



the garden

MONTESSORI & ARTS LEARNING CENTER

Guidelines for Observing at Wild Hearts Nature School

Thank you for taking the time to visit Wild Hearts. We hope that observing our program during our normal daily routine will give you a good look at what a child's day is like in our unique setting. Below are some guidelines to assist you in ensuring that your observation experience is as valuable and authentic as possible, and also does not detract from the children's school experience. We have also included a space for questions or notes for your own use while observing the classroom. Please feel free to contact us by phone or email afterwards to discuss any questions that come up during observation. We ask that you do not discuss your questions with the teachers during school hours, as they must be engaged with the supervision of the children at all times during school hours and will not be available to answer questions during the observation time, but are happy to do so at another time.

Enjoy your visit!

The environment is the most crucial part of the child's education here at Wild Hearts. In settings like ours, the environment is viewed as the "first teacher" and the child's play is viewed as their "work." As such, the Nature Guides (what you might call a teacher) take great care during the work period not to interrupt concentration, focus or independent learning that takes place. You may notice the guides standing close-by rather than inserting themselves while two children try to work out a disagreement, come up with a plan or even try to move or lift something heavy. Guides are careful to observe and only step in when necessary to ensure the children get the chance to think creatively, problem solve and work together to learn something new.

Learning at Wild Hearts happens in many different ways. The guides follow an emergent curriculum, which means the children's interest fuels the learning. Often times, the seasons are a big point of interest since the children are so immersed in weather and nature, see if you can figure out what the children are most interested in now as you observe. Does it appear in the following areas of learning?

- 1. Literacy & Language:** Guides provide unique opportunities for this type of enrichment. Through storybooks, songs, music, exposure to words and letters (i.e. field guides, writing in the sand, letter magnets, creating letter shapes with found objects, art, sensory play and fine motor opportunities to build hand strength needed for writing). You may also notice children learning the names of dinosaurs, trees, plants or other things of interest. This stage of development for children is a sensitive period for language and they are able to absorb and retain lots of information, especially if the information is interesting and relevant.
- 2. Science and Mathematics:** The natural world is rich with opportunities to explore mathematics and science. Children experience hands-on lessons in physics when they work with large blocks and pieces of wood to build structures, they learn about numbers and quantities when they count found objects, seeds to plant, animal tracks or trees. They learn about measurement by counting inches of rain, sprouts in the garden or degrees on a thermometer. Early math skills can be easily spotted in this environment if you know what to look for!
- 3. Sustainability:** It's impossible to spend this much time in nature and not develop an appreciation for its beauty. At the core of Wild Hearts is a desire to help children learn how to care for the planet. Through gardening and composting, children learn where food comes from and how it is grown. They learn to take care of their school environment by throwing trash in the trash can, recycling and reusing. Projects are often based around these concepts and children learn the value of sustainable actions and items.
- 4. The Arts:** Children are encouraged to create art that comes from within and to enjoy the process of making art, rather than being concerned about a final product. Guides provide materials and sometimes inspiration and children are given the freedom to take the reigns and explore those materials however they choose. Aside from visual art, children also have opportunities to participate in music, movement, dance, theatre and any other art form they like. Creativity is always welcome at Wild Hearts.
- 5. Gross Motor Development:** Because Wild Hearts students have so much freedom to move throughout their morning, they are constantly developing gross motor skills. As early educators, we know that this type of movement benefits their bodies and brains. Whether they are walking the slack-line, climbing a tree, moving heavy objects or hiking through the woods, they are learning about balance, strength and how to trust their bodies.

Degree of Self-Direction:

V

†

o

V)

†

=

#

\

\

Role of the Teachers:

u

†

=

u

prepare the environment and

. Sometimes the

provide direct

encouragement or indirect appreciation, and at other times, judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning † = Most often, the children will explore the materials independently. In this environment, the goal for the guides is to follow the children's lead, remain flexible with their plans for the day and adjust their expectations around the children's needs and abilities. They will offer redirection, gentle guidance and conflict resolution techniques to teach discipline. Rewards and punishments have no place in our program, where we are working to teach children to be intrinsically motivated.

Sociability:

Watch the ways in which the children offer assistance to one another – with the materials and with everyday tasks. Note how the younger children absorb the older children's work simply by being near them and how, conversely, the older children will assist the younger ones. The child's natural desire to form friends and be a part of an ongoing community is ever present. Our aim is to provide the children with a loving, respectful and supportive environment in which they will blossom into human beings who...

- *have a good self-concept
- *have respect for themselves and for the world around them
- *initiate tasks with interest and enthusiasm
- *are self-motivated
- *can complete the tasks they initiate
- *can love and live in peace with their fellow man

Questions/Notes: