

# Outdoor School Program Parent Handbook







## About Cheakamus Centre

- Located in Brackendale, approximately 45 minutes north of Horseshoe Bay.
- Traditional territories of the **Chi'yakmesh** people of **Skwxwú7mesh Nation** in the heart of the newly designated Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound UNESCO Biosphere Region.
- Boasts 165 hectares of unique environmental features including old-growth cedars, spawning habitat for five species of Pacific Salmon, and the largest recorded concentration of wintering bald eagles in North America.
- Owned by North Vancouver School District and has been running Outdoor School since 1969.
- Each year, over 6000 students participate in day and multi-day cultural and environmental learning programs.
- Cheakamus Centre's program buildings, cabins and trails are accessible to students and staff with diverse needs.
- More information about Cheakamus Centre [www.cheakamuscentre.ca](http://www.cheakamuscentre.ca)



## About the Outdoor School Program

**Outdoor School is about engaging learners in fun and meaningful ways that foster understanding and care for our natural world.**

Students attend for a 3-day (grade 4) or 4-day (grade 6) overnight experience, sleeping in cabins, doing hands-on activities during the day, and eating all meals together in our dining hall. The Outdoor School program is supported by a number of school staff, Cheakamus Centre staff, and high school volunteers.

Our facilities offer unique educational experiences:

- Salmon Hatchery supported by Fisheries and Oceans Canada involves children in hands-on study of the salmon life cycles and salmon enhancement practices;
- Biodiversity Farm allows children to observe and interact with animals such as goats, chickens, ducks, pigs and bees;
- Forest Field Pavilions act as centres for studying forest ecology and wildlife;
- State of the art Environmental Learning Centre where students gather for meals, snacks and activities.



## Accommodation

Students are housed in comfortable, heated cabins. Students are organized in cabin groups by their teachers and are supervised by their assigned high school leadership counsellor(s).

All of the cabins are equipped with two shared bathrooms and bunk style beds. There are two cabins (Cabins 7 & 8) that are wheelchair accessible and have separate bedrooms for students requiring additional supports. Click [HERE](#) for a look at the cabin layout.



## Evening Supervision

Each night of your child's stay at Cheakamus Centre, high school counsellors will supervise students during the evening program and overnight in the cabins. Cheakamus Centre staff support the counsellors in their supervisory roles with assistance provided from visiting teachers as required. A Wellness Supervisor, in addition to the resident program staff are on-call 24 hours a day to deal with illness or other related needs.

## Personal Care and Rest

Adequate time is provided daily for children to maintain good health practices. While personal hygiene is your child's own responsibility, counsellors will provide regular reminders during cabin time.

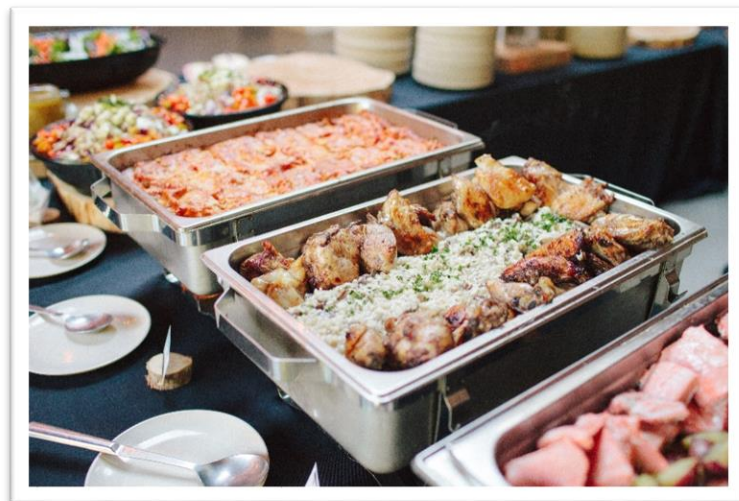
Getting enough sleep is important for children particularly given the many activities they're involved in throughout the day. The program is scheduled to provide enough time for breaks, and students' bed times are closely supervised by their cabin counsellors.

## Meals and Snacks

Cheakamus Centre is famous for its food! Our talented culinary team prepare simple, sustainable meals and snacks that are kid-friendly and nutritious, and keep our students healthy, happy and energized. Daily meals are served "family style" in the Environmental Learning Centre, supported by Cheakamus staff and high school counsellors.

