

PARENT HANDBOOK

An Outdoor School Guide for Parents





Shaver's Creek

ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



PennState

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Dear Parents,

Your child, their classmates, and teachers will be participating in Outdoor School, an exciting residential, environmental education program with Shaver's Creek Environmental Center. Outdoor School offers an excellent opportunity to study the natural world in small groups, providing children with a powerful educational experience – one we hope they will remember for a long time! This packet will answer some of your questions about Outdoor School and help you prepare your child to take full advantage of the experience.

For Outdoor School to reach its full potential for your child, your support and help are important. The staff of Outdoor School feels a special responsibility to the parents of the children whom we serve. Your child's teacher or the Outdoor School Directors will gladly help to answer any questions you might have. Please be sure to alert us to any special needs of your child, especially food allergies. For the safety of your child, please give your full attention to the online Youth Program Registration form provided to you via a link sent by the school. If your child has special dietary needs or food allergies, the school will send you a separate link to report these directly to Camp Blue Diamond. There is a **Student & Parent Code of Conduct** form your child's teacher will send home for you and your child to review together, you will both sign it, and return it to the teacher.

Outdoor School is an extension of the work your child is doing in school. As you know, some things may be learned by reading and traditional classroom study. But some things like the essence of a lake at sunrise, the subtle movements of a red-tailed hawk, and the importance of drinkable water are best learned outside. Our classroom becomes the forests, fields, and waters of Camp Blue Diamond and the surrounding Rothrock State Forest. Outdoor School provides a living laboratory as an extension of the classroom. The theme that ties our week together is Interrelationships. We feel it is important that every child understands something about the natural relationships which exist on our planet.

We are looking forward to an unforgettable experience at Outdoor School with your child!

Sincerely,
Outdoor School Staff
Shaver's Creek Environmental Center

PURPOSE

Outdoor School provides children with positive outdoor experiences which nurture the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to improve their quality of life. By offering activities which promote a healthy self-image, provide clear understandings of the earth's natural systems, and foster an emotional bond to the natural world Outdoor School strives to guide children toward healthy and harmonious relationships with other people and the earth. A week away from home may bring children a new sense of personal responsibility and independence and promote a life-long desire for learning.

HISTORY

As early as 1956, the Pennsylvania State University sponsored a resident outdoor education program. In 1970, under the federal Title III project, Outdoor School scheduled twenty weeks of resident programming. An organizational change took place in 1978 combining Outdoor School with other environmental education programs under Shaver's Creek Environmental Center. You probably know, or you may be, one of the thousands of former Outdoor School campers and university counselors who have enjoyed an Outdoor School experience over the past nearly 70 years!

SITE

Outdoor School takes place at Camp Blue Diamond near Petersburg, Pennsylvania approximately 20 miles southwest of State College. Camp Blue Diamond is a third-party entity with whom Outdoor School contracts to provide housing and meals. Camp Blue Diamond is an American Camp Association accredited summer camp and retreat facility operated by the Middle PA District Church of the Brethren. The property consists of 238 acres of mixed deciduous forest, fields, streams, wetlands, a lake, and a ball court. There are winterized cabins which each accommodate up to ten people and a separate restroom and shower building. There is a main lodge for dining and large group activities, a campfire ring, and indoor or covered spaces for inclement weather.

GENERAL INFORMATION

* There is NO cost to you. MCSD pays the tuition.

Cost of the Program: The tuition includes: overnight accommodation, meals and snacks, first aid/CPR certified staff, well-trained counselors and instructors, learning materials, a Discovery Book (nature journal), and an Outdoor School T-shirt.

Meals: Your child will receive a well-balanced diet consisting of three meals a day. Students and staff eat family-style in a dining room. Children will assist in dining hall preparations and clearing tables. If your child has dietary restrictions or food allergies, please communicate those in advance using the [Camp Blue Diamond Special Dietary intake form](#) (via this link or QR code).

* This will be provided with registration information.

Attendance: Students should plan to attend the full Outdoor School field trip, including the overnights, *unless there is an extreme situation or a medical condition*. Sports team practice, music recitals, family vacation, and elective doctor's appointments are not extreme situations. In the event of a situation or medical condition that warrants a student going home at night and returning the next morning, that student must be picked up by 5:15pm each day and returned by 8:45am the next morning. A teacher from the school and the ODS Director to be present for the pick-up and drop-off.

Parents/guardians will need to arrange this with the school's teachers in advance, who will then alert the ODS Director of the child's name, the parents' names, and who will be picking up the child each day. Parents/guardians will need to show a photo ID before the child is released to them.

Staff: The Outdoor School directors are full-time Shaver's Creek staff and Penn State instructors. The program assistant is a Shaver's Creek staff member with extensive experience in outdoor education. The staff is comprised of Environmental Education interns and undergraduate students who are gaining additional teaching experience. The counselors are university students who must apply and be selected for the program. The counselors complete several training sessions led by the directors prior to their week in residence. All Outdoor School staff and counselors have obtained clearances and criminal background checks in accordance with PA state laws and PSU policy.

Outdoor School follows the Penn State Non-Discrimination policy: Penn State is committed to equal access to programs, facilities, admission, and employment for all persons. It is the policy of the University to maintain an environment free of harassment and free of discrimination against any person because of their actual or perceived age, race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, physical or mental disability, religion, creed, service in the uniformed services (as defined in state and federal law), veteran status, marital or family status, pregnancy, pregnancy-related conditions, genetic information or political ideas. Discriminatory conduct and harassment violate the dignity of individuals, impedes the realization of the University's educational mission, and will not be tolerated. ***This access is extended to all university sponsored youth programs, including 4-H. The needs of any participant in a youth program will be discussed privately with that child's parent/legal guardian on a case-by-case basis with the goal of promoting a safe environment and quality experience.***

Our expectation is for all participants to abide by this policy as it complements our first rule at ODS: show respect to everyone. We have flexible housing options for children or staff who are transgender or gender non-binary.

Supervision: The staff, counselors, and classroom teachers are on duty 24 hours a day and at least two adults supervise every activity. On the first day, the Outdoor School staff explains the behavior expectations for all participants (refer to the **Student & Parent Code of Conduct**). We will work with the teachers to enforce these expectations which center on being respectful and safe. Children who have trouble making good choices will meet with their cabin counselor, teacher, and a director. A director will call the child's parents if a situation is more serious or if the child has already received multiple warnings about their behavior. Children who consistently make poor choices and disrupt the experience of others will be sent home. A short stay away from home is an important part of a child's developing sense of independence. For this reason, you are asked not to visit your child during his/her stay.

Injuries/Emergencies: A school nurse or our trained staff members administer first aid if necessary. A registered nurse and medical doctor are on call at Penn State University Health Services. **For emergencies only**, the Outdoor School number is (814) 667-2465; please ask for the Outdoor School director or classroom teacher. An alternate number is Shaver's Creek Environmental Center at (814) 863-2000.

Things you can do to help make your child's experience meaningful:

1. Be specific on the health history form about medical conditions including allergies, behavioral needs (for example ADHD), and special dietary needs.
2. Please review the Penn State University Non-Discrimination statement on the previous page with your child. Read the **Student & Parent Code of Conduct** with your child. **Both of you will sign it and return it to the classroom teacher.**
3. Check the packing list with your child to ensure they pack appropriate clothing and footwear for the weather. We will be outside, so it is important that your child has proper clothing. Old clothes are highly recommended. A raincoat or durable poncho is essential. Please write your child's name on their belongings.
4. Write a cheerful letter to your child at Outdoor School. Highlight how much fun they must be having rather than saying how much you miss them. The mailing address is: Child's Name, Shaver's Creek Outdoor School, c/o Camp Blue Diamond, PO Box 240, Petersburg, PA 16669.

Please mail your letter before your child leaves for Outdoor School so it arrives while they are at camp!

5. When your child returns home, encourage them to share what they learned and experienced at Outdoor School. Please check with your child's teacher for their expected time of arrival back at school.

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE

7:30 am	Daily Cabin Duties
7:45 am	Breakfast/Clean-up
9:00 am	Educational Lessons
12:00 pm	Lunch
1:00 pm	Teacher Time
2:00 pm	Educational Lessons
4:30 pm	Recreation Time with Cabin Group
5:30 pm	Dinner
7:00 pm	Evening Activity & Campfire
9:00 pm	Cabin Time
10:00 pm	Lights Out

Outdoor School Registration

Registration information will be available in early March.

IMPORTANT HEALTH CARE INFORMATION

Registration information will be available in early March.

All medications must be **given directly to the child's teacher** before going to Outdoor School, **not packed in their luggage**. The teachers and/or the school nurse are responsible for making medications available to the children during Outdoor School according to the directions you provide. All medications, prescription and non-prescription, will be stored in a locked cabinet. Children who carry inhalers, epinephrine auto-injectors (i.e. Epi-Pen), or diabetic supplies will keep those on their person. Do not send any unnecessary medication to Outdoor School. Our First Aid station is designed to care for minor problems and the staff is trained in First Aid/CPR as well as in using an epinephrine auto-injector.

If there is an illness or accident requiring a doctor's attention, we will call you or the emergency number on the medical form if we are not able to reach you. We will consult with the school nurse on site and if necessary, ask you to pick up your child and seek medical attention. If your child becomes sick, for their comfort and safety and in consideration of public health, we will ask you to pick up your child and take them home. Outdoor School has historically been a very safe place for children to learn about the out-of-doors. Some of the natural hazards at Outdoor School range from poison ivy to insect bites to the occasional scrap on a knee from falling during a game. Our staff is trained to recognize these hazards and practice prevention wherever possible. We do carry an illness and accident insurance policy that covers the children participating in Outdoor School for the dates they are on site.

