

Nature Program FAQs

What is Environmental Education?

Environmental Education (EE) is primarily the process of creating awareness and understanding of the natural world in people and teaching them to think critically on its behalf. EE instructs both children and adults on how to investigate and appreciate their environment through observation, experiment, and conservation. Though it can also exist in schools, museums, and other locations, EE in Brookline primarily functions through the variety of programs offered by our full time naturalist and environmental educator.

Why is Environmental Education Important?

Extensive research has been conducted showing that children who are active in nature are generally healthier than those who aren't. Environmental Education provides an opportunity for children and adults alike to get outside, be active, and learn about their environment in a hands-on and applicable matter. If people have a personal connection with the natural spaces in their town they will be more likely to understand their importance and defend them in the future. Plus, environmental education is fun!

What Types of Programs are Offered by the EE Division?

The Environmental Education Department offers a wide array of public, private, and partnership programs. The EE division strives to offer year-round programs for all ages and to meet the outdoor adventure and educational needs of the diverse community of Brookline.

Our program opportunities for the public include camp programs for children ages 5-13, a preschool nature series in the fall and spring, family education and adventure programs, and teen outings. The most popular programs, and the ones that often sell out, are the nature summer camps, the family campout, and maple sugaring.

Our Environmental Educator is also available for private programs including scout hikes and group nature outings.

The EE division also partners with many town groups on programming. Our environmental educator works with the school and parks departments in the fall to plant flower bulbs with every kindergarten class. In the spring, The Brookline Greenspace Alliance helps fund a program for first grade classes to take a field trip to Olmsted Park where they search for insects in a pond. Finally, we partner with Steps to Success on a supplemental science program that includes weekly field trips.

Who Leads the EE Programs?

Stephanie Springer is our full time Environmental Educator and has been working in the field for over 10 years. She holds a degree in biology and is also certified as a Wilderness First Responder. Stephanie is passionate about teaching and loves introducing Brookline's wonderful green spaces to the community!

Where are EE Programs Located?

The location of a program varies with the type. Most camp and youth programs take place at the Brookline Environmental Education Center (BEEC) located within Soule Park on Hammond Street. Family education and adventure programs often meet at a specific park. Locations are always listed with the program descriptions, and if you sign up for a program further details will be sent by email.

Summer Nature Camp FAQ:

- **Is Nature Camp a Licensed Program?**

Yes- We are licensed by the Town of Brookline Board of Health and must abide by their policies for a safe camp.

- **Where is camp located?**

Due to excessive demand, Nature Camp has expanded into two locations that will run the same program simultaneously. The original location is at BEEC, 654 Hammond St within the Soule Park. The new location is at the Eliot Recreation Center, 133 Eliot St in the first floor classroom.

- **How many children attend the camps?**

The Eliot location is limited to 10 children, with a Director and Counselor as staff. The BEEC location can accommodate up to 16 children, with a Director and two Counselors as staff. Our commitment to small group size allows us to take daily field trips and is a large part of why these camps are so popular!

- **What is the format of Nature Camp?**

Nature Camp is divided into age-specific camp sessions, each two weeks in length. Our younger camps, Little Acorns for 5-6 year olds and Sprouts for 7-8 year olds, focus more on local park explorations and nature lessons. Our older camps, Junior Rangers for 9-10 year olds and Adventurers for 11-13 year olds, include further field trips and more active adventures. All camps emphasize hands-on, field-based, experiential learning and include daily excursions.

- **What does a typical day at camp look like?**

Each day at camp has a different theme. Younger camps will start with a lesson and snack time, followed by a local field trip, lunch and story time, outdoor play time, crafts and journals. Longer trips include nearby zoos and farms.

Our older camps include more full day trips such as a marine science day looking at tidal animals on a beach, or canoeing at a pond in the Blue Hills.

- **Is transportation an option?**

Unfortunately, since Nature Camps are kept to a smaller capacity we cannot provide bus transportation. You will be required to coordinate transportation for your child during both drop off (between 8:30-9:00AM) and pick-up (4:00PM, or 3:00PM for Little Acorns).

- **Is extended care an option?**

Again, since we have a small capacity it is not feasible to offer extended day care at this program.

- **Who are the Nature Camp Counselors?**

Stephanie, our full time Environmental Educator, directs the camp at the original BEEC location. The Director at the Eliot location is hired seasonally and must have a college degree and at least two years of experience in education and leading children's programs. All other Counselors are typically college aged or higher with at least some experience in camp or child-care. All staff are screened and trained prior to the start of camp.

- **What is the registration process like?**

Registration for camp always opens in January, typically in the week following the local KIDS camp fair. Spaces are first-come, first-served with no priority given to those that have attended in the past. You can call or go online to register when it opens. Spots are competitive- we always expect at least a few sessions to sell out very quickly!

At the time of registration, you can choose to pay in full or set up a payment plan. Forms are handled online through a website called campdoc.com. Further parent information and camp schedules are sent out closer to the start of camp.