Our kitchen is able to cater to a range of dietary needs and restrictions – **if your child has particularly complex dietary requirements, please speak to your teacher.** Your teacher will communicate with our kitchen, if necessary, and may request that you provide supplemental foods.

Returning your child's Medical Form promptly, and noting any special dietary needs, will help the program staff and chef make necessary arrangements. (Please be specific: if a child is a vegetarian, are eggs and dairy products acceptable? If a child is lactose intolerant, is milk in baking okay? etc.) Please note that the Centre is a **nut-restricted facility**, including all meals served on-site.





# Sample Mid-Week Schedule

7:00	Rise and Shine, prepare for the day
8:00	Breakfast
8:45	Chores or free time with counsellors
9:15	Field Study
11:15	Chores or free time with counsellors
11:40	Lunch
12:30	Field Study
2:30	Snack
3:00	Afternoon Recreation Activity
4:15	Cabin Time
5:45	Dinner in dining hall @ ELC
7:00	Daily follow-up with classroom teachers
8:00	Snack & Evening Program
9:00	Cabin Time
9:45	Lights out! Counsellors are in cabins ODS staff supervising outside cabins

*\*Note that Gr. 4 student bed times are slightly earlier*



## Field Studies

Every morning and afternoon, children take part in 2-hour integrated Field Studies. The following are some examples of the Field Studies offered: farm study, pond study, birds/wildlife, salmon lifecycle study, forest study, nature art.

A focus on the out-of-doors does not mean that students' regular classroom subjects are set aside for their stay. Instead, they will use their new skills to discover the world around them, and make connections with what they are learning back at school.

## Recreation Activities and Evening Programs

During afternoon recreation periods, children are given the opportunity to explore nature, and to exercise their senses by playing games which challenge them to learn about ecology, survival, or teamwork. During your child's stay, a selection of these activities will be offered: canoeing (grade 6), archery (grade 6), cooperative challenges, tracking, nature games, insect study, apple pressing, and more!

After dinner, children spend time with their teacher discussing the day's events and highlights. This is an important time for teachers to check in with their students and provide support as needed. This is followed by a night walk, campfire songs or other evening activities led by the counsellors and Cheakamus Program Staff. The evening program is often a highlight for both the students and the counsellors.



## Wellness Supervisors

Cheakamus Centre has two First Aid certified Wellness Supervisors (one on days and one on nights) who will be available to respond to all program related medical needs 24 hours a day. This includes:

- ✓ Supporting children's physical and social-emotional wellbeing
- ✓ Working with the chef on any special diets and food allergies
- ✓ Assisting counsellors in their overnight support of students
- ✓ Administering medication as instructed by parents/guardians on the medical form
- ✓ Assessing and providing first-aid for any reported illnesses or injuries

Additional resident staff are available to assist in the event of an emergency. In emergency first-aid situations, children will be transported to Squamish General Hospital and accompanied by their teacher and/or Cheakamus Centre staff. Parents will be contacted as soon as possible in this event.

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## Counsellors

Volunteer counsellors play an integral role in the ODS program. In many cases, student's strongest and fondest memories of ODS is time spent with their cabin counsellor(s). Counsellors support students in the following ways:

- sleep in the cabins, providing supervision, guidance and care
- support students and teachers on field studies
- provide instruction and supervision for Special Program and evening activities
- help children perform their chores
- supervise during meals and snacktime

High school students in Gr. 10-12, mostly from North Vancouver, are eligible to counsel, and this leadership experience is a core component of the ODS program. Prior to counselling, these volunteers take part in a weekend-long training workshop which prepares them for the responsibilities of the role. In addition, high school students volunteering to counsel must obtain written permission from their school teachers, parents and their high school administration.

*Other supports include NVSD teachers, Program Coordinator, Program Manager, and Education Director.*

## Phone calls & Calling home

Generally, students are not permitted to use the phone to call or receive calls from home as this often creates greater anxiety. Parents concerned about communicating with their child are requested to contact their child's teacher to discuss strategies to support them while they are away. A recommended resource for preparing your child for spending time away from home/family can be found [here](#).

In case of an emergency at home, parents may contact their school principal who will communicate with Cheakamus Centre administration. Alternatively, parents may contact Cheakamus Centre at 604 898 5422. Voicemails will be answered as promptly as possible.



