



LITTLE ROOTS FOREST SCHOOL

Family Handbook

Thursdays • 9:30 AM – 11:00 AM

McCollum Park • Everett, WA

Ages 12 months – 3 years with parent/caregiver

Founded by Mattison Williams • Est. 2026

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Welcome to Little Roots!	4
Meet Your Teachers	5
Mattison Williams – Founder & Lead Teacher	5
Katelyn – Co-Teacher	5
What We Believe	6
Our Approach	7
From Montessori: Independence and Real Work	7
From Waldorf: Rhythm and Wonder	7
From Reggio Emilia: The Environment as Teacher	7
From Charlotte Mason: Nature as the First Teacher	7
Child-Led Curriculum	8
At the Stations	8
What Is Process Art?	10
The Crown Celebration	10
What a Session Looks Like	11
Our Forest Promise	12
For the grown-ups:	12
For the little ones (with your help):	12
How We Handle Big Feelings	13
How We Talk to Kids	14
Why We Let Kids Take Risks	15
What to Bring	16
In the Backpack (Every Week)	16
Optional but Nice to Have	16
What to Wear	16
Toileting & Changing	18
The Changing Tent	18
Getting Wet & Messy	18
When to Stay Home	18
Siblings	19
Birthday Celebrations	19
Weather & Cancellations	20
Health & Safety	21
Benefit & Risk Assessment	21
Photos & Privacy	26
Staying Connected	27
Bring a Friend!	27
Pricing & Enrollment	28

Refund & Cancellation Policy	28
Monthly Enrollment (\$99/month)	28
Bundle Payments	28
Before Your First Session	29
Questions You Probably Have	29

Welcome to Little Roots!

Little Roots started the way most good things do – with a mom who couldn't find what she was looking for.

I'm Mattison, and before Little Roots, I taught preschool in college and then spent years as a middle school science teacher. I loved watching kids light up when they got to touch, build, and explore instead of just sitting and listening. But when I became a mom, I realized something – that same spark of curiosity starts way earlier than 7th grade. My daughter was reaching for leaves and studying bugs before she could walk. And I kept thinking: why aren't there more spaces designed for this?

The answer came when I spent time at A Little Darling School in Bellingham, WA, working alongside my mentor Netta Darling. Her philosophy is simple and powerful: the environment is the teacher. Let children lead. Trust the process. Those ideas changed how I see childhood – and gave me the courage to build something of my own.

Little Roots Forest School is the class I wished existed when I was a new mom looking for connection, purpose, and a reason to get outside on a Thursday morning. It's nature-based, child-led, and built for the whole family – not just the little ones. Little Roots is intentionally small. We cap each session at 15 families so every child gets the space, attention, and unhurried time they deserve.

This handbook has everything you need to feel ready. Give it a read before our first session, and reach out if you have any questions.

See you in the forest!

Mattison Williams

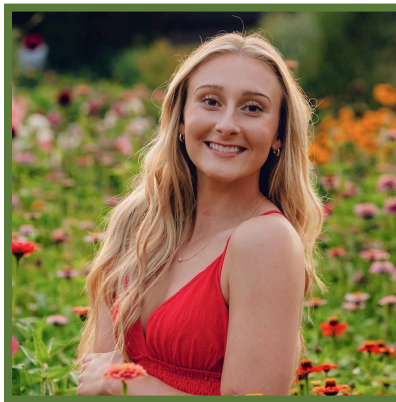
Founder & Lead Teacher, Little Roots Forest School

Meet Your Teachers



Mattison Williams – Founder & Lead Teacher

Licensed Washington State educator. Former preschool and middle school science teacher (NGSS). Bachelor's in Elementary Education with a focus in general sciences from Western Washington University. Trained alongside Netta Darling at A Little Darling School in Bellingham, whose philosophy of child-led learning shaped everything about Little Roots. Pediatric CPR & First Aid certified. Mom to one nature-loving girl who'll be right there with your little ones every Thursday.



Katelyn – Co-Teacher

Early childhood education student and YMCA youth program leader. At the YMCA she is a coach, referee, and summer camp leader. Pediatric CPR & First Aid certified. Mattison's cousin and the calm, steady presence your little ones will love having in the forest every Thursday.

What We Believe

The forest is the classroom. We don't bring worksheets outside. We let sticks and puddles and pinecones do the teaching. Every rock is a math lesson. Every bug is a science experiment. Every muddy handprint is art.

Kids lead, we follow. If your toddler wants to poke the same mushroom for fifteen minutes, we let them. That deep focus? That IS learning. We're not here to rush anyone through a checklist. We're here to notice what lights them up and lean into it. This is also why we do not stick to one philosophy and pedagogy but rather draw from all to meet the individual child's needs.

