

Santa Cruz County Outdoor Science School

Parent/Guardians' Frequently Asked Questions

CABINS

Q: *What are the sleeping accommodations like?*

A: Sleeping accommodations can include built-in wooden bunks, stand-alone wooden bunks and metal cots. All beds contain a flat board surface (no springs) with a plastic-covered mattress that is 3-4 inches thick. Students need to bring their own bedding which should include a sleeping bag and pillow, two blankets and a pillow or a sheet/blanket combo and a pillow.

Q: *How warm are the cabins?*

A: All cabins have heaters which are controlled by a thermostat. The cabins are nice and warm at night – no need to send extra blankets or a heavy duty sleeping bag.

Q: *What are the showering accommodations like?*

A: There is one shower per bathroom. When students shower they will have privacy in the bathroom where they can lock the door. Students are encouraged to take 4 minute (or less) showers to conserve resources and to allow all students the opportunity to shower before breakfast time. Cabin shower rotation time happens in the morning before breakfast.

Q: *Can my child be in a cabin with their friend?*

A: We work with the classroom teachers to put the cabin lists together. Your child's teacher will send us groupings of students in twos or threes. We then take those groupings and make larger cabin groups of eight to thirteen students. Your child may have an opportunity to request a friend, depending on how the classroom teacher organizes the procedures for grouping the students. We rarely split a grouping put together by the classroom teachers. In the event that we need to do so, we consult with the classroom teacher first to find the best solution for everyone.

Q: *Who will be leading my child's cabin group?*

A: Cabin leaders are trained high-school volunteers who are selected through a process that requires an application, letter of recommendation and approval signatures from school personnel. They arrive the day before the 5th/6th grade students to begin their group interview and training in leadership, risk management, positive discipline and logistics of the program. They work under the supervision of the Outdoor Science School staff.

Q: *How do you ensure privacy for the students in the cabin?*

A: Our cabin privacy rules are communicated to the students before they arrive through our [student safety video](#) shown in their classroom, on arrival day during an afternoon meeting and they are posted in each cabin.

Cabin privacy rules include:

- Only one person is allowed in the bathroom at a time, even if there are two toilet stalls.
- Cabin leaders may shower only during their designated breaks when students are out on activity.
- Students shower in the bathroom one at a time.
- Students and cabin leaders must be clothed at all times in the cabin. Appropriate places to change are: in the bathroom with the door closed or in a sleeping bag.
- Respect personal space. "High-fives/fist-bumps and handshakes are ok. Otherwise, keep your hands to yourself." Personal space includes each student's bunk. "Keep to your own bunk. No sitting on someone else's bunk."
- Cell phones are not permitted for anyone in the cabin (including students, cabin leaders, staff and visiting classroom teachers).
- It is prohibited for students, staff, teachers and cabin leaders to take photographs in the cabin at any time.

FOOD

Q: *What kind of food will be served?*

A: Our food is approved by our biggest critics (the students). Sample menus are posted on our website under the “parents” tab. If your child has any food allergies, please call the outdoor science school two weeks before their attendance to discuss details.

Q: *What if my child has a special diet?*

A: If your child has a food allergy or sensitivity and requires a special diet, please contact the Outdoor Science School at 831-722-8222 about one month before their participation to discuss appropriate accommodations.

Q: *Should I pack snacks for my child?*

A: Please do not pack any food, candy or gum in your child’s luggage. We do not want to attract critters to the cabins, therefore, we do not allow food in the cabins. If a student is hungry between meals, they can let the cabin leader or outdoor educator know.

Communication with your child

Q: *Can I call the Outdoor Science School to see how my child is doing?*

A: We ask that parents call the Outdoor Science School only when it is absolutely necessary (special arrangements, family emergency, etc). We have one land line to the site and no cell phone reception in our area. It is important to keep our phone line open as much as possible for business calls and for communication in the event of an urgent matter. The Outdoor Science School staff work closely with the visiting classroom teachers to ensure that students are doing well and we remain in touch with the school principal and administrative assistant while the students are in attendance.

Q: *Can my child call home?*

A: Under normal circumstances, we do not provide students with the opportunity to call home. It is logistically difficult in the short time we have with them and it detracts from their engagement and involvement with the Outdoor Science School experience. In extremely unusual circumstances, individual or regular phone calls can be arranged. The decisions in this case are made by the director, the classroom teacher and sometimes the school principal together.

Q: *Can I write letters? Can my child write letters?*

A: Writing and receiving letters help students feel connected to home. Students will have a little bit of down time each day in their cabin when they can write home if they would like. If you would like your child to write home, please send your child with envelopes and stamps as we do not provide these at the Outdoor Science School. If you would like to send a letter to your child, you can find instructions in the parent packet. Send it the week before they attend to ensure that it arrives in time. We deliver mail each morning at breakfast.

Q: *Are cell phones allowed?*

A: We do not get cell reception at the Outdoor Science School. Our goal is to provide an unplugged experience for our students. Cell phones, and other electronics, are not allowed for these reasons (with the only exception of CGMs for students with insulin dependent diabetes).

Q: *Can I visit?*

A: We invite parents (and anxious students) to set up a tour to visit the outdoor science school (Thursdays only) before your child’s school is scheduled to attend. To set up a tour, please call the Outdoor Science School office at 831-722-8222.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Q: *What if my child is anxious about staying overnight?*

A: It is common for students to feel nervous about 4 or 5 days in a new place away from home – especially if it is their first time! If your child is particularly anxious about attending, we recommend that you call about one month before your child’s attendance week and set up a tour for you and your child. Visiting the site and meeting some of the staff often alleviates many fears. If after the tour, your child is still very anxious, we will work together on a solution to help them participate in a way that offers respect and support as they stretch their comfort zone and grow their independence.

