Metro Parks Nature Camps Family Handbook

Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks

Updated: September 2026

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Dear Camp Families,
Welcome and thank you for choosing Metro Parks Summer Camp! We are so excited about this fun-filled summer. In order to be prepared for camp, please read the following information:

VISION, MISSION, GOALS

Metro Parks Nature Camps are specialty programs designed to foster the discovery of nature, provide a safe place to be yourself, and create a fun-filled summer that can lead to life-long friendships. The Camp Team works hard to make sure campers have a great experience while also providing the necessary information to ensure our parents and guardians are informed and involved.

MISSION OF METRO PARKS
To conserve open spaces, while providing places and opportunities that encourage people to discover and experience nature.

MISSION OF NATURE CAMPS
Provide children with the opportunity and encouragement to foster a deeper connection with nature through the following principles: exploration, education, community building and stewardship.

GOALS OF METRO PARKS NATURE CAMPS

Create a safe and inclusive environment in which campers can discover nature.
Provide opportunities for campers to make new friends and build relationships
Introduce campers to new outdoor recreation and nature experiences.
Facilitate the development of new skills through hands-on learning.
Foster a life-long appreciation and understanding of the natural world.
Change lives naturally.
Have fun!

CONTACT INFORMATION

Macy Tallarico- Camp Coordinator
Email: mqtallarico@metroparks.net
614-895-6213 (office phone)
614-285-2155 (Cell phone)

**For evening hours (After 3:30 PM) or inquiries that require a more immediate response please call the cell phone.*
If you have any questions or concerns regarding your child's camp. Please contact us no later than the Wednesday before your week of camp.

We will not be responding to emails or voicemails left over the weekend until the following Monday.

Camp Email: naturecamps@metroparks.net
Summer Nature Camp Cell Phones:
Highbanks - Dragonfly: 614-725-8027
Highbanks - Northern: 614-357-3372
Blendon Woods: 614-725-8435
Scioto Grove: 614-512-4373
Teen & Preschool Camp: 614-701-7115

**Camp cell phone lines are only available during summer, Monday – Friday 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. No administrative inquiries. No texting.*

REGISTRATION

Camp registration must be completed online, on our reservation system. You must make an online account, and input your campers information into your "household". If you are having trouble, please contact the Metro Parks Info Line, M-F 9am-1pm. 614-891-0700

REFUND POLICY

The refund policy for Nature Camps is adjusted each year/season. The refund policy will be stated during registration, in the confirmation email after enrolling, as well as posted on our website.

Please contact the Camp Coordinator in the event of a medical or family emergency that results in a child being unable to attend camp.

PAYMENT

Payment for Metro Parks Summer Camp is due in full at the time of registration. You may register and pay online, over the phone, or in person at Metro Parks Headquarters. Please note that registering in person or over the phone does not guarantee you a spot.

Address checks to the following:
Metro Parks Headquarters
% Amy Gault
1069 W Main Street
Westerville, OH 43081

REQUIRED FORMS

After registration, you will be sent a link to your email on file from ePACT (online form management system). Forms are required to be filled out before your camper's session of camp. If you already have an account from last year, use the same log in information to update your campers forms for the new season.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Metro Parks offer camp scholarships based on financial need. Scholarship applications are available by request and on the Metro Parks website.

TAX ID NUMBER

For tax filing purposes, Metro Parks' tax ID # is: 31-1578154

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

COMMUNICATION

It is our goal to provide a safe and inclusive environment for campers to discover nature, develop new skills, and make new friends. This is aided greatly by open communication between parents and our staff. Counselors are wonderful resources and we suggest you check in with them daily. Do not hesitate to bring up concerns, ask questions, or just get a recap of the day. You are also more than welcome to reach out to the Camp supervisor to discuss matters further. We want to make sure your camper has the best summer!

CAMPER INFORMATION
If concerns about our program arise during your week of camp, please bring them to the attention of the Camp Supervisor. We also encourage you to share as much information as possible about your camper(s) with your counselors as you are willing. Knowing how to meet the individual needs of each of our campers will help our counselors to better create a safe, inclusive, and fun experience each week

MEDICATIONS, INJURIES & ILLNESS

MEDICATIONS
Any and all medications must be indicated on the online forms. Metro Parks employees are not authorized to administer medication of any kind with the exception of epinephrine auto-injectors (please see below). Medications to be taken at camp must be clearly labeled with the camper's name and given to the Head Counselor at drop-off. Counselors will have a first-aid backpack onsite where camper medications can be stored and can check in with campers if medications are scheduled for a certain time of day. Please email or call the Camp Supervisor prior to your child(ren)s camp session(s) to discuss any medical concerns.

