

Caregiver Handbook

Outdoor School 2026-27



Pine Project



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Land Acknowledgement



We extend our deep gratitude to the generations of People – past and present – who have tended this land, the Dish with One Spoon Territory. We acknowledge the abiding wisdom of the Dish with One Spoon treaty between the Anishnabeg and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. The ‘Dish’ represents what is now known as southern Ontario; we all eat out of the dish with only one spoon, ensuring that our dish is never empty. This symbolizes our ongoing roles and responsibilities of sustaining the land and treating each other and all living things with equity and respect.

The Pine Project operates on the land we now call Toronto, which has been a site of human activity for thousands of years. ‘Toronto’ or ‘Tkaronto’, a Mohawk word meaning “where the trees stand in the water,”* is part of the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit (of the Anishnabeg Peoples).

Today, Toronto is home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples from across Turtle Island. We acknowledge the history and ongoing process of colonization, and recognize that in order to realize the promise and challenge of reconciliation, acknowledgement must be coupled with action. We seek to move forward with humility, respect, gratitude and meaningful relationship building.

*We respectfully acknowledge the many histories and several translations associated with the history of this land.

Welcome to the Pine Project!

The Pine Project fosters confidence, resilience, learning and connection to nature through transformative outdoor experiences for children and youth in Toronto and beyond. Our programs inspire a vital reconnection between people and nature, community, and oneself.

We work primarily with children and families in urban settings, delivering innovative year-round outdoor programming that blends hands-on learning, joyful exploration, and mentorship in the local natural environment. We support kids to grow into healthy, active, and resilient individuals who carry a love for the natural world throughout their lives.

A Place to Belong



We are deeply committed to creating a community where everyone belongs. As is true in nature, we believe that diversity is essential for a strong and vibrant community. We aim to include and celebrate the many facets that contribute to our human identity, including gender identity, race, ability, and sexual orientation. Our goal is to craft a culture where people are seen and acknowledged for their shared humanity as well as their unique individuality.

Our approach is grounded in acknowledgement of the long-standing and ongoing systems of racism, inequity, and injustice that prevent many from accessing and feeling welcome in the outdoors. We strive to promote inclusive policies and practices, including providing accommodations that promote equity and removing barriers to access wherever possible. Out at programs, you will see us living these values by acknowledging the original stewards of this land, inviting participants to share their pronouns and other affirming practices, using child-centred approaches to create space for all voices, and addressing any oppressive behaviours that arise.



Program Overview

Program Dates

Sessions occur on a weekly or monthly basis between:

Fall Season: September 28 - December 4, 2026

Winter Season: January 4 - March 5, 2027

Spring Season: March 30 - June 4, 2027

Please note that programs do not run on Statutory Holidays.



What Happens at Outdoor School?

Outdoor School gives children and youth regular opportunities to learn, play, explore, and grow alongside caring mentors.

Our programming is shaped by the seasons, the places we explore, the interests and abilities of each group, and the opportunities that arise along the way. Participants might spend their day playing games, following animal tracks, building shelters, carving, making fires, exploring the forest, creating nature crafts, telling stories, solving challenges, or investigating something unexpected they discover.

Outdoor skills are an important part of Pine, but they are only one part of what participants are learning. Through repeated experiences of challenge, discovery, play, mentorship, and connection, young people have opportunities to become more confident and capable, build strong relationships, and develop a lasting connection with the natural world.

Through these experiences, we aim to build three important areas of connection:

- Connection to self — developing confidence, competence, independence, resilience, self-awareness, and a willingness to take on challenges.
- Connection to others — building friendships, belonging, collaboration, empathy, leadership, and the skills to be part of a community.
- Connection to nature — developing curiosity, knowledge, comfort outdoors, care for the natural world, and a lasting sense of relationship with the places around us.



Program Overview

Drop-off and Pick-up

Pick-up Procedures:

We're excited to be able to welcome caregivers to Closing Circle! At the end of each program day, we close our time together in a Closing Circle. During this time, the group reflects on their learnings and adventures of the day. Please arrive 15 minutes before the program end time if you wish to participate in Closing Circle.

If you are not planning on attending Closing Circle, please arrive 5 minutes before the end of program.

If someone other than the listed guardians will be picking up the participant, you must complete the Pick-up Authorization form online.

Running Early or Late:

We ask that caregivers do their best to respect drop-off and pick-up times.

