

# Cheakamus Centre Outdoor School Program Parent Handbook



CHEAKAMUS  
CENTRE  
nature is in session

# Cheakamus Centre and the Outdoor School Program

Our mission is to create a hub of innovative, authentic educational experiences in nature that inspire all learners to make informed, sustainable decisions through a deeper understanding and connection to the natural world. Since its inception in 1969, the Outdoor School (ODS) Program has provided experiential environmental programs to thousands of students from North Vancouver and beyond. This unique program including field studies, outdoor recreation, and other direct experiences in nature, instills in learners a sense of respect and appreciation for the natural world.

## About Cheakamus Centre

- The ODS program is housed at Cheakamus Centre, a North Vancouver School District owned environmental learning centre operating since 1969
- Cheakamus Centre is located approximately 45 minutes north of Horseshoe Bay, in Squamish, B.C. within minutes of all emergency services
- The 165 hectare (420 acre) site is a designated ecological reserve situated on the banks of the Cheakamus River with over 12 km of managed salmon stream habitat
- Each year, over 6000 students participate in day and multi-day cultural and environmental learning programs
- Cheakamus Centre's program buildings, cabins and trails are accessible to students and staff with diverse needs
- Unique environmental features include thousand-year old cedars, spawning habitat for five species of Pacific Salmon, and the largest recorded concentration of wintering bald eagles in North America



For maps of the facility, and directions for getting here, please visit our [website](#).

## About the Outdoor School Program

The ODS Program promotes awareness of community and environment, and provides opportunities to emphasize and enhance classroom curriculum and core competencies. Students take part in hands-on classes each day and learn about local ecology, wildlife, and food systems. They also get to participate in fun activities such as nature games, explorations on the farm, or evening campfire singing. With an emphasis on co-operation and consideration for fellow students, children are encouraged to build community and address issues in a constructive manner. Our facilities offer unique educational experiences:

- Salmon Hatchery supported by Fisheries and Oceans Canada involves children in hands-on study of the salmon life cycles and salmon enhancement practices;
- Biodiversity Farm allows children to observe and interact with animals such as goats, chickens, turkeys, ducks, pigs and bees;
- Forest Field Pavilions act as centres for studying forest ecology and wildlife;
- State of the art Environmental Learning Centre where students gather for meals, snacks and activities.

## Accommodation

Students are housed in comfortable, heated cabins. Students are organized in same-gender cabin groups by their teachers and are supervised by their assigned high school leadership counsellor.

All of the cabins are equipped with two shared bathrooms and bunk style beds. There are two cabins (Cabins 7 & 8) that are wheelchair accessible and have separate bedrooms for students requiring additional supports.



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## Meals and Snacks

Cheakamus Centre is famous for its food! Chef Wade and his talented culinary team prepare simple, sustainable meals and snacks that are kid-friendly and nutritious, and keep our students healthy, happy and energized. Daily meals are served “family style” in the Environmental Learning Centre, and on occasion in the Fireside Dining Hall. Check out a sample of our [Daily School Menu](#). Our kitchen is able to cater to a wide range of dietary needs and restrictions.

Returning your child’s Medical and Dietary form promptly, and noting any special dietary needs, will help the program staff and chef make necessary arrangements. (Please be specific: if a child is a vegetarian, are eggs and dairy products acceptable? If a child is lactose intolerant, is milk in baking okay? etc.) Please note that the Centre is a peanut-free facility, including all meals served on-site.

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## Evening Supervision

Each night of your child’s stay at Cheakamus Centre, counsellors will be in the cabins all night long. Cheakamus Centre staff support the counsellors in their supervisory roles with assistance provided from visiting teachers as required. A Program Support Specialist, in addition to the Resident Program Coordinator and on-site

## Teachers

Well in advance of your child's program, Cheakamus Centre teachers are in contact with classroom teachers to assist in all aspects of the planning process. Your child's school teacher will generally be able to address questions that may come up regarding their participation in the program. If required, classroom teachers can direct parent questions to the Cheakamus Centre teachers and staff for clarification.

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## Personal Care and Rest

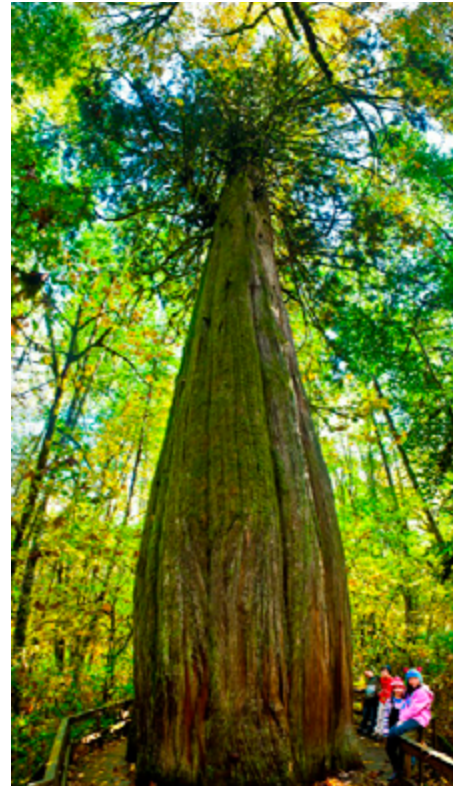
Adequate time is provided daily for children to maintain good health practices. While personal hygiene is your child’s own responsibility, counsellors will provide regular reminders during cabin time.