For your child's health and safety, please:

Read the *Youth Program Consent for Treatment* form (linked above) and fill it out completely. Your child may not come to Outdoor School without a completed form. **Changes to your child's health after you have turned in the form can be communicated to your child's teacher or the ODS director.** There is a section regarding the use of Benadryl and epinephrine in the event of an allergic reaction to an insect sting or food. Please indicate in this section whether we may give your child Benadryl. In the event of a life-threatening allergic reaction emergency our staff will administer epinephrine via auto-injector. The staff is trained according to Penn State University Health Services protocols to recognize when an allergic reaction warrants such action and how to use the epinephrine auto-injector. *If there is a compelling medical reason why you don't want your child to be given epinephrine in a life-threatening allergic reaction emergency, please contact your school nurse to discuss this matter as it could create a potentially dangerous situation for your child.* Again, this is a precautionary measure, and our staff works hard to avoid situations that would expose the students to harmful insect stings. If your child carries their own epinephrine auto-injector they are permitted to always keep it with them.

PACKING LIST

Students will get dirty! Clothing should be seasonally appropriate, comfortable, and functional. Layering is great for changing temperatures throughout the day. Pack in one suitcase plus a bedroll as students will be carrying their luggage from the bus to the cabins. **Students also need to bring their school backpack to carry the following items during lessons:** raingear, water bottle, pens/pencils, and an extra layer like a sweatshirt. Please mark all clothing and equipment with your child's name.

Items to leave at home: cell phones, smart watches, other electronics, food, candy, gum, knives, firearms, fishing gear, pets, fireworks, make-up, curling irons, money, and jewelry.

Bedding and Toiletries:

- Sleeping bag or bed roll (sheets & blanket)
- Bath towel & wash cloth
- Laundry bag (plastic trash bag)
- Pillow and pillowcase
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Soap in a container
- Deodorant
- Shampoo
- Hairbrush/comb
- Chapstick

Clothing:

- Warm jacket/coat
- Warm hat and mittens
- Raincoat or durable poncho with hood
- 1-2 Sweatshirts
- 1-2 pair of sturdy shoes for hiking
- 1 pair of old sneakers or rubber boots for water study - no sandals!
- Pajamas
- 4-5 shirts
- 4-5 pants
- 5-6 underwear
- 8 pairs of socks - they get wet!

Equipment:

- School backpack
- Water bottle with secure lid - labeled with their name!
- 2 pencils or pens
- Flashlight with extra batteries
- Sunscreen

Students must bring a backpack to carry on the hikes. They should have the following items labeled with their name:

- rain gear (a durable poncho or raincoat)
- a reusable water bottle with a secure lid
- several pencils/pens
- extra clothing layer like a sweatshirt



Return this page.

Student & Parent Code of Conduct

We want you to have a fun, safe time at Outdoor School, so it is important for you and your parent/guardian to understand our behavior expectations. Please read these guidelines carefully. You and your parent/guardian will initial each section and sign at the bottom to indicate you have read the guidelines. Return this paper to your teacher.

At Outdoor School I will:

_____ Student & parent	<u>Show Respect</u> - I will treat all people respectfully, fairly, and equally even if they are different from me; I will not use put-downs or rude language; I will not engage in bullying or fighting.
_____ Student & parent	<u>Be Safe</u> - I will listen and follow the leaders' instructions, and always stay with my group.
_____ Student & parent	<u>Have Fun</u> - I will have a good attitude and participate in all the activities.
_____ Student & parent	<u>Stay Healthy</u> - I will bring a reusable water bottle labeled with my name. I will wash my hands often, drink enough water, eat an appropriate amount of food, and get enough sleep.
_____ Student & parent	<u>Be Prepared</u> - I will be prepared for learning OUTSIDE in all kinds of weather by bringing rain gear and wearing sturdy shoes. I will follow the packing list, especially packing old clothes and shoes! I will bring a daypack to carry my water bottle, rain gear, pencils or pens, and an extra jacket.

At Outdoor School I understand:

_____ Student & parent	<u>The "Three Strikes and You're Out" system</u> If I make a poor choice at Outdoor School here is what will happen: 1. First offense - I will meet with my cabin counselors or learning group leader and/or a teacher. a. Fighting will result in immediate dismissal from Outdoor School. 2. Second offense - meet with an Outdoor School director and/or a teacher. 3. Third offense - my parent/guardian will pick me up and I will not return to camp.
_____ Student & parent	<u>Critters like food</u> - I will leave snacks, gum, and candy at home. I will check the packing list for other items that don't belong at Outdoor School like electronics, phones, and weapons.
_____ Student & parent	<u>ODS counselors and learning group leaders are not permitted to interact with minors via social media</u> , so please do not try to find them on Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, or any other social media sites! You can send letters to counselors through your teachers.

My parent/guardian and I have read the expectations above and agree to abide by the Outdoor School rules to Show Respect, Be Safe, and Have Fun as well as the consequences for poor behavior.

Student signature

Date

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