Late drop-off/ Early pick-up:

If you need to drop-off late or pick-up early, please let instructors know ahead of time if possible. When you're on your way, we ask that you call/text the Field Phone number so that we can arrange for someone to meet you.

Late pick-up:

If a caregiver is aware that they will be late, we ask that they contact instructors at the field phone provided in their Welcome Email/Package. Due to the costs incurred when a caregiver is late and to respect the time of our instructors, a late fee of \$1/minute will be charged for any child who has not been picked up by a program's end time.

Staff will inform families that a late fee will be charged and our office team will be in touch to collect the fee electronically.



What to Bring Checklist

Each day we will have a new adventure in the park following our inspirations and our keen senses of exploration. It's hard to say where the trails might take us, so it's important to pack lightly in a single backpack!

Participants will be required to carry their own backpacks, with all their belongings, themselves throughout the day.

Please clearly label all personal belongings (including backpacks).

Clothing

☐ Weather Appropriate Clothing

Make sure to dress for the weather. We are outdoors in all weather (rain, shine, cold and snow!)

Cold Weather: Insulated and waterproof boots, snowsuits, warm gloves or mitts, scarves, and hats.

Rainy Days: Rain boots and rain jackets.

Hot & Sunny Days: Sunhat and sunscreen.

Please ensure that your child arrives at program with sunscreen applied!

☐ Extra Clothing

Please send an extra set of clothes in a waterproof bag in your child's backpack (labelled with their name). They'll need these in case of a puddle encounter!

Optional

☐ Hand Sanitizer

☐ Nature Journal/Notebook

☐ Pencil/Pencil Crayons

☐ A favourite field guide

☐ Carving Tools - A fixed/locking blade (blade length of no more than 2.5 inches/ 63mm)



Staff must approve all carving tools.

Participants must keep carving tools in their backpacks until they have asked for and been given permission to use them.

Food & Drink

☐ Food

Please send your child with all of the food that they will require for the duration of program*. We will stop for snack breaks each program day. Please pack **litter-free** and **nut-free** food for your child to munch on.

*Full-day program participants should pack snacks and a lunch.

Children should be able to open, eat, and pack up their snacks themselves. Please practice opening containers and water bottles with your child before program.

☐ Water

Please send your child with all the drinking water they require for the duration of program. We will not be able to refill water on site.

Lost & Found

If an item is misplaced, you can contact our team at info@pineproject.org or ask your instructors at your next program day.

The Pine Project does not take responsibility for any lost or damaged items.



Please DO NOT bring:

- Anything valuable or electronic
- Distracting toys
- Any weapons or look-a-likes



Health & Safety



Managing Risk in the Woods

At Pine Outdoor School, **we won't avoid all risks**. Taking on small, measured risks allows children to learn boundaries and experience natural consequences. We teach participants to manage risks and build skills to make good decisions.

Participants may have the opportunity to practice skills like carving or sawing, with support and supervision by our experienced counsellors. With that being said, the responsibility of using carving tools also comes with the possibility of injury. All of these activities will be introduced in a progressive manner to ensure that your participant learns and grows while staying safe.

Being Outdoors

At the Pine Project, we believe that meaningful outdoor experiences happen in all seasons and all kinds of weather. Our programs are designed to help participants build comfort, confidence, and resilience in nature — rain, snow, or shine.

Safety is always our top priority. Because we operate in City of Toronto parks without access to indoor program space, our teams plan carefully for weather variation. We have comprehensive safety plans in place, and staff are trained to assess conditions and manage risk in real time. Our approach focuses on identifying, evaluating, and reducing risk by implementing thoughtful mitigation strategies and modifications. Programs run as scheduled whenever possible to minimize disruption for families, and modifications may include:

- Air quality: When the Air Quality Health Index is high, public health recommends reducing or avoiding strenuous activities outdoors. We focus on quiet, low-intensity alternatives such as crafts, support mask use if desired, and monitor for symptoms.
- High winds: We modify programs by choosing areas that are open or have overhead shelter to avoid risk of falling branches, falling trees, and blowing debris.
- Thunderstorms: We move groups away from tall trees, open areas, and bodies of water, and take shelter under covered areas in the park or tarps in low, dry areas.
- Extreme cold: We keep participants moving to stay warm, and use tents or fires when appropriate. Staff monitor for early signs of cold-related illness and ensure everyone remains properly dressed and comfortable.
- Heavy rain or flooding: We avoid low-lying areas, use well-drained tarp sites, move to higher ground when needed, and have simple alternate exit routes if water blocks regular paths.