EPIPENS AND AUTO-INJECTORS
Properly trained Metro Parks employees may assist and if needed administer a camper's personal EpiPen in a medical emergency. To be properly trained, the employee will need to have participated in and successfully completed a Metro Parks First-Aid program that covers the use of EpiPens. If EMS has not been activated prior to an employee administering epinephrine, they will immediately be activated once the epinephrine has been administered. If a child has an EpiPen at school, they must also have one at camp.

ALLERGIES
Allergies are taken very seriously at camp. If your child is allergic to something, please verify this on their Emergency Medical Form. When you arrive at camp, please notify the Head Counselor as well.

ILLNESS AT HOME & AT CAMP
For the safety and health of all our campers, the symptoms listed below this paragraph will require at least a 24-hour absence from camp and appropriate medical treatment (if applicable). Please inform your Head Counselor if your child will not be at camp due to an illness. Should these symptoms present at camp, a counselor will notify you via a phone call. Your child will then be removed from camp and transported to a quiet location away from other campers. They will remain under the supervision of a Metro Parks staff member until an authorized adult arrives for pick up. The camper will not be allowed to return to camp the next day and will need to be symptom-free for at least 24 hours before returning to camp.
Symptoms:

- Fever: Temperature of 100.4°F
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Rash: Body rash, with itching or fever
- Head Lice: Itchy head, active lice
- Eye Infection: Redness, itching, and/or draining from the eye

EMERGENCIES
In the event of a medical emergency, counselors will activate Metro Parks' Emergency Response Plan. Counselors will immediately notify the ranger on duty and a squad will be dispatched. Counselors will then contact the Emergency Contact(s) listed on the child's digital forms. Counselors are certified in First-Aid/CPR and will provide appropriate treatment until medical personnel arrive on the scene.

CAMPER INCIDENT REPORTS
Camper Incident Reports are filled out by counselors for any type of injury, illness, insect sting, etc., and require a parent/guardian signature of acknowledgment at the end of each camp day. Parents/guardians will be contacted via phone call if the injury, illness, insect sting, etc. is severe in nature and requires immediate medical attention.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

DISCIPLINE
Metro Parks teaches Camp Counselors to approach discipline with patience and understanding. The rules of our camps are discussed with campers at the start of each week and revisited throughout the week. We encourage respect for others and the environment, teamwork, participation, open communication, and safety.
<u>These are the following steps our camp program follows when handling discipline:</u>

- Observe and listen to the situation
- Redirect inappropriate behavior
- Speak to the camper individually
- Listen to the camper and offer guidance
- Continuously monitor the situation

<u>If the behavior continues:</u>

- Separate the camper and discuss inappropriate behavior
- Document the situation and discuss it with parents/guardians

CAMPER INCIDENT REPORTS
In addition to injury, illness, insect stings, etc., Camper Incident Reports are also filled out by counselors for any type of continued or significant inappropriate behavior and verbal or physical conflict. Camper Incident Reports require a parent/guardian signature of acknowledgment at the end of each camp day. Parents/guardians will be contacted via phone call if the incident is severe in nature and requires more immediate action.

SUSPENSION
If a camper receives three Incident Reports regarding discipline in one week or is involved in a severe situation, the camper will be asked to leave camp for the remainder of that week. If the camper in question is signed up for more than one week of camp, they may return for their next scheduled camp week. However, if the camper receives three Incident Reports in one week for a second time, Metro Parks reserves the right to cancel all remaining camp registrations and issue a full refund for the remaining weeks.

INCLUSION

ZERO-TOLERANCE BULLYING POLICY
Metro Parks believes camp should be a fun, engaging, and safe place for everyone. Therefore, Metro Parks has a zero-tolerance bullying policy. If a camper exhibits any form of bullying they will be given a verbal warning and an Incident Report will be written up. If the bullying behavior continues, the camper's parent/guardian will be called to pick up the child from camp immediately. Depending upon the severity of the behavior, the camper may be suspended for the following day or the rest of the week.

INCLUSION STATEMENT
Metro Parks Nature Camps knows every child deserves the chance to experience nature, build friendships and feel a sense of belonging. Inclusion is a guiding principle, allowing us to welcome campers with a wide range of abilities, needs and strengths. The overall outcome of Nature Camps is to create the opportunity for campers to invest in nature while feeling safe, supported and protected.

We are committed to:
Working with families to identify each campers individual needs
Provide reasonable accommodations (quiet breaks, sensory space, etc)
Use proactive strategies to support campers behavioral, emotional or social needs (Clear timelines, positive reinforcement, etc)
Ensuring safety for campers and staff alike.

While we are not able to provide 1:1 supervision or other accommodations that may alter the group-based outdoor experience, we are happy to discuss accommodations and fulfill to the best of our extent.