Q: *What if my child has special medical needs or behavioral needs?*

A: If your child has special medical or behavioral needs, please contact the Outdoor Science School office at 831-722-8222 about one month before your child’s attendance week so we can discuss best practices to ensure a safe and positive experience for them.

Q: *What if my child sleepwalks or wets the bed?*

A: If your child is a sleep-walker, please indicate this on their registration form. They will be assigned a bottom bunk. We also have door alarms that can be installed upon request for regular and active sleepwalkers.

We have established tried and true procedures for managing bedwetting circumstances at Outdoor Science School while maintaining confidentiality. We have a few options based on the frequency/likelihood of bedwetting. If your child is a bed-wetter, please indicate so on their registration form. Also, please call the Outdoor Science School office at 831-722-8222 two weeks before your child’s attendance week to discuss the best options for your child.

WEATHER/EMERGENCIES/PESTS

Q: *How does the Outdoor Science School program prepare for emergencies?*

A: The Outdoor Science School has an established emergency preparedness plan and an emergency procedures manual. Each school year, staff are trained on these procedures through manual reviews, table top exercises and simulations. All staff members are required to obtain a Wilderness First Aid certificate as well as CPR. Wilderness First Aid is a 16 hour (two day) intensive first aid training program. Our location at the Koinonia Conference Grounds is 5.2 miles from the Corralitos fire department and 10.6 miles from Watsonville Community Hospital.

Q: *Is there poison oak?*

A: Poison oak exists near and along our hiking trails. As long as students follow our important school rule of “stay on trail,” they are unlikely to directly encounter poison oak. Naturalists survey all areas before allowing students to go off trail for exploration. If your child is highly allergic to poison oak, please indicate so on their registration form. We have Tecnu wash available in the health office for students who have accidentally come into contact with poison oak.

Q: *Are there ticks?*

A: Ticks do live in the redwood forest. On rare occasions, they will “hitchhike” on a student. For this reason, we give self-tick-check instructions to every student on arrival day and encourage them to do self-tick checks in the bathroom each night and morning. If a student discovers a tick, the health supervisor will remove it, save it and send it home with the student. We will also notify parents.

Q: *Should I be worried about bed bugs?*

A: Bed bugs are found in hotels, camps, cruise ships, multi-unit dwellings, and other structures that house people for short periods of time. While they are certainly a nuisance, they do not transmit disease to people. Bed bugs do not fly or jump; they either crawl or are carried from place to place. Although incidents of bed bugs are very

rare at Outdoor Science School, it is prudent to adhere to the following protocol for washing clothing, bedding and decontaminating other personal items when your child returns home.

- Unpack all clothing, bedding and personal items outside on a driveway or other concrete surface if possible. If unpacking must occur inside, unpack in a bathtub or lay a white or light covered sheet on an uncarpeted surface so any insects can be readily spotted and killed.
- Transfer washable items in a plastic bag and empty into a clothes dryer and tumble for 30-45 minutes on the high heat setting. Do not over pack the dryer.
- After heat-treating in a clothes dryer, transfer items to the washing machine and wash in hot water with detergent. Dry in a clothes' dryer on the high heat setting.
- For items that cannot be laundered, such as suitcases, vacuuming or cleaning with soap and water or alcohol based cleaning products are other options.
- Wipe off shoes. Use rubbing alcohol or soap and water to wipe off the bottoms of shoes.

Q: *What happens when it rains?*

A: We love rain at the Outdoor Science School! The newts, banana slugs and pacific giant salamanders come out to play. We encourage you to pack a poncho in your child's luggage in case of rain. If your child does not bring a poncho, we have plenty of rain jackets to loan out for the week. In the case of light-medium rain, we put on our ponchos/rain coats and continue field study without modification. In the case of inclement weather (heavy/sustained rains, high winds, storms, etc) we modify the field study class to include indoor lessons as needed to keep the students safe.

OTHER LOGISTICS

Q: *What if it's my child's birthday?*

A: If your child's birthday is happening during their time at Outdoor Science School, make sure that the correct birthdate is written on the registration form. When we process the registration forms we mark any birthdays happening that week. Your child will receive a special dessert on their birthday evening (or at breakfast if their birthday is on departure day) and a special acknowledgement by the students and staff participating that week.

Q: *What if my child forgets to pack something important?*

A: We have many items on hand that a child can borrow or have if they forget something (toothbrushes, jackets, hats, etc). Most of the time, if a child is missing something, we are able to replace the item or make do with what they have. If we are not able to solve the problem, we will call home to request that an item be dropped off. If your child forgets their medicine, the health supervisor will call to let you know that it needs to be dropped off.

Q: *How do I pay?*

A: Your child's school collects the individual payments. Please submit your payment to your child's teacher or the person designated by their school to collect the money.

Q: *Will there be another school there? Will there be students from another school in my child's cabin?*

A: Depending on the number of students each school enrolls for each program, we often have more than one school sharing participation in our program. With a focus on community building, we build our cabin groups to include pairs and triplets from two or three schools. We work closely with the visiting classroom teachers from all schools to create cabin groups that are harmonious. We also work closely with the cabin leaders to ensure that all students are feeling safe in their cabin (both physically and emotionally).

Q: *Can I pick my child up early or mid-week for a special event?*

A: We consider Outdoor Science School to be a very special event, since it is a once in a lifetime experience. Every moment of each student's day is packed with new adventures and learning opportunities. For that reason, we ask families to consider the impact of a child missing part of the program. If after considering this, there is an event that your child cannot miss, please let their teacher know in advance, and call the Outdoor Science School at 831-722-8222 in advance to discuss pick up and drop off time.