Dressing appropriately is an important part of managing risk outdoors. Families help keep participants safe by ensuring they're prepared for the day's weather - for more information on how to dress for the weather please see page 5.

We understand that some caregivers may decide not to participate in programs on some days due to weather, and we encourage families to make decisions that feel right for them. We are unable to offer credits or refunds if your child does not participate. In rare cases where environmental hazards cannot be managed safely, the Pine Project may cancel or shorten a session. Because conditions can change quickly, cancellation decisions are sometimes made close to program time and not solely based on forecasts. Families will be informed by email and text (if opted-in) and, if necessary, phone call.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about our safety and risk management practices, please reach out to our office team.

Health & Safety

Additional Support

We do our very best to provide a positive environment for all of our participants. If a participant requires additional support beyond what was described upon registration, please reach out to our team. Elaborating as much as possible allows us to understand how best to support a participant's diverse needs.

While we may not be able to meet every participant's needs, we try our best to provide a wonderful experience for all.

Washrooms

The parks are not equipped with washrooms or running water. There will be a private portable toilet available for the exclusive use of Pine Project participants and staff.

It is important that participants are able to use the washroom themselves and communicate their washroom needs. If your child struggles with communicating their washroom needs or requires washroom assistance, please let us know.

Hand sanitizer will be used when soap and water is not available.

Ticks

Ticks exist in Toronto city parks. We do our best to teach tick awareness in a positive and clear way. We recommend that kids change out of their clothes when they get home each day and conduct tick checks each night. If we find a tick embedded into your child's skin, we will phone home immediately. We do not remove the tick.

To inform yourself on ticks, how to prevent and check for them, and options for their removal, please see:
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/lyme-disease>.

Medications

Wherever possible, please administer medications for participants prior to coming to program. If the participant requires medications at program, including inhalers, please reach out to our office prior to the start of camp.

Allergies

If the participant has any anaphylactic (life-threatening) allergies, please complete the Anaphylaxis Emergency Plan Form, available in the online registration system.

Please provide two epipens for your child, as well as a pouch/fanny pack so your child can carry one epipen with them at all times.

Please let your counsellors know if your child suffers from seasonal allergies.

Illness

If a participant falls ill while at program, caregivers will be contacted to pickup their child. Please ensure that you've provided two emergency contacts who are able to pick up within 1 hour of being contacted, if needed.

✱ **If your participant is experiencing any symptoms of communicable illness, please keep them home.** ✱



Code of Conduct

At Pine, we are committed to creating programs where participants and staff feel safe, respected, included, and able to learn and explore together. Our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and justice is an important part of creating that environment. Our expectations for behaviour are grounded in three core agreements:

Take care of yourself. Take care of others. Take care of nature.

All participants are expected to follow these agreements and staff instructions throughout their time at Pine. We ask caregivers to review and discuss these expectations with their child before participating.

1) Take care of self

Participants are expected to:

- ☐ Listen to, respect, and follow staff instructions and directions, including staying with the group.
- ☐ Speak up if they have questions or concerns, or if something feels unsafe, uncomfortable, or wrong.
- ☐ Maintain proper nutrition, hydration, and hygiene, and inform staff of any personal needs or concerns.
- ☐ Take responsibility for their own belongings.
- ☐ Do not bring, possess, or use prohibited items, including alcohol, tobacco or vaping products, illegal drugs, weapons or look-alikes, or other unsafe items.

2) Take care of others

Participants are expected to:

- ☐ Treat other participants and staff with respect and help everyone feel safe and included.
- ☐ Respect other people's bodies, personal space, privacy, belongings, and boundaries.
- ☐ Keep hands to themselves and do not fight, play fight, or intentionally hurt another person.
- ☐ Do not engage in bullying, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, threats, intimidation, verbal abuse, or behaviour that targets someone based on their identity or ability.
- ☐ Refrain from intimate relationships with other participants while at Pine programs. Do not engage in sexual or inappropriate behaviour with or around other participants, including: sexual jokes, comments, or gestures; exposing private body parts; unwelcome or inappropriate physical contact; possessing or sharing sexually explicit material; any sexual activity.
- ☐ Do not share food, drinks, or medication.

3) Take care of nature

Participants are expected to:

- ☐ Treat plants, wildlife, waterways, and natural spaces with care and respect.
- ☐ Follow staff instructions for interacting safely and responsibly with nature.
- ☐ Respect and care for the places and communities where Pine programs take place.



