

Parent Handbook

Wild Wonders **Forest School**





Wild Wonders Forest School **Contact Information**

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Welcome To Our Growing Community

Parent Handbook

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Our Mission

Wild Wonders Forest School aims to provide land based learning for children 3-12 years old. We value learning through play! Our educators use emergent curriculum and inquiry based learning to provide interest led and child centred activities. We aim to foster community development within our groups, as well as in the greater world.

Our Vision

Wild Wonders Forest School is giving the leaders of tomorrow the time and space; to be active participants in their own learning, to make authentic connections with their peers, the environment and themselves, while co-creating a community in which they can discover who they are becoming.





Our Core Values: *Nature, Art & Compassion*

Nature- *Wild Wonders* Forest School believes children need repeated access to the same land, where they can explore and play at their own rhythms. We believe that children need opportunities to explore a wide variety of natural experiences. This develops such capacities as risk assessment, ecological awareness, and a feeling of belonging within the natural world.

Art- *Wild Wonders* Forest School aims to provide rich materials with which children can explore creativity and self expression to make learning more visible. We believe art is an important reflection tool that can help children process and understand the world. We are inspired by the teaching of Reggio Emilia Preschools, striving to follow their example wherever possible.

Compassion- *Wild Wonders* Forest School believes we need more compassion in the world. We strive to both model and teach compassion for, ourselves, each other, and our natural world. We believe that children are naturally empathic beings, who's impulses need nurturing to grow and deepen. We aim to provide a compassionate example for children as we set our community standards and create a culture of kindness together.

About Us

Wild Wonders Forest School aims to get children ages 3-12 years old, outside year round, in all weather, rain or shine!

This outdoor, play based, recreational program is all about creating relationships with children to nature, others, and themselves. It's a place where children are at the helm of their own learning. We focus on a play based, emergent curriculum and inquiry based learning models. Children are free to explore through play as they create and learn at their own pace

Our unique, three hour programs, are all outdoor (except in cases of unpredictable, extreme weather) We provide a light snack each day, open ended nature and art based activities and large amounts of time for free play.

Our programs always include a focus on art making as reflection tools. We provide a rich variety of natural art materials. Children create their own unique work, in their nature journals. We also providing lessons for more focused explorations into different art techniques as well as opportunities for other reflective practices to help children deepen their learning. The use of sit spots, gratitude circles or breathing exercises are examples of this reflective experiences.



Inclusion and Accessibility

One of the foundational goals of *Wild Wonders* Forest School is to make our programs accessible students, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, language, physical ability or socioeconomic status.

We seek to dismantle the barriers to participation in Forest School as much as possible, by continuing to provide a site that is physically accessible for everyone and our community safe and welcoming to all.

All children are welcome into our programs, such as those on the Autism Spectrum, or those with ADD/ ADHD for example. Please contact us if there are ways in which we can better provide support to your child, while at our programs, and/or if you have questions about how your child might be able to participate in our programs. For example: in the past we have had children on the Autism Spectrum attend with a 1:1 aid for additional support.

It is our goal to make our programs financially accessible to everyone. If cost is preventing your family or someone you



We aim to make our programs accessible to as wide a range of students as possible

know from participating in our programs, please contact us for more information about our scholarship spaces. We aim to provide at least one scholarship space for every program we run, so please, don't hesitate to inquire.

We are also working to establish a "gear bank" or "lending library" of outerwear (snowpants, hats, mitts, etc.) so that the supplies needed for safe enjoyment of Forest School are not, a barrier to participation. If you need any gear for your child to attend Forest School, please let us know and we can check if we have anything that you could borrow. If you have a donation of lightly used gear, please let us know.

We welcome your feedback and suggestions in the realization of those goals.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental sustainability is the heart of all our programs.

Wild Wonders Forest School believes that deep connections with nature and direct experience on the land are the only way for children to grow up to be adults who care about and wish to protect our natural spaces. Repeated access to the land over many seasons is integral to developing these relationships between children and wild places. Immersion in nature while being an amazing educational opportunity for our children can also have an adverse effect on the wild spaces we use.

Therefore, we are committed to monitoring, and mitigating our potential impacts on the site we occupy. Some of these practices include, rotation of sites/ locations, creating, maintaining and using trails and pathways whenever possible and keeping our highest impact activities limited to specific spaces. We aim to use natural and biodegradable, soap, paints, and other arts and craft materials whenever possible.

We know that we share our Forest School spaces with a variety of wildlife, so a leave no trace ethic is encouraged, as much as possible. We model this by cleaning up all of our snack leftovers, to be brought to the compost, as well as bringing back rinse water from paints, to be disposed of down the drain. We aim to teach a respectful relationship to our earth.





Why Forest School?

As a species, Humans have been living and learning in natural spaces for most of our history.

In this area, for example, the Mi'kmaw people have been living and learning on, and from the land, for at least 1100 years and often continue to be keepers of these traditional practices and knowledge. Over time, however, many people have grown disconnected from our natural roots, as we have settled into agricultural and then industrial lifestyles. Today, we are seeing an acceleration of this lack of connection to the natural world, with increasing ill effects on our bodies, our minds and especially our children. People, and in particular families, are searching for ways to redevelop this relationship with nature.

Forest Schools provide year round, outdoor programs connecting kids and families to nature and the outdoors. Forest Schools originated in Denmark in the 1950's. They are now gaining momentum internationally, across Canada and in Nova Scotia. These land based schools are connecting children to nature through free play, exploring, wondering and wandering. Here, children learn at their own pace in a natural setting, be it in a forest or an overgrown vacant lot, which they visit repeatedly over a period of time, preferably in all weather and seasons. Forest Schools also aim to develop connections to the Indigenous groups who have historically been the keepers of the land they use. Forest Schools strive to incorporate learning from an Indigenous lens, with the more euro-centric scientific model, in the Mi'kmaw spirit of Etuaptmumk (Two Eyed Seeing).



Terms and Conditions

Registration and Refunds

Registration

In order to participate in pre-registered programs (Nature Kindergarten and Forest Friends) payment must be made in full, by the first day the program begins, unless another arrangement has been agreed upon.

To participate in our Stay and Play, Drop-In Program, fill out the registration form the first time your family attends. Each time you'd like to attend after that just email to let us know you are coming. Please notify Sarah Storm via email of your attendance by Tuesday evening to insure participation.

All payment can be made in cash or by e-transfers to growingwildwonder@gmail.com

Refunds

Refunds are not given, except in extreme circumstances that prevent a child from participating in Forest School. *Wild Wonders* Forest School reserves the right to determine and assess these circumstances, on a case by case basis. If a refund is issued, it will be subject to a \$50 administrative fee. Refunds will not be given if programs are cancelled due to inclement weather. A full refund will be given in the event that a program is cancelled due to insufficient registration. Due to unforeseen circumstances some session dates occasionally may have to be changed. should this occur after you have already registered, we would provide at least 3 weeks notice.



Policies and Procedures

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Privacy Policy

Wild Wonders Forest School we take the privacy of our students very seriously. Any personal data shared with us, including photographic images, will only be used for the purposes that you have consented to. We will not share details with third parties without consent, except where we are legally compelled or obligated to do so.

Illness Policy

In the following cases, we ask that participants (including students, teachers, and accompanying volunteers) stay home from Forest School for at least 24 hours after their last symptom has subsided:

- Temperature over 101 degrees F or 38.3 degrees C
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Should the above situations arise while at Forest School, parents will be contacted and the participant will be asked to be picked up immediately.



A snack is provided each day, usually fruit and a homemade muffin.

Food/Allergies Policy

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School a snack will be provided each day, usually fruit and a homemade muffin. If your child has allergies* or other special dietary concerns, please contact us prior to the first day to make arrangements. We can generally accommodate gluten free, dairy free, or vegan diets. All other food restrictions will be dealt with on a case by case basis. Please contact us to discuss an alternative snack option. If you are worried that your child will not like what is provided, you can also feel free to include a snack from home. Students are asked to bring their own drink in an insulated, water bottle. Warm water or tea is nice in winter.