Everyone teaches, everyone learns. At Little Roots, each person is both a student and a teacher. You're learning alongside your child – noticing what they notice, wondering what they wonder. By Week 3, you'll catch yourself saying things like "I notice..." and "I wonder..." at the grocery store. That's the goal.

Everything has a purpose. When your baby dumps a cup of water for the 47th time, they're not being difficult – they're studying gravity and cause and effect. When your toddler sorts rocks into a muffin tin, that's early math. We'll help you see the learning that's already happening in their play.

This is for you, too. Parenting little ones can feel isolating, especially in the PNW rain. Little Roots is a community – a place where you can connect with other families who care about the same things you do. You'll leave each session with ideas, confidence, and maybe a friend who also doesn't mind their kid eating dirt.

Our Approach

Little Roots is inspired by the forest school tradition, but we don't follow a single method. Instead, we blend four educational philosophies – Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia, and Charlotte Mason – into something built for toddlers ages 1–3, this place (the PNW forest), and these families.

When most people hear “forest school,” they picture older kids building shelters and whittling sticks. Our version looks a little different – because our learners are still discovering what happens when they step in a puddle on purpose. And that's exactly where we meet them. We take the best of many approaches and shape them around each child.

From Montessori: Independence and Real Work

Our stations include pouring, scooping, and transferring – what Montessori calls practical life. When a toddler pours water from one cup to another, they're building fine motor control, concentration, and confidence all at once. We set up the environment so kids can do things themselves, at their own pace. No one rushes them, and no one does it for them.

From Waldorf: Rhythm and Wonder

Our sessions follow the same gentle rhythm every week – arrival, stations, circle, snack, nature walk, closing. That predictability is grounding, not boring. Young children thrive when they know what comes next. We lean into storytelling, songs, and sensory experiences rather than flashcards or worksheets. The forest provides more than enough to wonder about.

From Reggio Emilia: The Environment as Teacher

This is our biggest influence. We don't bring a lesson plan and force the forest to fit it. We watch what the children are drawn to and build from there. A pile of sticks becomes a counting game. A puddle becomes a science experiment. The forest IS the curriculum – and the children tell us what they're ready to learn by what they reach for.

From Charlotte Mason: Nature as the First Teacher

Charlotte Mason believed young children learn best through direct contact with living things – not pictures of birds, but real birds. Not a lesson about rain, but standing in it. Our nature walks are the heart of this philosophy. We go slow, we notice, we narrate what we see. “I notice that mushroom is growing on the log. I wonder why.” That simple practice teaches observation, language, and reverence for the natural world.

Child-Led Curriculum

At Little Roots, we follow the children's curiosity. When we notice a shared interest emerging – maybe everyone is fascinated by the worms we found on the trail, or can't stop talking about birds – we build on that. These interests naturally grow into themes that shape our activities, songs, stories, and nature explorations over the coming days or weeks.

A theme might look like spending a few sessions learning bird calls on our walk, inviting a local birder to visit our group, or creating a collaborative nature art project inspired by nests. The direction always comes from what the children are drawn to, not a pre-set curriculum handed down to them.

This approach honors something we believe deeply – that children are naturally curious and capable learners. Our role is to listen, observe, and then create opportunities for that curiosity to unfold in meaningful ways. Some themes last a single session. Others stick around for weeks. We let the children lead.

At the Stations

Each week we set up five to seven nature-based stations, and children move freely between them. Nobody tells them where to go or when to rotate – they choose. That freedom is intentional. Here's what they'll find:

Collaborative Art. Each season, the whole class builds one big art piece together. Each week the children add to it using a different technique, sponge painting, pressing yarn into paint, brushes, leaves, sticks. This is where the Crown Celebration begins.

Individual Art. Open-ended invitations to create – painting with sticks, pressing leaves into clay, dripping watercolors onto wet paper. This is always process art, which means there's never a model to copy. Your child decides what it becomes.

Sensory Play. Mud, water, sand, natural textures. Sensory experiences help toddlers process their world and regulate their emotions. If your child wants to squish mud between their fingers for twenty minutes, that's not mess – that's development.

Nature Exploration. Magnifying glasses, bug jars, collecting trays. We investigate whatever the forest gives us that day – a feather, a slug, a patch of moss. The curriculum changes with the seasons because the forest does.

Motor Skills. Climbing on low stumps, balancing on logs, walking on uneven ground. This is age-appropriate risk that builds confidence and body awareness. The forest floor is the best gross motor gym there is.

Practical Life. Pouring, scooping, transferring, sorting. These Montessori-inspired tasks build independence and fine motor control. Your toddler is capable of more than you think – and they light up when they get to prove it.

Mud Kitchen. Dirt soup, acorn stew, pinecone pie. Your child stirs, pours, scoops, and serves while building language, imagination, and sensory confidence – all in one glorious mess.

