

Forest Bluff Family Handbook

“Nurturing the Human Spirit”

Our mission is to guide children in their self-formation from birth through fourteen years of age. Self-formation follows universal principles and is unique for each child. It involves an integrating process that is guided by the developing intellect and the human spirit. It is best achieved in an educational environment that fosters self-discipline and the opportunity to exercise freedom appropriate to the child’s developing sense of responsibility. These skills of strong character are readily observed in the child’s growing respect for others, for the environment and for the self.

Academically, a Forest Bluff education focuses on the child’s skills for discovery and exploration of a world that is both physical and spiritual in nature. We believe that this search for understanding, as opposed to the presentation, memorization and subsequent testing of information, is the essence of a meaningful education. It is a life-long process for each of us.

We encourage Directors and parents to continue their own personal growth as a means to assist children in their self-development and in their attainment of those virtues important to a civilized and productive society: character, integrity, service and passion for life.

— • —

We thank each of you for following the philosophy and practices of Forest Bluff School as outlined in the following pages. Doing so is what makes this community supportive to our children in their development at Forest Bluff School.

Table of Contents:

Arrival and Dismissal	Page 3
Attendance.....	Page 3
Parking Lot Procedures	Page 3
Pets.....	Page 3
Transportation.....	Page 3
Emergencies.....	Page 4
Medical Forms	Page 4
Illness.....	Page 4
Lunches.....	Page 4
Items from Home.....	Page 4
School Dress.....	Page 5
After School Activities.....	Page 6
Play Dates.....	Page 6
Birthday Parties.....	Page 6
Sleepovers.....	Page 6
Social Events.....	Page 6
Homework	Page 6
Testing.....	Page 7
Tutoring.....	Page 7
Technology and Television.....	Page 7
Inclusion and Disciplinary Actions.....	Page 8
Communication with Teachers.....	Page 8
Continuing Education Series.....	Page 8

If you have questions or wish clarification regarding school practices or guidelines, please contact your child's Director.

Arrival and Dismissal: Thank you for arriving promptly at 8:30 a.m. and for picking your children up on time at their dismissals, at (11:30 a.m., 3:20 p.m., or 3:30 p.m.). For a calm entrance to the school day, it is important to hold the hand of children three years old and under until they arrive at their classroom door. We ask that four and five year olds also walk by your side. For safety, young children remain with you or inside your car while waiting for elementary-age siblings at the 3:30 dismissal.

Attendance: Full attendance at every school day is necessary for your child's best education. If your child must be excused from school, give a written notification to the school office as far in advance as possible. This enables teachers to plan group lessons as best they can. Because a child's absence impacts others, we ask that absences be kept to a respectful minimum.

Parking Lot Procedures: Thank you for giving your parking space to waiting cars *as soon as feasible* when delivering or picking up your children, especially at the 3:20-3:30 dismissals. Please turn to the right when entering the parking lot and proceed slowly and carefully. The school property is a "no cell zone." If you must make a call, please do so in a parked car. We thank you for sharing these guidelines with caregivers and other family members.

Pets: Because of safety and liability issues, dogs and family pets are not permitted outside of your cars. If walking to school, please keep dogs on leash at the edge of the school property.

Transportation: Before a child is picked up by anyone other than their parent or their usual caregiver, a parent's consent with a note or a phone call must be given to the school office. This regulation is necessary for insurance requirements.

Biking: All students biking to school are asked to wear helmets. Children in the Lower Elementary or younger may only bike to school with an adult. These children bring their lunches in their usual school luncheon baskets.

Bikes should always be walked downhill when going from the stop sign by the Village Green down along #176 (as per the village sign that says "walk your bikes") or, if using the ramp structure from the railroad station down to #176.

Students in the Upper Elementary and Secondary Levels are given permission to ride bikes or walk to and from school independently upon mutual agreement between parent and teacher. This process includes the student submitting a drawn map of their planned route to the office and agreeing to stay on the submitted route.

Please walk, rather than ride, bikes on school grounds.

Emergencies: In the event that a parent is unavailable in an emergency, we telephone the numbers listed on the Emergency Information Form. It is recommended that one of the indicated contacts is a family member. Please be certain that the indicated family members or friends know that you have designated them as emergency contacts. It is essential to update the office if changes occur in your emergency information. Forest Bluff has contingency plans for large-scale emergencies and you will be contacted in such events through our AMG Alert system at the numbers you have given us.

Medical Forms: Medical Forms and emergency contact numbers are required for every student *at least seven business days* before his or her first day of school. Please notify the school in writing of medical needs and restrictions including food allergies or temporary ailments throughout the school year.

Illness: Children must remain at home when ill. Because young children readily pick up secondary infections when weakened from an initial illness, it is best to keep them at home for a full day of rest after recovery from even minor sickness: a fever, a severe sore throat, a cold, cough, diarrhea or vomiting. In this way, a continuing contagion cycle within the classroom is prevented. Teachers and fellow parents appreciate your vigilance in this matter.

Lunches: Children ages 5 and older bring their lunch to school daily. They prepare it themselves with adult supervision appropriate to their age level and ability. A simple menu of a nutritious sandwich, including a source of protein, fruit, raw vegetable and a fruit or milk beverage is an excellent choice. This is an opportune time to help your children to understand good nutrition and to establish healthy eating habits for a lifetime. Please do not allow your children to pack chips, nuts, popcorn, pretzels, soft drinks, boxed juices or candy. If you wish them to have a dessert, one small cookie is a choice.

Children pack their lunches in baskets smaller than 16” in length, 8” in width and 12” in height. Your child places the following items inside: a china or glass plate, a cloth placemat, a cloth napkin, a drinking glass and a full complement of flatware daily. Children eat together at small tables setting their places as if dining in a restaurant together and their teachers guide them to develop good manners and polite conversation. At the end of their meal, children may place their used utensils in a large plastic baggie to bring home for washing and disposal.

Children in the Upper Elementary and Secondary Levels transport their lunches in backpacks instead of a basket. We ask that backpacks be simple, unembellished and standard in design.

Items from Home: Personal items from home such as purses, wallets, toys, games, pets, stuffed animals, blankets or “show and tell” items, should not be brought to school.

School Dress: Over the years, Forest Bluff School has given careful thought to our dress requirements. We have found that maintaining a modest, simple and classic style best serves our students. By avoiding logos, slogans and fads in clothing, we maintain our tradition of emphasizing a focus on education. We suggest a limited school wardrobe appropriate for activity. These clothes can be apart from play or dress clothes so that your child has an easy time making appropriate choices.

Boys: Boys wear collared shirts, either “polo style” or button down and worn tucked in for a neat appearance. Turtlenecks are also permitted. Pants are traditional “khaki-style,” corduroy, wool, linen or cotton. Shorts are just above the knee and of the above materials. Hair for boys is cut above the brow in front, above the collar in the back and above the ears.

Girls: Girls blouses are plain and opaque, and if longer, are tucked in. Turtlenecks are also permitted. Pants are traditional “khaki-style,” corduroy, wool, linen or cotton. Skirts are near the knee or longer, and shorts are mid-thigh to the knee, made of the above materials. Leggings or tights are permitted if worn under a skirt or dress. Hair for girls is above the brow if cut in bangs or held back from the face with an unembellished hair band, ribbon, barrette, clip or elastic. We ask that children with pierced ears wear just one gold or silver ball stud 4mm or smaller in each lower ear lobe. (No other jewelry or piercing locations, thank you.)

For Both: Jackets, coats and headwear for outdoors are simple and practical. Sweaters are cardigan style, or slipovers with turtle or crew necks. Baseball hats and sun hats may be worn outdoors and are removed when inside the building.

Shoes are simple tennis shoes with laces that facilitate balance, stable movement, running, stopping, starting, jumping, etc. We thank you for choosing shoes that are simple, not fluorescent or designed to attract attention.