### Teachers

Well in advance of your child's program, Cheakamus Centre teachers are in contact with classroom teachers to assist in all aspects of the planning process. Your child's school teacher will generally be able to address questions that may come up regarding their participation in the program. **Please direct all questions to your school teacher.**

### At Home

A successful Outdoor School experience begins at home, long before your child arrives at the school. Please share parts of this handbook with your child and talk about the things to see and do at Outdoor School. You will also need to:

- ✓ Carefully read and review the information provided with the Informed Consent Form.
- ✓ Fill in the Informed Consent form and Medical Form and return them to your child's teacher by the deadline given.
  - Please remember to include the following on the Medical Form
    - child's Medical Service Plan number or Insurance Plan number
    - any required medications – including Gravol, Tylenol, etc.
    - any dietary restrictions or food allergies
    - comments about sleep disorders, bed-wetting, allergies, etc.
    - complete and sign the form in ink!
- ✓ Submit payment for the ODS Program fee.
- ✓ Help your child pack their clothing and equipment. Children carry their own luggage: please pack accordingly.
- ✓ Mark all clothing and equipment for identification. Use a sew-in name tag or write your child's name and school with a laundry-marking felt pen.

*Parents with medical or dietary related questions are encouraged to reach out to your school teacher.*

### Preparing for Overnight

If your child has anxiety about spending nights away from home, the following can be helpful to prepare them:

- Practice a sleepover with friends or family
  - This is a great way to familiarize them with spending a night away, and sleeping over with trusted friends/family in a familiar home can build their confidence with spending the night in a group setting in an unfamiliar cabin.
- Try a night in your sleeping bag
  - Even if they are sleeping in their bed, sleeping in the sleeping bag can be helpful to get a feel for the physical sensation of spending the night in it, especially for students with sensory sensitivities.
- Review the schedule
  - Frontloading your child with the schedule can help them feel prepared to take on the day.
- Talk through anxieties
  - Spending time listening to your child's concerns can help parents better understand their needs and how best to support their anxieties.



## Inclusion and Students Requiring Adaptations or Support

We are committed to providing opportunities for all students to attend and actively participate in the ODS Program, as laid out in this [information for parents](#) document re: SD44 programs at Cheakamus Centre. Our goal is to integrate students with complex needs as much as possible into our regular program schedule. Please contact your child's teacher and/or support staff well in-advance of your program date to inquire about planning requirements.



## Site Visits

On the first Sunday of May, students and parents are welcome to attend our free, public Open House. This is a wonderful opportunity to introduce children to the site and tours will be provided by program staff to help parents and students prepare for their program experience. Apart from Open House, we occasionally host site tour days for parents and students. For information on dates and times, please check with your teacher.

*Please note that drop-in visits are not permitted.*

## Expectations and Guidelines

As explained in the Informed Consent document, each child is expected to follow their school's Code of Conduct in addition to the guidelines provided to them on arrival. The large majority of students become very engaged in the hands-on programming, and there simply isn't time in the Outdoor School program schedule for getting into trouble.

Occasionally, children will choose to be uncooperative and this may result in them missing some of the opportunities available to their peers. In extreme disciplinary situations—when a child is reprimanded repeatedly, or is a danger to self or others—the Cheakamus Centre Administration and the child's classroom teacher(s) will contact the home school principal and the child's parents. While uncommon, parents are reminded that they may be asked to pick up their child and take them home in this event.

## ODS Program Fee

The program fee, payable through School Cash Online, helps cover the cost of transportation, accommodation, meals and snacks, and onsite program facilitation and support. Questions with regard to program fees can be directed to your teacher. Please note, refunds are not provided for partial stays unless special arrangements have been made in advance with Cheakamus Centre.

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## Still have some questions?

We hope we have answered many of your questions regarding the Outdoor School Program. If there's something you're still wondering about, or if you have a comment about the program, please speak to your child's teacher or contact us at [office@cheakamuscentre.ca](mailto:office@cheakamuscentre.ca). For further information about the ODS Program and Cheakamus Centre, please feel free to visit our website at [www.cheakamuscentre.ca](http://www.cheakamuscentre.ca).

Cheakamus Centre values your support of this unique educational program, and we are committed to ensuring that your child's stay here is a positive experience, providing foundations for learning that will last a lifetime.

Thank you!