What Is Process Art?

Process art means the focus is on the experience of creating, not on making a finished product that looks a certain way. There's no model to copy, no "right" way to do it, and no adults hovering to make sure the tree looks like a tree. Your child might paint with sticks, smear mud across paper, press leaves into clay, or tear and layer natural materials into a collage. Every choice they make is theirs.

Why does this matter? Because process art builds fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. It builds decision-making and creative confidence. It supports sensory processing and self-regulation. And most importantly, it teaches your child that their ideas have value – that what they create doesn't need to match someone else's version to be worthy.

A note for parents: You might see your child's art and think "that's just a smear of brown paint." To your child, it's the mud they discovered on the trail, the color of the bark they touched, the feeling of the brush in their hand for the first time. That's not "just" anything. That's a whole world of learning on a single piece of paper.

The Crown Celebration

This is one of our favorite Little Roots traditions.

Each season, the whole class builds one big collaborative art piece together. Week by week, the children add to it using different techniques, sponge painting one week, pressing yarn into paint the next, then brushes, then leaves and sticks.

At the end of the season, we cut this shared masterpiece into individual crowns, one for every child. Each crown carries a piece of every session, every technique, and every tiny hand that made it.

Your child walks out of the forest wearing something the whole class made together, and that's a pretty magical thing.

What a Session Looks Like

Every Thursday follows the same rhythm, not a rigid schedule. We do this on purpose – toddlers feel safe when they know what’s coming. The activities and explorations change each week based on what your children are curious about, but the flow stays the same. The times below are approximate guides to help you know what to expect. We read the energy of the group and transition naturally, so the exact timing may shift from week to week.

Time	What Happens
9:30	Arrival & Free Explore – Stations are already set up when you walk in. Your child can start exploring right away while everyone settles in.
9:45	Stations – Mud kitchen, sensory play, art, motor skills, nature exploration, and more. Your child moves freely between them – no one tells them where to go or when to rotate.
10:05	Morning Circle – A gathering song, a story, and an introduction to the day’s nature focus with something real to touch and hold.
10:20	Snack & Songs – We sit together while everyone enjoys their own snacks. A second shorter book and a song to get our wiggles out.
10:30	Nature Walk – We head out on the forest loop trail together at toddler pace. We collect, observe, wonder out loud, and let the children lead the way. This is the grand finale of our morning.
10:55	Closing Circle – We share one discovery, sing our closing song, and say goodbye to the forest together. Families are welcome to stay and play at the park!

Your Role During the Session: You’re your child’s guide. Stay near them, follow their lead, and enjoy the experience with them. We’ll model language and developmental narration throughout the session so you can use it at home too.

A Quick Note on Snack Time: Snack time is simple and low-key. Families sit together in a loose circle, usually on picnic blankets or sit-upons (a small foam pad or towel works great, and we’ll remind you in the weekly email if we’re on especially wet ground). We do a round of hand cleaning with baby wipes, wet cloths, or hand sanitizer before anyone eats.

Each family brings their own nut-free snack, and we don’t share food between families to keep allergy-sensitive kids safe. A song and a short second book help the group settle in while everyone eats.

Our Forest Promise

These are the shared agreements that make Little Roots work for everyone. Think of them less like rules and more like — this is how we take care of each other out here.

For the grown-ups:

- Stay close to your child — within eyesight and earshot at all times. You're their person out here.
- Put your phone away during the session. I know it's hard. But these moments are so short, and your kid notices when you're present.
- Be kind to all the kids, not just yours. It takes a village, and this is ours.
- Show up on time. Late arrivals interrupt circle time and throw off the rhythm for everyone.
- Dress for a mess. Seriously. Both of you. If you're worried about the outfit, it's the wrong outfit.
- Let your kid take risks. I know it's scary. We'll talk more about this. But that log they want to climb on? Let them try. You are right there to support them.

For the little ones (with your help):

- Gentle hands with friends, animals, and plants.
- We look at creatures and let them go — the forest is their home.
- We leave the forest as beautiful as we found it.
- Sticks stay low — below our shoulders.
- When we hear the gathering song, it's time to come together.

How We Handle Big Feelings

Toddlers have big emotions. That's not a problem – that's development. At Little Roots, we don't do time-outs, we don't shame, and we don't force anyone to do anything. Here's what we do instead:

- We describe what we see: “You're holding that stick up high” instead of “Stop!”
- We offer choices: “You can dig here or splash over there – which one?”
- We name the feeling: “You're frustrated because the rock won't balance. That makes sense.”
- We redirect gently: “Sand stays low – let's pour it into the bucket instead.”
- We trust you to know your kid. If they need a break, a walk, a snack, or just a really long hug – take it. Zero judgment.