When expectations aren't met

Staff will support participants to understand and meet these expectations, considering their age and needs, the circumstances, the nature and impact of the behaviour, and the safety and well-being of everyone involved. In some cases, this may include requiring a participant to leave the program or determining that they are not able to participate in future programs.

Caregiver Participation



Our programs are one part of the bigger picture of your child's development. We've found that the more we support families to be involved, the richer the experience for the participant. This is why we love to include family members as much as possible. Here's how:

Closing Circles

Caregivers and siblings are invited to join closing circles, 15 minutes before pick-up, at every session. This gives us a chance to celebrate and share stories about their daily adventures.

Take Home Challenges

Staff may provide kids and families with nature-related mysteries and questions to research at home. Please let us know when you've learned something new! We'll try to make time to share it with the group during our circle!

Supporting Your Child's Independence

One of the expectations in our programs is that your child takes care of themselves. When dropping off or picking up your child from our programs, please encourage them to do things for themselves. Doing up their backpack, zipping up their jacket, or putting on their shoes themselves are all steps towards independence. Although these seem like small tasks, doing them independently helps children take responsibility. As our relationship with them grows, they will have the opportunity to take on more tasks. Sometimes this can even serve to make them more helpful at home!

Collaborating With Staff

Our goal is to form a solid partnership with the caregivers of each child. We really value your input and aspire to support you in achieving your family's goals.

Building Confidence

We encourage participants to try hard things, take healthy risks, and direct their own learning at their own pace, while managing and mitigating larger risks alongside the mentorship of their instructors. Caregivers play an important role in this process. Children often take emotional cues from the adults around them, especially during moments of challenge, uncertainty, or separation. We ask families to support their child's independence by staying confident and calm, trusting the program, and allowing space for discomfort. This healthy stress is part of how resilience is built, whether that means a quick goodbye at drop-off for younger participants, or navigating new social dynamics and personal 'edges' for older ones. Kids often finish their days at Pine tired and dirty, but also bursting with pride and self confidence.

Communication



If you're running early or late, or in case of emergency, you can contact the field staff (during program hours) at:

WEST Field Phone:
(437) 771 1176

EAST Field Phone:
(437) 771 3225

For all inquiries, please contact our administrative team:

Contact us by phone:

(416) 792 2772

Contact us by email:

info@pineproject.org

Communication & Feedback

We value respectful, constructive communication and believe it is the foundation for resolving concerns and supporting a positive experience for everyone. We are committed to listening and working collaboratively with families when challenges arise. If you have a question or concern about your child's experience, we ask that you:

1. Connect directly with a lead instructor in your group. Let them know you'd like to share feedback and arrange a time to talk.
2. Approach conversations with curiosity and openness. Asking questions and seeking context before forming conclusions helps us work together productively.
3. Reach out to our office team if you feel your concern has not been fully addressed.

We welcome feedback shared in a respectful and solution-oriented way. Communication that is abusive, threatening, or discriminatory toward staff or community members will not be tolerated.

Staying Involved

If your child is enjoying our programs, Pine offers additional opportunities for kids to continue their nature connection journey:

- **Red Wolf Overnight Camp** - An immersive wilderness experience for ages 7-16
- **March Break Day Camp** - Week-long camp in Toronto parks for ages 4-13
- **Summer Day Camps** - Week-long programs in Toronto parks for ages 4-16

To learn more visit pineproject.org or contact our team at info@pineproject.org.