*At *Wild Wonders* we are not a Nut-Free Zone.

In the case of a severe or life threatening allergy to nuts or anything else, we will make accommodations to provide a safe environment.

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Hygiene Policy

Children will be asked to wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer, at the beginning of programs, before eating and after going to the washroom. Children will be encouraged to cough into their elbow, and to wash hands after coughing into hands.

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we do not have access to an indoor washroom, we provide an outhouse at our main site. If we are away from the outhouse area, a teacher will accompany children to use the washroom. We also provide the option for children to “wild pee” away from the group, if they are comfortable. If children are not fully independent in the washroom, then *Wild Wonders* will require parents to sign a release form allowing our staff to help them.

Ratios Policy

The ratios between *Wild Wonders* Forest School educators/volunteers and participants vary depending on the age of the group of participants and the adults accompanying them. For example, the maximum ratio of unaccompanied preschool-aged children to Forest School educator/volunteer is 5:1, while the ratio of school-aged children to Forest School educator/volunteer is 7:1. Our lead educator will always hold a Forest and Nature School

Practitioners Course Certification and all staff will have at minimum a Standard First Aid Certification.

Staff/Volunteer Responsibilities

The responsibilities of *Wild Wonders* Forest School educators/volunteers are wide-ranging and include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **The physical safety of our students.** By modelling and inviting students to participate in making decisions around risk, we foster an environment of shared responsibility. We make risk assessments together, based on the situation at hand, an individual’s unique capability, current weather, and other factors.
- **The social and emotional needs of our students.** By modelling compassion for all beings, we invite children to be active citizens of our small community, and co-creating community standards for our groups, which we are then all expected to follow.
- **The health of our forest.** By modelling respect for the natural world of our home environment, we encourage children to develop their own connections to the natural world and learn how best to protect it.
- **Deep observation of our students interest and play.** By actively participating in the games of students, we are able to follow the questions and connections they are making and help lead them towards new ones.

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Clothing/ Gear Policy

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we are outdoors for several hours at a time, in all kinds of weather. It is important each child brings a backpack with the following items.

- Water bottle- Insulated is best!
- One full change of clothing -Including 2 pairs of socks/ underwear
- Waterproof rain gear/ muddy buddy OR snow pants and jacket
- Sneakers for running or rain/snow boots -Please no open toe shoes & no crocs.
- Sun hat OR toque depending on weather
- A balaclava or neck warmer (no scarves please)
- 2 pairs of waterproof mitts in winter. Plus one thin pair for snack time
- Extra insulating layer ie: Sweater or fleece

Optional-

Non-aerosol Sunscreen and bug spray for re-application -Please come with both already applied when appropriate

An extra snack

What to wear

Please dress your children in play clothes for our program! Most of the art supplies and messy play we get into will wash off in the laundry. Some of the paint or glue we use (not to mention sap) may be hard to get out. Worry about getting dirty can get in the way of our important work and play.



Children must be able to carry their own backpack with their extra gear

Learning in hands-on, sensory and experiential ways gets messy and at *Wild Wonders* Forest school. Our philosophy is the messier we get, the more we are learning, and the more fun we are having!

Please consider dressing your child in layers for all seasons. Layers can be easily added or removed to keep children comfortable. Breathable fabrics such as cotton and hemp are great option for summer. Fabrics such as silk, wool and polyester are best worn next to the skin, in cooler seasons, as they wick moisture and regulate temperature. Fleece and wool are great choices for additional insulating layers in winter -think socks here too! A waterproof and windproof outer shell can make a big difference towards comfort in a variety of weather. Make sure boots are not too small, especially with extra socks on, as this can cause cold feet.

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Extreme Weather Policy

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we advocate being outdoors in all sorts of weather and in all seasons! Still, there is some extreme weather in which we can not risk being outdoors. Since we have limited indoor spaces, moving the program indoors is not an ideal option. In the event of changing weather, when we have already started a program, we will move inside. We will then make a decision as to whether we can finish the day's program indoors or if it is necessary to call parents to pick up children.