Getting enough sleep is important for children particularly given the many activities they’re involved in throughout the day. The program is scheduled to provide enough time for breaks, and students' bed times are closely supervised by their cabin counsellors.

## Sample Mid-Week Intermediate Day

- 7:00 Rise and Shine, prepare for the day
- 8:00 Breakfast in dining hall @ ELC
- 8:45 Chores or free time with counsellors
- 9:30 Field Study
- 11:30 Chores or free time with counsellors
- 12:00 Lunch in dining hall @ ELC
- 1:00 Field Study
- 3:00 Snack in dining hall @ ELC
- 3:15 Afternoon Activity (Recreation)
- 4:45 Film or presentation in auditorium
- 5:15 Chores or free time with counsellors
- 5:45 Supper in dining hall @ ELC
- 7:00 Daily follow-up with classroom teachers
- 8:00 Evening Activity (Recreation)
- 9:00 Snack, then off to cabins
- 9:45 Lights out! Counsellors are in cabins  
ODS staff supervising outside cabins

\*Note that primary student bed times are slightly earlier



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## Field Studies

Every morning from 9:30 to 11:30, and each afternoon from 1:00 to 3:00, children take part in integrated Field Studies. In these experiential study periods, children may learn about eagles, or salmon; life in the forest or in a pond; farm animals or any number of other nature-based topics. A focus on the out-of-doors does not mean that students' regular classroom subjects are set aside for their stay. Instead, they will use their new skills to discover the world around them, and make connections with what they are learning back at school.

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## Afternoon and Evening Programs

"Integration" does not stop when field study time ends. During afternoon activity periods, children are given the opportunity to explore nature, and to exercise their senses by playing games which challenge them to learn about ecology, survival, or teamwork. During your child's stay, a selection of these activities will be offered.

After dinner, children spend time with their teacher discussing the day's events and highlights. This is an important time for teachers to check in with their students and provide support as needed. This is followed by a short night walk, campfire songs or other evening activities led by the counsellors and Program Coordinator. The evening program is often a highlight for both the students and the counsellors.

In an integrated salmon study students may watch fish and record observations (language arts); catch, measure and weigh salmon (math); fertilize salmon eggs (science); discuss impacts of pollution on salmon habitat, and discuss how salmon play a part in our economy (social studies)

## Program Support Specialists & First Aid Attendant

A First Aid certified Program Support Specialist (PSS) and on-call Resident Program Coordinator will be available to respond to all program related medical needs 24 hours a day. This includes:

- responding to health problems as they are noted on medical forms;
- working with the chef on any special diets and food allergies
- informing and working with counsellors in supporting children's health concerns as reported on medical forms;
- administering medication as instructed by parents/guardians;
- assessing and providing First Aid for any reported illnesses or injuries.

In emergency situations, children will be transported to Squamish General Hospital and accompanied by their teacher and/or Cheakamus Centre staff. Parents will be contacted as soon as possible in this event.

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## Counsellors

Volunteer counsellors play an integral role in the ODS program. In many cases, student's strongest and fondest memories of ODS is time spent with their cabin counsellor(s). Counsellors support students in the following ways:

- sleep in the cabins, providing supervision, guidance and care;
- support students and teachers on field studies;
- provide instruction and supervision for Special Program and evening activities;
- help children perform their chores;
- supervise during meals and snack time.

High school students in Gr. 10-12 as well as alumni are eligible to counsel, and this leadership experience is a core component of the ODS program. Prior to counselling, these volunteers take part in a weekend-long training workshop which prepares them for the responsibilities of the role. In addition, high school students volunteering to counsel must obtain written permission from their school teachers, parents and their high school administration.

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## Students Requiring Adaptations or Support

We are committed to providing opportunities for all students to attend and actively participate in the ODS Program. Our goal is to integrate students with special needs as much as possible into our regular program schedule. Please contact your child's teacher and/or support staff well in-advance of your program date to inquire about planning requirements.

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## Phone calls & Calling home

Generally, students are not permitted to use the phone to call or receive calls from home as this often creates greater anxiety. Parents concerned about communicating with their child are requested to contact their child's teacher to discuss strategies to support them while they are away. A recommended resource for preparing your child for spending time away from home/family can be found [here](#).