Here's what this looks like in action: Your toddler is at the mud kitchen, happily stirring a bowl of dirt soup. Another child reaches over and grabs the spoon right out of their hand. Your child's face crumbles and they start to cry.

Instead of jumping in with “That's okay!” or “Share, please!” – here's what we do. We get down low and describe what happened: “You were using that spoon and someone took it. That's frustrating.” We let the feeling land. Then we offer a choice: “Would you like to ask for it back, or would you like to use this other spoon?” Meanwhile, we gently narrate for the other child too: “You wanted a turn with the spoon. Your friend was still using it. Let's find you one.”

No shaming. Not forcing a hug or a “sorry.” Both kids get their feelings seen, and both kids learn something real about how relationships work. It's not always tidy, and that's the point.

A note on big feelings: They're going to happen. A toddler crying in the forest is still a toddler having a wonderful childhood. Step away if you need to. Take a breath. We've all been there and we've got your back.

How We Talk to Kids

At Little Roots, we use a framework called Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed by Marshall Rosenberg, that centers on empathy, observation, and authentic expression. You might hear us use language like “I notice you feel frustrated because you wanted a turn with the shovel” rather than “Stop grabbing” or “Be nice.”

NVC focuses on four simple steps: observing without judgment, naming feelings, identifying needs, and making requests. Even with our youngest learners, we practice this by narrating what we see, validating big emotions, and modeling respectful language throughout our time together.

This looks like:

- “I see you’re upset. You wanted more time at the water station.”
- “I see you both want the same stick. What can we do?”
- “You’re feeling excited! You found something new on the trail.”

We encourage families to explore NVC at home too. When children hear their feelings and needs reflected back to them from an early age, they build the foundation for empathy, self-awareness, and healthy communication that lasts a lifetime.

Why We Let Kids Take Risks

Research consistently shows that age-appropriate risk — climbing a low log, walking on uneven ground, touching something unfamiliar — builds confidence, resilience, spatial awareness, and self-regulation. Kids who are allowed to assess risk for themselves become safer and more capable, not less.

At Little Roots, risky play might look like:

- Climbing on a low stump or fallen log
- Walking on uneven, rooty, muddy ground
- Picking up sticks, rocks, and pinecones
- Splashing in shallow puddles
- Getting genuinely, gloriously muddy
- Touching moss, bark, wet leaves, and other textures

What we ask of you: Try swapping “be careful!” for something more specific. Instead of creating fear, build awareness:

- “Do you feel steady on that log?”
- “Notice that branch — it’s a little wobbly.”
- “Where are you going to put your foot next?”

These small shifts help your child develop body awareness instead of anxiety. And trust me — as a former science teacher and a mom, I would never put your child in a situation where the risk of serious injury is high. We’re talking about mud and stumps, not cliff edges.

We will never force a child into a risky situation. Every kid moves at their own speed, and being cautious is respected just as much as being adventurous.

What to Bring

A small backpack for your child's gear. Older toddlers might love carrying their own (we recommend 12L with a chest clip if they do), but for younger ones, you'll probably just carry it yourself or toss everything in your own bag. Either way works great. Label everything with your child's name. You'd be amazed how many identical water bottles show up.

In the Backpack (Every Week)

- Reusable water bottle (full!)
- Snack in a sealed container (nut-free please)
- Full change of clothes (shirt, pants, socks, underwear – weather-appropriate)
- Diapers, wipes, and bags if your child is still in diapers
- Two clean washcloths in a ziplock bag (for muddy hands and faces)
- Sunscreen and bug spray (apply before arrival, then bring the bottles for reapplication if needed)

Optional but Nice to Have

- A sit-upon or small towel for circle time
- A nature collecting bag or small basket

What to Wear

This is the Pacific Northwest. It will rain. It will be muddy. Your child will find the one puddle you didn't see coming. Dress accordingly - and this goes for you too. [Our gear page](#) has everything we recommend.

- OAKI: Use code LITTLEROOTS for 25% off orders over \$29.99, plus free shipping over \$100.

Weather	What to Wear
Rainy	Rain jacket + rain pants/rain suit for both of you. Waterproof boots – pull rain pants OVER the boots (trust me on this one). Pack a dry change of clothes.
Cold or Snow	Layers! Warm base layer (wool or synthetic, avoid cotton, it holds moisture), fleece mid-layer, waterproof outer shell. Warm hat, mittens, wool socks. On snowy days, swap rain boots for insulated snow boots and add snow pants over the base layers.
Warm	Lightweight long sleeves and pants protect from scratches and sun. Closed-toe shoes always. Sun hat. Sunscreen before arrival.
Every Day	Closed-toe shoes with good grip – no sandals, no Crocs, no flip-flops on the trail. Clothes that can get dirty. A mindset that mud washes out.