Not permitted: Sweatpants, leggings worn as pants, cotton or spandex “yoga pants,” or sweatshirts, sweaters with hoods or that tie in front, denim, blue jean or camouflage material, cargo pants, pants worn low on the hips, excessively tight, baggy or layered clothing, bare midriff blouses or shirts, spaghetti straps, clothing with printing, advertising, club or team logos, athletic awards, memberships, fancy decoration, sparkles, stickers, makeup of any kind, nail polish, face or hair sparkles, tattoos, body piercings, hair gel, spiking or coloring in the hair, jewelry including metal, twine or beaded bracelets, necklaces, rings, or earrings other than the small stud earrings described above.

Clothing and footwear for the Young Children’s Community varies slightly to facilitate ease of dressing and undressing for toileting and is communicated directly to parents by your child’s teacher.

Secondary Level students follow Dress Code guidelines set by the Secondary Level directors, Matt Robbins and Elisabeth Miles, and Secondary Level Advisor, Paula Lillard.

After School Activities: The school day at Forest Bluff is a demanding one; Children choose their activities during the school day and interact with their peers constantly. Afterwards, they feel much the way you might after a big day at work. We recommend that younger children go right home after school, have lunch with you and then have a rest time by themselves in their bedroom, followed by some time outdoors. Unscheduled time to unwind is very important for children of all ages, because it offers time to develop creative thoughts, make things and explore, to read and to reflect on the many images and learning experiences of the day.

If parents want their children to participate in a formal sport program, take individual lessons or play a musical instrument, we suggest limiting the number of days and hours involved so that your children arrive at school each day rested and ready for the challenges ahead.

Play Dates: Because of the demanding nature of the school day, play dates are best reserved for weekends. We find that students get along best when they do not spend too much time together outside of school, and therefore, we encourage parents to guide their children to developing many different friendships.

Birthday Parties, Sleepovers, Social Events: When it comes to social events outside of school, we ask parents to consider two points: “less is more” (keep it simple), and at Forest Bluff, we are teaching respectful tolerance and a spirit of inclusion. Because our classrooms can be very distracted by the excitement over a birthday party, we ask that parents arrange such events, whenever possible, for vacation times and summers, or just simply celebrate *with family members*. Due to the likelihood of hurt feelings, invitations and gifts for birthdays or other outside events are not brought to school. The Directors are happy to make suggestions and share ideas for the most successful celebrations for children of particular ages. For Elementary children, we suggest inviting all the children of your child’s age range (for example, just the 6 and 7 year olds), or all the girls in the class, or all the boys in the class, if you are not inviting the whole class. These clear delineations help children to understand they are not being excluded arbitrarily, and it helps them to avoid hurting one another’s feelings.

Sleepovers for Elementary children under age ten are not recommended during the school year. Parents and teachers often find that after such an event, children typically take several days to recover their natural dispositions and energy.

Homework: “Homework” at Forest Bluff is **reading** and **helping out** at home. These two activities are indicated by research as being vitally important for developing confidence and academic competence.

From the time children enter Forest Bluff, we ask that parents read to them daily. This habit is important to continue even when children are older, because they can learn more advanced vocabulary, comprehension and writing styles by listening to a good reader.

The most important thing about reading together is what happens between a parent and his or her child in these private moments. Spontaneous discussions arise in which you are able to impart your values, deepest feelings about faith and death, and so on. Such conversations strengthen your bonds as a family and prepare your children for their lives.

Elementary aged children should establish a habit of reading for one to two hours every day. It is helpful to make this a regular time when other family members are still and studying or reading as well.

We strongly urge families to include children of all ages in the caring for the home and contributing to the daily functioning of the family in the form of chores and real responsibilities. This is a powerful way to prepare our children for life.

Testing: Traditional academic testing is not necessary in a Montessori setting because children's learning is being judged by different criteria than those of standard tests. You can be assured that informal testing occurs *daily* in Montessori classrooms because the presentation of new materials depends upon a child's mastery of each one in a sequence that leads to ever-advancing complexity and abstraction. A complete verbal account of your child's progress in every area is given at fall and spring conferences each year. Please consult your child's director if you have a concern about your child's abilities in any academic area.

Formal, standardized testing occurs at the Secondary Level in preparation for entrance to high school. We will personally recommend formal SSAT coaching during a child's seventh grade year for those who wish to take this test for high school placement. Students in the Secondary Level program also take some tests that will familiarize them with test taking for high school, and they work through this process with their Secondary Level classmates and Directors to hone their test-taking skills. Because our children have not been subjected to constant formal testing in their early years of self-formation, they are ready to test at the Secondary Level with a refreshing confidence and competence.

Tutoring: The Montessori approach you have chosen works best for most children when school is their place for formal learning experiences. This is contrary to the "more is better" approach. Our Directors collectively observe your child's intellectual, physical and social development carefully over time, and they will let you know if working with an expert outside of school will facilitate your child's learning here. If you have a concern about your child's progress in any academic (or other) area, please consult your child's Director to discuss how best to address those concerns. Our Directors and Head of School will provide suggestions and will help you choose experts who are best aligned with your child's personality and learning development. It is important that we collaborate to find the best fit, and that the chosen experts (and their teaching methods) enhance - but do not conflict - with your child's classroom experiences. Directors and experts/tutors are expected to communicate closely to support your child.

Technology and Television: It has been well established that children's minds and their abilities for deep concentration and thought are altered when they spend their energies

with technological tools instead of direct involvement with the world around them. For our part, we observe that the children who choose their work readily upon entering the classroom, are more independent and self-directed, make good choices throughout the day, engage positively with their peers, respect the work of others, concentrate well and are more contented and at peace with themselves, are invariably those children who do not spend their free hours in passive screen entertainment, texting, e-mailings, surfing the net or engaging in computer games. Therefore, we consistently encourage our families to avoid such activities for their children of all ages. No personal technology, including iPods, iPads, cell phones, “smartwatches,” “fitbit” watches, etc., are permitted at school.

Inclusion and Disciplinary Actions: In the spirit of Montessori education, we will not engage in or permit discriminatory behavior or statements. This extends to actions or statements made outside of school hours, including internet activity. This being said, we firmly believe that children are in their formative years of life and will make mistakes. When this occurs, our Directors will collectively decide the school’s actions to best aid the students involved and collaborate with their parents. In order to help their children, as they grow and learn, parents are asked to place their confidence and trust in our Directors to handle situations and to make decisions that will benefit, protect, and support all of our students in their specific development. Simultaneously, we are open to hearing parents’ feelings and insights, and we ask Forest Bluff parents to exercise a supportive attitude so that we can keep all energies focused on serving our children. Serious matters are handled immediately, decisively and as discreetly as possible to protect families’ privacy and, when needed, with confidentially chosen professional assistance.

Communication with Teachers: Parents may leave written notes for their child’s teacher at the front desk. Once received, notes will be delivered promptly. Parents leave telephone messages any time of day or night. When received after hours, messages are delivered to the teacher the following morning. Teachers contact parents in the mornings or afternoons from the school office between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. We thank you for not calling teachers at their homes or on their personal cell phones.

To protect the professionalism of our relationships and equality amongst our Forest Bluff employees, we ask that parents not throw parties for or invite teaching Directors to socialize informally outside of school events, unless the Director is being invited *as a parent on their child’s behalf*. While the generosity is deeply appreciated, please understand that Directors may politely decline social invitations.

Continuing Education Series: This is possibly the most important thing we ask of parents at Forest Bluff. When both parents attend these evenings regularly, the positive communication between that family and the school is confirmed and your children benefit immensely. These educational gatherings form the basis of our ongoing understanding of the process of self-formation in childhood and our roles as parents and teachers in Montessori education. Children whose parents are faithful in their attendance through all their years at Forest Bluff benefit significantly at school and at home.