In case of an emergency at home, parents may contact their school principal who will communicate with Cheakamus Centre administration. Alternatively, parents may contact Cheakamus Centre at 604 898 5422. Voicemails will be answered as promptly as possible.

## Helping Your Child Get Ready

A successful Outdoor School experience begins at home, long before your child arrives at the school. Please share parts of this handbook with your child and talk about the things to see and do at Outdoor School. You will also need to:

- Carefully read and review the information provided with the Informed Consent form. Fill in this form and return it to your child's teacher by the deadline given.
- Fill in the medical form and return it to your child's teacher by the deadline given. Please remember to include the following:
  - child's Medical Service Plan number or Insurance Plan number
  - any required medications – including Graval, Tylenol etc.
  - any special dietary needs
  - comments about sleep disorders, bed-wetting, allergies etc.
  - complete and sign the form in ink!
- Submit payment for the ODS Program fee. Cheques should be made payable to your child's school.
- Help your child pack their clothing and equipment. Children carry their own luggage: please pack accordingly.
- Mark all clothing and equipment for identification. Use a sew-in name tag or write your child's name and school with a laundry-marking felt pen.

Parents with medical or dietary related questions may contact program staff at 604 898 5422

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### Site Visits

We are excited to welcome families to our Annual Open House on the first Sunday in May. This is a wonderful opportunity to introduce children to the site and tours will be provided by program staff to help parents and students prepare for their program experience. If you are unable to attend, and your child is anxious about attending Outdoor School, please contact us at 604 898 5422 x 221 to discuss other possible options to see the site. Please note that drop-in visits by family members during program times are not permitted.



# Clothing and Equipment

Here is a checklist of suggested items for your child to bring to Outdoor School. Please remember: learning and playing outdoors can be wet and dirty. It is best to send older clothing and equipment you may already have at home. Where possible, please send wool or synthetic items (ie. polyester, nylon, etc) as cotton is uncomfortable and cold when wet. Some extra raingear and boots are available if required.

## Bedding

- Sleeping bag (extra blanket if sleeping bag is lightweight) OR 3-blanket bedroll and sheet
- Pillow and case

## Clothing

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shirts (3 or 4)                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Insulated jacket                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jeans/heavy pants (2 or 3 prs.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweater/sweatshirt (2)            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Socks (4 or 5 prs)                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Indoor/gym shoes                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Underwear (4 or 5 changes)            | <input type="checkbox"/> Pyjamas                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toque or waterproof head covering (2) | <input type="checkbox"/> Rain jacket (rain pants optional) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waterproof, insulated boots           | <input type="checkbox"/> Mitts or gloves                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra pair of shoes or runners        |  |

## Personal Kit

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|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Towel and Wash cloth             | <input type="checkbox"/> Reusable water bottle                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hairbrush or comb                | <input type="checkbox"/> Soap and Container                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toothbrush and toothpaste        | <input type="checkbox"/> Lip salve (optional)                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sun screen lotion                | <input type="checkbox"/> Special diet food if required                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book for free time (recommended) | <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil and any other teacher requested materials |

### Please DO NOT SEND:

Phones or other electronic devices, money, knives, flashlights, candy or food - except if the food is required as part of a special diet. Digital cameras are not recommended as they may be damaged or lost and they can also be distracting on field studies and activities. Note that Cheakamus Centre assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal items. Items not permitted will be held by children's teachers until they return to school. While children may reclaim electronic devices when they return to their school, food attracts mice and will not be returned.



## Expectations and Guidelines

As explained in the Informed Consent document, each child is expected to follow their school's Code of Conduct in addition to the guidelines provided to them on arrival. The large majority of students become very engaged in the hands-on programming, and there simply isn't time in the Outdoor School program schedule for getting into trouble.

Occasionally, children will choose to be uncooperative and this may result in them missing some of the opportunities available to their peers. In extreme disciplinary situations—when a child is reprimanded repeatedly, or is a danger to self or others—the Cheakamus Centre Administration and the child's classroom teacher(s) will contact the home school principal and the child's parents. While uncommon, parents are reminded that they may be asked to pick up their child and take them home in this event.

## ODS Program Fee

The program fee helps cover the cost of transportation (for SD44 groups only), accommodation, meals and snacks, and onsite program facilitation and support. Questions with regard to program fees can be directed to Cheakamus Centre. Please note, refunds are not provided for partial stays unless special arrangements have been made in advance with Cheakamus Centre.

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## Still have some questions?

We hope we have answered many of your questions regarding the Outdoor School Program. If there's something you're still wondering about, or if you have a comment about the program, please speak to your child's teacher or contact us at 604 898 5422. For further information about the ODS Program and Cheakamus Centre, please feel free to visit our website at

[www.cheakamuscentre.ca](http://www.cheakamuscentre.ca)

Cheakamus Centre values your support of this unique educational program, and we are committed to ensuring that your child's stay here is a positive experience, providing foundations for learning that will last a lifetime.