Pro tip: Keep a “forest school bin” in your car with rain gear, backup boots, and a change of clothes. You’ll never get caught off guard by PNW weather again.

Toileting & Changing

Toddlers are in all different places with toileting, and we support whatever works for your family – diapers, pull-ups, underwear, elimination communication, or anywhere in between. There’s no judgment here. We’ve seen it all, and every approach is welcome at Little Roots.

The Changing Tent

We bring a pop-up privacy tent to every class. Inside you’ll find:

- A children’s potty for toddlers who are learning or practicing
- A changing mat for diaper changes
- Wipes and hand sanitizer
- Diaper disposal bags

The tent is yours to use anytime during the session. You’re responsible for changing and toileting your own child – we’re happy to point you to the tent or hold your coffee while you handle it, but we won’t change diapers or assist with toileting directly.

Getting Wet & Messy

It’s going to happen. Between a mud kitchen, water play, sensory stations, and just being a toddler in the forest, your child will almost certainly need a clothing change at some point. The changing tent doubles as a private space to swap into dry clothes. This is why we ask you to bring a full change of weather-appropriate clothes in your child’s backpack every single week.

A note on elimination communication: If your family practices EC, that’s wonderful. Let us know so we can support you – whether that means being mindful of timing, having the potty easily accessible, or just understanding your signals. We think it’s great that you’re tuned in to your child’s cues.

When to Stay Home

- Fever of 100.4°F or higher (or within 24 hours of it breaking without meds)
- Vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- An undiagnosed rash
- Persistent cough, thick/green nasal discharge, or trouble breathing
- Pink eye (until cleared by a doctor)
- Any contagious illness (hand-foot-and-mouth, RSV, flu, COVID, strep)
- Head lice

Siblings

Families are messy and complicated and rarely fit into neat age brackets. Here's how we handle siblings:

Younger siblings (under 12 months): Babies in carriers or strollers are always welcome at no cost with a paid sibling. They're along for the ride and the fresh air.

Older siblings (3–5 years): Reach out before registering. Depending on class size and the child's needs, we can often make it work. As Little Roots grows, we plan to offer programming for older kids too.

Multiples: Absolutely. You may want a second adult to help, but it's not required. We'll be there to support you.

Birthday Celebrations

Birthdays are a big deal when you're little, and we love celebrating them at Little Roots!

If your child's birthday falls close to a session, let us know and we'll celebrate during class. Here's what our forest birthday looks like.

Just like our seasonal crowns, the birthday child gets a crown made from collaborative process art the class creates together that morning. At the art station, every child contributes (painting, pressing leaves, adding color however they choose) and we shape the finished piece into a crown for the birthday child to wear during their celebration and take home at the end of the day. It means the birthday crown carries a piece of every friend in the class.

Next comes the Montessori 'going around the sun' celebration. A small sun symbol sits in the center of our circle, and the birthday child walks around it once for each year of their life while we sing a little verse about the earth traveling around the sun. For a one-year-old, that's one slow loop. For a two-year-old, two. It's a simple way to help little ones feel the passage of time in their body, and it gives the whole class a chance to celebrate this specific child on this specific day.

Then, during the closing circle, the birthday child sits in the center and the whole class sings 'Birthday Cake,' a fun, interactive song where we pretend to bake a cake together. We crack the eggs, stir the batter, put it in the oven, and when it's 'done,' the birthday child gets to blow out the pretend candles while everyone cheers. Then we sing Happy Birthday together and shower them with celebration.

Weather & Cancellations

Let me be real with you: we go out in the rain. Rain is some of our best days. Puddles appear, worms come out, the forest smells incredible, and the sound of rain on the canopy is better than any sound machine. Dress for it and lean in.

We cancel for: Lightning or active thunderstorms, sustained winds over 40 mph, extreme heat (over 95°F), unhealthy air quality for sensitive groups (AQI of 101 or higher), heavy snow or ice that makes roads or trails unsafe, or any situation where I determine it's not safe to be out there. For cold weather, we don't have a hard temperature cutoff. We dress in layers, use our best judgment on wind chill and overall conditions, and cancel if it's genuinely unsafe to be outside.

How you'll know: I'll email everyone by 7:30 AM Thursday morning if we're cancelling. If things change suddenly, I'll notify you as soon as I can.

Makeup sessions: If I cancel a class, I'll try to offer a makeup session on a Tuesday morning later that month at no extra cost. If a Tuesday makeup doesn't work out, that month's tuition still covers our regular Thursday sessions and we'll see you next week.

If your family misses a week: No refunds or makeups for individual absences. Life happens – we'll miss you and see you next Thursday.