Examples of extreme weather which would compromise programming:

- Winds of more than 40KM/hr or gust more than 70KM/h
- Extreme cold, temperatures of -20C or below (including windchill)
- Extreme heat, temperatures of 30C or above
- Thunder and lightning

Weather/Closure Policy

Educators at *Wild Wonders* Forest school monitor weather forecasts daily and check weather forecasts regularly to make informed decisions about the day's plan and activities.

In the event that the weather/road conditions make travel to/from *Wild Wonders* Forest School unsafe, we may need to cancel programs for the day. We will notify you by text,

with as much warning as possible, but at least 1 hour prior to the time the program would have started. If the South Shore Regional Schools are closed we will be as well.

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we always plan one make-up date, for each session. We can, therefore, reschedule most missed program dates. If additional days are canceled, no refund will be provided.

Child Release Policy

Wild Wonders Forest School requests written authorization for any additional people, other than parents who may pick up their children. If prior written authorization is not possible, (in unforeseen circumstances for example) the parent must phone us to give verbal authorization. If there is any confusion or uncertainty, the child will not be allowed to leave Forest School until a parent has been contacted. Anyone including parents, who are authorized to pick up students, should be prepared to present photo ID.

In the case of a child custody situation, where one parent is not authorized to pick up a child, a copy of the separation agreement or court order will be required.

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Child Protection Policy

Wild Wonders Forest School commits to taking a proactive position in the prevention of child abuse. It is the responsibility of every person, including a person who acts in professional or official duties with respect to children, to immediately report to a Nova Scotia child protection agency if they suspect that child abuse has occurred or if a child is at risk of abuse. *Wild Wonders* Forest School staff, take this responsibility very seriously.

Risk Management Policy

Wild Wonders Forest School acknowledges that because we are set in a natural, mature forest, there is always an element of risk involved in our program. In fact, we at *Wild Wonders* believe that risk and risky play is an important element in learning! Risk assessment is a life skill that children can only learn with practice. We aim to provide many opportunities for this, within an age appropriate sphere. We encourage activities like running, puddle jumping, mud and snow sliding, tree climbing, tool use, building of forts and other play structures... just to name a few. Children and educators work together to decide what is a reasonable level of risk for each situation, group and child. We create our community



Some risk associated with our activities is inherent to our programs

standards together, as a group, to provide basic framework for this. From here, we work together in ongoing discussion about what is safe, depending on each child's unique competency, the situation at hand, and of course, current weather and environmental conditions.

Some of the risks we may encounter are, (but not limited to):

- Injuries from moving our bodies, climbing, jumping running, etc... often on uneven ground, rocks and logs in the forest
- Injuries from learning to properly use tools such as saws, knives, hammers and nails
- Injuries from using matches or fire
- Potentially poisonous plants and mushrooms
- Wildlife and ticks
- Inclement weather, and sometimes slippery conditions accompanying such weather.



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Tick Policy

Our forest, at *Wild Wonders* Forest School, is the home of many insects, including ticks. They are especially prevalent in the spring and fall. We recommend using insect repellent to deter ticks. Staff always carry a natural tick repellent (Atlantics), to offer to families at drop off and to re-apply as required throughout the program.

If a tick is seen on a student it is brushed off. If a tick is attached we will remove it using tweezers or a tick key and save it in a baggie to give the family for identification. Parents/guardians will be informed at pick-up.

There is, however, no substitution for thorough tick checks. Always check yourself and your family for ticks after being outside. Having a bath or shower within two hours of coming inside, makes it easier to spot ticks and wash off unattached ticks. Ticks like warm places on the body. Remember to check: around ears, behind knees, between the legs/groin area, around the waist, and especially in the hair.

For more information about the current recommendations for tick safety and the prevention of Lyme and other tick borne disease please visit <https://novascotia.ca/ticksafety/>

For more information about being outdoors during tick season, visit a blog post on the Child and Nature Alliance website <http://childnature.ca/what-can-we-do-about-ticks/>



Policies and Procedures

Health and Safety Policies Con't

Tool Use Policy

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we believe tools can be an important way for students to learn practical skills. Tools are only brought out once educators have had a chance to get to know the students of any particular group. Individual students are assessed based on age, maturity level, and their previous navigation of lower risk situations, before being introduced to any new tool.