Directions - WEST END

King's Mill Park

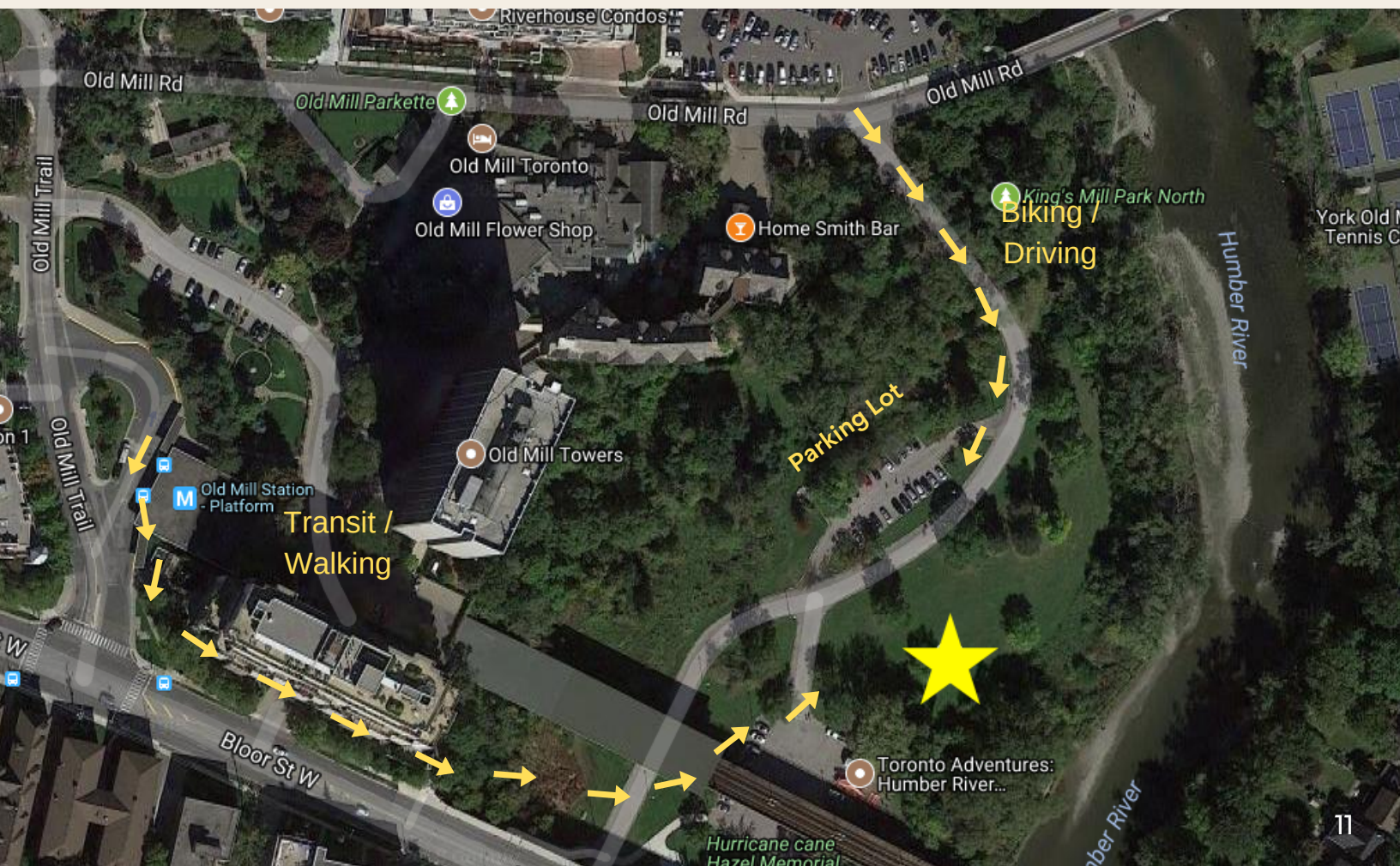
43.64958, -79.49202

Transit/Walking Instructions

- Take the subway to Old Mill Station.
- When you exit, turn left out of the station.
- Turn left again onto Bloor St. Stay on the North side as you walk East.
- When you approach the bridge you will see a set of stairs on your left side. If you cross over the Humber River you have gone too far.
- Take the stairs down and turn Left, walking Northeast, past the parking lot until you see us in the nearby field.

Biking/Driving Instructions

- Heading West on Bloor St, turn right on Old Mill Trail (where the subway station is) and then another right on Old Mill Rd. Off of Old Mill Rd. you will see an entrance to King's Mill Park on the right.
- Turn right into the park and follow this paved road, past the first parking lot on your right. You will see us in the big field to your left (just before the second parking lot).



Directions - EAST END

Stan Wadlow Park

43°41'58.4"N 79°18'43.5"W

Transit/Walking Instructions

- Take the Line 2 (Bloor-Danforth) Subway to Main Street Station.
- At Main Street Station take either 87A or 87:
- 87A Cosburn bus towards Broadview Station Via East York Acres for 10 stops.
- Get off the bus at East York Acres and continue down Haldon Ave to the meeting location.
- 87 Cosburn bus towards Broadview Station for 9 stops.
- Get off the bus at Westlake Ave and walk one block west, then turn right onto Haldon ave and continue towards the meeting location.

Biking/Driving Instructions

- Heading East on Danforth, turn left onto Woodbine Avenue.
- Continue North and turn right onto Cosburn Avenue.
- Continue East and turn left onto Haldon Ave
- Continue until the designated parking lot.