Health & Safety

- Both instructors hold current Pediatric First Aid and CPR certifications.
- We carry a comprehensive outdoor first aid kit to every session.
- Little Roots School LLC is fully insured with general liability coverage.
- You are responsible for your child at all times. Stay within eyesight and earshot throughout the session.
- All allergies, medical conditions, and emergency contacts must be on your registration form. We keep a printed copy in a waterproof binder at every session.
- If your child has a severe allergy, carry your own EpiPen or medication. Let us know so we can be prepared to help if needed.
- Snacks must be nut-free. Each family brings their own – we don't share food between families.
- We bring a pop-up changing tent with a children's potty to every session (see Toileting & Changing section). Porta potties are available on-site at the park for adults.

Sunscreen & bug spray: Please apply these to your child before you arrive. We can't apply products to your child, but you're welcome to reapply during class.

If your child gets hurt: Scrapes, bumps, and minor tumbles are a normal part of outdoor play. You are always with your child, and you know them best. Our first aid kit is available to you at every session for cleaning and bandaging minor injuries. If something more serious happens – a hard fall, a sting, a potential allergic reaction – we're right there to help you assess and support whatever you decide to do next. In a medical emergency, call 911 first, then your emergency contact.

Cell service and nearest hospital: Cell service at McCollum Park is limited but reliable enough to make phone calls. Data may be spotty depending on your carrier and the trail area. The nearest emergency room is Providence Regional Medical Center Everett (1321 Colby Ave, Everett), about 15 minutes away.

Benefit & Risk Assessment

We believe in being honest with families about what our program involves. Outdoor play with toddlers comes with real benefits and real risks, and we want you to have a clear picture of both before you join us. The chart below walks through every main activity at Little Roots, what your child gains from it, what could go wrong, and what we do to keep everyone safe.

One thing that shapes everything below: a parent or trusted caregiver stays with their child for the entire session. You are your child's first line of safety out there, and you know them better than anyone. Our role is to create the environment, model the language, and support you. Your role is to stay close, follow their lead, and keep them within eyesight and earshot at all times.

Both teachers hold current Pediatric First Aid and CPR certifications, and we carry a fully stocked outdoor first aid kit to every session.

Sensory Play (Mud, Water, Sand, Natural Textures, Mud Kitchen)

Benefits

Sensory play is how toddlers make sense of the world. Squishing mud, pouring water, running fingers through sand, stirring up pretend soup at the mud kitchen. This kind of hands-on exploration builds fine motor control, supports self-regulation, and helps kids process big feelings. At the mud kitchen in particular, imagination and language start to bloom. Kids name what they are making, invite other children into their play, and practice the early social skills of sharing space and materials. It also develops vocabulary as they describe what they feel (cold, sticky, rough, soft) and builds the neural pathways that later support focus and learning.

Risks

Toddlers put things in their mouths. They can get cold or wet enough to be uncomfortable. Skin irritation is possible from prolonged exposure to mud or water in cold weather. Occasional disputes over tools.

Precautions

All sensory materials are natural and chosen to be toddler-safe (no small objects, beads, or anything that poses a choking hazard). Mud kitchen tools are child-sized, real materials (wooden spoons, metal pots) rather than plastic, with no sharp edges. Parents monitor their own child's mouthing behavior and redirect as needed. Families bring a full change of clothes every week, and the changing tent is available for wet or muddy transitions. On cold days, we keep sensory stations shorter and warmer.

Nature Walks on the Forest Loop

Benefits

Walking on uneven, natural ground is one of the best things a toddler can do for their developing body. It builds balance, core strength, coordination, and spatial awareness in a way no flat playground can. It also teaches observation, patience, and reverence for the natural world as we stop to notice a mushroom, a beetle, or the way light falls through the trees.

Risks

Trips and falls on roots, rocks, or muddy sections. Getting separated from the group if a child wanders. Weather exposure on longer walks.

Precautions

The loop trail we use is well-maintained and appropriate for toddler pace. We walk slowly. Parents stay within arm's reach of their child throughout the walk. We do a head count before we start and check in frequently. On rough weather days, we shorten or skip the walk entirely.

Climbing on Low Stumps and Fallen Logs

Benefits

Age-appropriate climbing is where confidence is built. When a toddler figures out how to get up onto a log by themselves, and then how to get down, they are learning their body can do hard things. Research consistently shows that children who are allowed to take small physical risks become safer, more capable, and more self-aware than children who are protected from them.

Risks

Falls, scrapes, bruises. A child could climb higher than they can safely get down from.

Precautions

We only climb on stumps and logs at a height appropriate for toddlers (generally under knee-height for an adult). Parents stay within arm's reach. We never boost a child up to somewhere they cannot reach on their own. If a child cannot climb up by themselves, they are not ready for that spot yet. We teach kids to come down feet-first and talk them through where to put their hands and feet.