If you have specific camper needs or questions you would like to discuss, please contact us at naturecamps@metroparks.net

GENERAL CAMP INFORMATION

DROP OFF/PICK UP
Camp hours vary based on the camp offering. The following are our current drop off/pick up times for various camps that we offer:

Traditional Summer Day Camp | Drop Off: 8:30-9am & Pick Up: 4-4:30pm
Teen Adventure Camp | Drop Off: 9-9:30am & Pick Up: 4-4:30pm
AM Preschool Camp | Drop Off: 8:30-9am & Pick Up: 11:30-12pm
PM Preschool Camp | Drop Off:12:30-1pm & Pick Up: 3:30-4pm
Winter Break Camp | Drop Off: 9-9:30am & Pick Up: 3:30-4pm

We understand that emergencies happen and ask that you notify your Head Counselor via phone call immediately if you are running late. Campers must be signed in and out each day by an authorized adult with a picture ID. Please make sure all adults authorized for pickup (including yourself) are listed in your camper's information and have your IDs ready.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

Camp will run regardless of the weather so please send your camper with adequate gear if the forecast calls for rain, snow, cold temps, excessive heat, etc. In the event of inclement weather, camp will be moved to a covered or indoor location (if not already stationed indoors) and parents/guardians will be notified via email of any changes in the drop-off or pick-up location.

LUNCH AND SNACKS

Campers should bring their own lunch and water daily. Lunch should be in a bag or cooler clearly labeled with the camper's name. Refrigerators and microwaves are not available so please plan accordingly.Metro Parks will provide two snacks each day for campers. All snacks served by Metro Parks will be free of peanuts and tree nuts. Nutrition information for snacks and cookout supplies will be available upon request.

> *If your child has any food allergies, please include this information with the emergency medical information and consult with the Camp supervisor ahead of time regarding any concerns.

TRADITIONAL SUMMER CAMP COOKOUT

Metro Parks will provide a cookout one day per week of camp. Campers will not need to bring lunch on cookout day. Please check with your Head Counselor for your camp location's cookout day.

BUG SPRAY/SUNSCREEN

All campers should come to camp wearing sunscreen. Campers should also bring sunscreen for reapplication throughout the day, and bug spray if they choose. Sunscreen and bug spray must be clearly labeled with your child's first and last name. Campers will need to apply their own sunscreen and bug spray throughout the day. To prevent any accidental injuries, we ask that they find an outdoor space away from other campers before applying any aerosol-type sunscreens or bug sprays. If your child has trouble reapplying sunscreen, counselors may help ONLY IF your camper has their own sunscreen clearly labeled with their first and last name. Any sunscreen not labeled with a camper's name, will not be applied. This is to prevent any unknown skin irritation or reactions.

TEEN CAMP INFORMATION

If your camper is enrolled in our teen camp they will be participating in risk-related recreation activities. These guidelines are put in place to reduce the risk of accidents and injuries and must be abided by in order to participate in our teen camp program activities.

> Via Ferrata (14 & Up), Rock climbing and Bouldering Guidelines:
> Must be between 88-265lbs with strong upper body strength (Via Ferrata only)
> Must be at least 5ft in height. (Via Ferrata only)
> Wear closed toe shoes with good grip
> Flexible, athletic clothing.
> Campers should plan to eat a healthy breakfast and lunch and stay hydrated for their climbing day
> Campers should come prepared to be fully engaged in listening to the instructions given by the climbing guides.

PRESCHOOL CAMP INFORMATION

This camp is for ages 3-5 years old. Your camper must be fully potty trained to attend this camp. Campers must also be able to follow simple directions, and stay with the camp group at all times.

WHAT TO WEAR

Closed-toe, sturdy shoes such as tennis shoes or Keen-like sandals (Summer) boots/warm shoes (Winter) and clothes that can get dirty. A hat is also recommended.

WHAT TO BRING

Bag or backpack with the following:

- Change of clothes
- Change of shoes
- Lightweight jacket or sweatshirt
- Raincoat or poncho
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen (Summer)
- Coat, gloves, scarf, hat (Winter)
- Water bottle
- Lunch
- Plastic shopping bag for wet clothes or shoes
- Medications, if applicable
- Notebook, sketchbook, journal, book, etc. if desired for downtime
- It is helpful to label all items brought to camp with your camper's first and last name so we can notify you if items are left behind

WHAT NOT TO BRING

Cell phones (camper will be asked to keep them in their bag for the day if they are brought to camp and deemed a distraction from the overall camp experience)
iPads, iPods, or any electronic devices
Toys that cannot be shared or replaced easily if broken
Personal outdoor recreation equipment (i.e. kayaks, fishing poles, bows, etc.) Metro Parks will provide equipment for campers to use
Valuables

FAQS

Please visit our FAQ page for the most up to date frequently asked questions!

WE LOOK FORWARD TO MAKING LIFELONG MEMORIES AT NATURE CAMP!

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