phone: 231-649-1906

Mailing Address: 1200 West 11th ST. Suite 115, Traverse City, MI, 49684

www.humannatureschool.org

info@humannatureschool.org

Please send in your payments on time as agreed to by the deadline of the program or as stated on your signed payment contract. If your payment is late, you will be contacted. Timely payments are greatly appreciated so that we can maintain our agreements with staff and provide needed supplies. As many of you know, there is not a lot of “cushion” in our budget. In addition to timely payment we appreciate any contribution of volunteer time and supplies. A major part of our success is dependent on the generosity of donors and volunteers. We continue to thrive as a community and create successful experiences through the continuation of community involvement and resource donation. Periodically throughout the year there will be specific requests for service or supplies and we ask that you pay attention to those and respond as appropriate to your situation.

Additional Tuition and Absentee Policy

We generally allow tuition to be pro-rated for up to 2 classes if you know in advance of payment that your child will not be able to attend a class(es). However, this generally does not include unplanned absences such as sickness or injury. We do allow/encourage students to consider doing a “make up day” w/ another current HNS program as applicable, ask to learn more.

In the event of class cancellations due to bad weather; HNS will offer the equivalent number of make up days. If you are unable to attend make up days we will give a rebate not exceeding the total value of 2 class days for that program.

If a student needs to unexpectedly drop out of a HNS program tuition will not be refunded and payment in full is still required.