Stick Play

Benefits

Sticks are one of the best open-ended toys the forest offers. Your toddler will pick them up, carry them, poke at things, and turn them into whatever their imagination decides (a spoon, a magic wand, a fishing pole). Along the way they are building grip strength, hand-eye coordination, and the kind of imaginative play that sets the foundation for language and storytelling.

Risks

Sticks can poke eyes, faces, and other kids. They can break unexpectedly. Kids can trip while carrying them.

Precautions

Our Forest Promise says sticks stay below the shoulders, and we reinforce this gently every session. Big sticks need big spaces, so we help kids move to open areas when they want to carry something long. Parents stay close and redirect before an unsafe situation escalates.

Water Play in Puddles

Benefits

Puddles are a toddler's dream. Splashing, stomping, and pouring water teaches cause and effect, builds gross motor skills, and delivers pure joyful sensory input. It also teaches kids that rain is not something to avoid. It is something to play in.

Risks

Getting genuinely wet and cold. Slipping on wet surfaces. Puddles can contain unexpected debris.

Precautions

We require waterproof boots and rain pants on wet days, and we ask families to pack a full change of clothes every single week. We check puddle areas for glass, sharp objects, or animal waste before kids play. Parents monitor their child's temperature and comfort and use the changing tent when a swap is needed.

Nature Collecting (Rocks, Leaves, Pinecones, Sticks)

Benefits

Collecting is early math, early science, and early art all rolled into one. Sorting rocks by size, lining up pinecones, comparing leaves. These are the building blocks of classification, counting, and observation. It also teaches kids to slow down and really look, which is a skill most adults have to relearn later.

Risks

Small objects can be a choking hazard for the youngest children. Some natural materials (certain berries, mushrooms, plants) are toxic if eaten.

Precautions

Parents monitor mouthing behavior, especially for the youngest kids in the group. We teach 'we look at it, we don't eat it' as a class rhythm from day one. Teachers point out and name any plants or mushrooms in the area that kids should not touch, and we practice noticing these together over time.

Encounters with Wildlife and Insects

Benefits

Seeing a real slug, a real beetle, a real bird up close teaches kids something no book can. They learn that creatures have their own lives, their own homes, and deserve gentle treatment. These moments build empathy, curiosity, and a lifelong respect for the natural world.

Risks

Bee and wasp stings. Mosquito and tick bites. Occasional larger wildlife (rarely, but McCollum Park is a wooded park).

Precautions

We teach 'we look with our eyes, not our hands' for most creatures. Bugs get observed in collecting jars and released at the end of the session. Parents apply bug spray before arrival if they choose. All known allergies (including bee stings) are noted on registration forms, and families with severe allergies carry their own EpiPen. Teachers carry a first aid kit at every session.

Encounters with Plants

Benefits

Learning to identify plants, the ones we can touch, the ones we leave alone, the ones that change with the seasons, is one of the oldest forms of education there is. Toddlers absorb this naturally when adults point things out consistently. Over time, they develop a real familiarity with the forest around them.

Risks

Some plants at McCollum Park can cause irritation (stinging nettle), rashes, or illness if eaten (certain berries and mushrooms).

Precautions

Teachers identify and point out any plants of concern at the start of each session. We reinforce 'we look, we don't eat' consistently. Parents stay close to their child during exploration. We do not forage or eat anything from the forest during class, regardless of how safe it may be.

Photos & Privacy

We photograph our sessions for Instagram (@littleroots.school) and to share with enrolled families. Here's our approach:

We never publicly share photos of children's faces. This is a core value at Little Roots, not a preference. On anything public, like Instagram or our website, you'll only see hands, materials, nature finds, tiny boots on the trail, backs of heads, art in progress, and the forest around us. No faces, ever.

On your registration form, you'll choose one of two options:

- Full Permission: your child may be photographed. Photos shared publicly will not show their face.
- No Photography: we'll make every reasonable effort to exclude your child from photos entirely.

Staying Connected

Weekly preview: Every Monday I'll email the group with the week's focus, what to expect, and a weather heads-up so you can dress accordingly.

Cancellations: Email by 7:30 AM Thursday.

Questions: Email me anytime at hello@littleroots.school. I usually respond within a few hours, sometimes faster.

Instagram/Facebook: Follow [@littleroots.school/](https://www.instagram.com/littleroots.school/) Little Roots Forest School for activity ideas, nature inspiration, and behind-the-scenes peeks. This is also where I announce new sessions and openings first.

Bring a Friend!

The best way Little Roots grows is through families like you telling other families about us. Our referral program:

Refer a family who enrolls → \$25 off your next month's tuition.

No limit. Refer three families and that's \$75 off. Just have your friend mention your name when they register.