Examples of tools we might use include, hammers, nails and tape measures for building, drills, for making holes. knives for whittling and saws for cutting. Tools are always kept away from children and only used with direct supervision, in designated areas. Educators always demonstrate proper technique and teach about the risks associated with improper use. Students who are using tools improperly will be asked to put their tools away until the next day. Continued improper use of tools could result in loss of tool use privileges.

Emergency Procedures and First Aid

Wild Wonders Forest School has written emergency procedures with which all Forest School educators and volunteers are familiar. A copy of these procedures, as well as emergency phone numbers and medical information of all students, is carried by the Forest School Lead educator at all times. Our first aid kits are well equipped with all the

necessary items to treat minor injuries, including scrapes, minor cuts and burns, slivers, blisters etc. A *Wild Wonders* Forest School staff member trained in Standard First Aid and CPR will be present at all times

In the event that urgent care is needed for a participant, parents will be notified immediately by phone and a Forest School staff will stay with the child until a parent/ guardian arrives. In case of a serious injury, that requires immediate medical attention, the child will be transported by ambulance with a member of the *Wild Wonders* Forest School team, who will stay with them until a parent/ guardian or emergency contact arrives.

If an emergency affects the whole group, the *Wild Wonders* Forest School team will remove the group from the situation, and gather together in the pick up/drop off area, or inside, depending on the situation. We will then proceed to contact parents/ guardians by phone for pick-up.

The most common injuries we see at Forest School are bumps and bruises from falling on the uneven ground, bug bites, splinters. We will notify parents verbally of any minor injuries that occur at pick up each day. In the case of head injuries (regardless how minor), we will always call home to notify parents, then let them decide if pick-up is preferable.

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Learning Policies

A Typical Day at Forest School

While every day at *Wild Wonders* Forest school is a bit different, based on the season, the weather, group interests, and activities introduced by our educators. We also try to provide some rhythms and routines that become predictable for our students.

We meet the parents at the main parking area. Students explore and play while they wait for the rest of the group. Once everyone has arrived, we gather in a circle for our morning check-in. We start our days with gratitude, songs and daily intentions. These practices frames our daily plan.

Each day the students are given large periods of time to really settle into deep play. Children are encouraged to make up games and choose their own activities. Educators and volunteers are encouraged to play with and deeply observe the students, noticing what learning is happening and how best to support, enrich and extend that learning.

About halfway through our time, we will gather for a light snack. Usually fresh fruit and a homemade muffin. During this time we often read a book or two, or lead a discussion of something that has caught the children's interest that day. After snack, it's back to the free play that makes up the core of our days.



Each day, educators bring learning provocations, set up specifically to build on the themes and questions from the previous sessions. Most days, we will also be offering a new art process or craft technique or perhaps some tools, that students are given the option to try.

As the day at Wild Wonders Forest School comes to a close, students are encouraged to help tidy up the space and collect their belongings. We then share in a final circle that closes our time together. Going over the day's events, while asking questions and other reflective practice are used to consolidate the day's learning.

Educators will always be on hand at the end of programs to greet parents, answer questions about the day and discuss any concerns.

Policies and Procedures

Learning Policies

Emergent Learning & Free Play

Learning at *Wild Wonders* Forest School looks very different than it does in a conventional school setting. At Forest School, we are focused on student-led, emergent, inquiry and play-based learning. We believe that students of all ages are capable of asking complex questions and expressing themselves in hundreds of ways. We encourage students to explore these questions and pursue their own interests to construct their own understanding of the world around them.

Observation, Documentation & Planning

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we use the principles of observation and documentation and planning to support making students learning visible. This can help educators, parents and students better understand the rich learning that is often taking place through the free play, as well as educator offered provocations and activities at Forest School.

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we follow the interests of our students and nurture emergent learning. Forest School educators shift their emphasis from observation and documentation slowly towards planning for the next days activities. Forest School educators closely observe students, inviting them to push learning farther with open-ended activities and provocations and reflections.