Know someone who's curious but not sure? Invite them to come watch a session. No cost, no commitment. Sometimes seeing it in person is all it takes.

Pricing & Enrollment

Item	Details
Monthly Enrollment	\$99/month. Thursdays, 9:30–11:00 AM at McCollum Park. Child-led sessions exploring your child’s natural curiosities.
Registration Fee	\$49 one-time fee. Founding Families (June 2026 enrollees) pay no registration fee.
Full Year Bundle (June–May)	\$999 total. Covers a full year of sessions. Bundles waive the \$49 registration fee.
School Year Bundle (Sept–May)	\$799 total. Covers sessions September through May. Bundles waive the \$49 registration fee.
Payment	Payment is processed securely through Stripe. You’ll be redirected to our secure payment page after submitting the registration form.
Referral Program	Refer a family who enrolls and get \$25 off your next month’s tuition. No limit.

Refund & Cancellation Policy

We’re a small business and we plan our supplies, staffing, and session capacity based on enrollment. We’ve tried to make this policy fair to families while allowing us to operate sustainably.

Monthly Enrollment (\$99/month)

- You may withdraw at any time with 14 days written notice via email.
- If notice is not received 14 days in advance, you will be charged for the following month.
- No refunds for partial months or individual missed sessions.

Bundle Payments

Full Year Bundle (\$999, June–May) or School Year Bundle (\$799, Sept–May): refundable on a prorated basis minus a \$50 early withdrawal fee if you withdraw before the session period ends. Proration is based on the number of sessions remaining.

The \$49 registration fee is non-refundable under all circumstances. If Little Roots cancels a session due to weather or safety, we will reschedule or add a makeup session at no additional cost.

Before Your First Session

Here's everything you need to do before your first Thursday:

- Fill out the registration form on our website (littleroots.school/register)
- Complete your payment through Stripe
- Read this handbook (you're almost done!)
- Sign your liability waiver (we'll send the link with your welcome email)
- Pack your child's backpack (see What to Bring)
- Check the weather and dress for it (see What to Wear)
- Apply sunscreen and bug spray before you arrive
- Look for your welcome email with parking directions and our exact meeting spot at McCollum Park (we'll send this a few days before your first session)

That's it. Show up, breathe the forest air, and let your kid get muddy.

Questions You Probably Have

Is 12 months too young for this?

Not at all. Babies are natural scientists. At 12 months, they're absorbing the world through every sense – feeling bark, hearing birdsong, watching leaves dance. You'll be amazed at what they take in.

My baby is 10 or 11 months – can we still join?

Probably! The 12-month starting age is a guideline, not a hard cutoff. If your baby is sitting independently and you think they'd enjoy being outdoors with other kids, reach out and we'll chat.

What if my child won't sit for circle time?

Totally normal and totally fine. Toddlers learn by moving. If your child wants to wander during circle, let them – they're still listening. We keep circles short and engaging for exactly this reason.

What if it rains the whole time?

We go! Rain is some of our best exploring weather, puddles, worms, dripping leaves, the sound of rain on the canopy. Dress in rain gear and embrace it. We only cancel for serious safety concerns like lightning, extreme wind, unhealthy air quality, or heavy snow and ice that make roads or trails unsafe. See our Weather & Cancellations section for the full list.

Can a grandparent or nanny bring my child?

Absolutely. Any trusted adult caregiver listed on your registration form is welcome. Just make sure they've read this handbook and know the expectations.

Is this drop-off?

No. A parent or caregiver stays for the entire session. This is a shared experience – you're learning alongside your kid, not dropping them off. That's what makes it special.

My child has food allergies – is that okay?

Yes. We're nut-free. Each family brings their own snacks and we don't share food between families. Note all allergies on your registration form and carry any necessary medication.

What if we have to miss a week?

No worries. We can't offer refunds or makeups for individual absences, but we'll miss you and see you the next week.

How much does it cost?

\$99 per month, plus a one-time \$49 registration fee. Founding Families (June 2026 enrollees) pay no registration fee. Bundles are available: Full Year Bundle \$999 (June–May) or School Year Bundle \$799 (Sept–May). Bundles waive the registration fee. Payment is processed securely through Stripe.

How do I register?

Head to littleroots.school/register! Fill out the registration form, then complete your payment through Stripe. You'll get a confirmation email right away, and we'll follow up with a welcome message. Spots are limited to 15 families per session.

Do I need to re-register for fall?

Nope! Little Roots runs on a monthly subscription, so once you're enrolled, you stay enrolled month to month. There's no need to re-register each season. If you ever need to cancel, just send us an email with 30 days' notice. Easy as that.

The forest is waiting. Let's go explore together.

Mattison Williams • Founder & Lead Teacher

@littleroots.school

hello@littleroots.school