Forest School educators may support their observations by taking photos, videos, and written notes which are themselves used to extend learning, refocus it, or direct it. For example, educators might show participants a photo of themselves engaged in an activity from the session before, and prompt them to revisit that activity by asking; “What were you doing there?” “What were you thinking about?” “Did you accomplish what you were trying to?” “What if we tried... today?”

Photos, videos, notes and student art work are all used to co-create a theory of the learning taking place. This is a collaboration between the students and educators. In this way, educators and students work together to answer big questions. “What was happening there?” “What was being learned?” “What do we already know?” “What questions do we still have?” “What do we understand now, that we didn’t before?”

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we believe that this type of learning can lead to deep understanding about the world, the way we each uniquely learn, and how each student can best direct their own learning in the future. It is our aim to preserve the natural curiosity and passion that is born into young children, while empowering them to guide their own learning.

Policies and Procedures

Learning Policies

Behaviour Management Policy

At *Wild Wonders* Forest School we are proactive in manage behaviour by co-creating community standards together, by engaging in developmentally appropriate activities, and by nurturing a positive physical and social/emotional space. In general, our behaviour management will:

- Consider the child's needs and developmental level
- Make expectations and consequences clear
- Focus on the behaviour rather than the child
- Be implemented in a positive and consistent manner
- Be designed to help the child to learn desirable

behaviour and techniques

- Involve consulting with parents/guardians to include their input of successful approaches with a child, as well as to keep them informed of issues/concerns as they arise
- Help children to develop self-control, self-confidence, decision making skills, the ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in their interactions with others

Wild Wonders Forest School defines inappropriate behaviour as using actions or words that make other students or staff members feel uncomfortable. Unsafe behaviour is defined as any behaviour that puts a child or staff member at risk. This includes not responding when called, running, hiding, taking risk without consulting staff, and not following guidelines, so that behaviour becomes potentially dangerous to the child or others.

Prohibited Behaviour Management Practices

- Corporal punishment, sexual abuse and harassment are strictly prohibited at all times. This includes hitting, spanking, pushing, shaking, pinching, biting, grabbing, slapping, etc.
- Forest School mandates zero tolerance for sexual abuse, harassment, molestation, corporal punishment or neglect of any child. Employees and volunteers are expected to ensure that no harm comes to any child, at any time.
- A child must not be humiliated, either physically or verbally, through sarcasm, taunting, teasing, degrading, etc. Deliberately harsh or degrading measures that would humiliate a child or undermine a child's self-respect are not acceptable.
- A child must not be deprived of basic needs for food, clothing, or shelter. Food must not be used as a punishment or threat. Access to clean water and safe shelter must always be available for the child.

Wild Wonders Forest School reserves the right to suspend or expel a child from the program, should their behaviour be consistently unsafe for themselves or others.



Policies and Procedures

Communication Policies

General Communication Policy

Wild Wonders Forest School will primarily communicate with families, by email. To reach us, please direct emails to growingwildwonder@gmail.com or text Sarah Storm (902)299-0424

Please be sure to communicate the following:

- If you will be late/absent
- If your child is ill with a communicable disease
- If your child is being treated for lice

Emergency Communications Policy

In the event of an emergency at Forest School, parents/guardians will be contacted by telephone, once emergency personnel (if needed) have been contacted. In the event that weather/road conditions make travel to/from Forest School dangerous for staff/students and Forest School needs to cancel programs or close early for the day, parents will be notified by text.

Social Media Policy

Wild Wonders Forest School has a public website, public Facebook account and private Facebook groups for each program cohort, where both pictures and stories are posted about the things we do at Forest School. Our photo consent extends to our social media pages. Please contact us if you have any concerns about photo content or protecting your families privacy over social media.



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Concerns or Grievances

Please don't hesitate to reach out. Our staff are always available, before and after programs, for discussion. If there are any issues that might require a longer conversation, we are happy to arrange that too.

Please contact us and we will be happy to discuss any issue that is important to you.

Email:

growingwildwonder@gmail.com

Sarah Storm- Executive director
and lead educator

Call or Text- 1(902) 299-0424

