

Camp Handbook 2023



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Camp Hours*:

Monday – Thursday

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Friday

9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

**Unless otherwise noted*

Camp Location:

VINS Nature Center

149 Natures Way

Quechee, VT 05059

Dear VINS Nature Camp Families,

Thank you for choosing VINS Nature Camp. Preparations are well underway for another summer of adventure and discovery.

At VINS Nature Camp, our mission is to help young people develop the life skills necessary to be a positive force for their community and the natural world. In order to be successful in our mission, we need the help of both campers and parents/guardians. The most significant way you can help is by becoming familiar with our rules and policies and by talking with your child about our camp values and behavior code before their first day of camp.

This handbook is designed to help you plan for camp. It contains information about our policies, drop-off and pick-up, a packing list and much more.

As you prepare for camp, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to sharing the wonders of the natural world with your child.

Warm regards,

Sarah Strew

Lead Nature Camp

ssrew@vinsweb.org

Contact Information

Address: Vermont Institute of Natural Science
149 Natures Way
PO Box 1281
Quechee, VT 05059

Office: 802-359-5000 EXT: 245

Cell: 802-359-2091

Fax: 802-359-5001

Email: camps@vinsweb.org

Website: www.vinsweb.org/nature-camp

Tax ID#: 03-0231665

Who We Are

Organization

Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) has been a leader in environmental education and wildlife conservation since 1972. VINS' mission is to motivate individuals to care for the natural environment through education, research, and avian wildlife rehabilitation.

We offer locally relevant and compelling environmental education programs and services designed for a wide audience. Our programs combine environmental science concepts with hands-on exploration to build empathy for nature and empower individuals to care for local natural ecosystems.

VINS Nature Camp Mission & Philosophy

VINS Nature Camp helps young people develop the life skills and connections necessary to be a positive force for their community and the environment. By exploring the diversity of nature's living creatures and habitats, VINS Nature Camp nurtures each child's curiosity and helps them to build respectful and caring relationships with themselves, others, and the natural world.

At VINS Nature Camp, we have core values that inform all that we do from how we approach teaching and exploring the natural world, to how we interact with others. Those core values are:

- We recognize that curiosity and a love of learning are crucial to lifelong engagement.
- We believe that every individual has a capacity for scientific thinking and ecological awareness.
- We recognize the power of the individual to make a positive impact on the world.
- We believe in treating human and non-human nature with the utmost respect.

By recognizing these core values, VINS Nature Camp creates an environment that is inclusive, nurturing and exploratory. Campers develop friendships, learn new skills and grow more comfortable in a natural setting. Our goal is that when they leave VINS Nature Camp, they will have a better understanding of themselves and their relationships with the human and natural world.

General Camp Information

Camp Locations

VINS Nature Camp runs week-long camps at locations in both Vermont and New Hampshire.

Your camper will be participating in camp(s) held at the VINS Nature Center in Quechee, VT. The VINS Nature Center serves as the center of VINS' organizational operations. Our 47-acre campus features nature trails, exhibit spaces including the Forest Canopy Walk, observation platform, outdoor classroom and 17 state-of-the-art raptor enclosures. The campus' trails and paths wind visitors through a floodplain forest, along the Ottauquechee River, and through an upland meadow.

Age Groups

Camps are designed for specific age groups starting with pre-school through grade 8. VINS uses the following designations to identify camps and campers by age group:

- *Peeps* are children age 4 & 5 or entering kindergarten
- *Fledglings* are children entering grades 1-3
- *Falcons* are children entering grades 4-6
- *Eagles* are children entering grades 6-8

Camper Supervision

Camps will be staffed to comply or in some cases exceed American Camp Association staff/camper guidelines as follows:

- *Peeps*: 1 instructor to 6 campers
- *Fledglings*: 1 instructor to 6 campers
- *Falcons*: 1 instructor to 7 campers
- *Eagles* day camps: 1 instructor to 7 campers
- *Eagles* overnight camps: 1 instructor to 6 campers

Campers will be under the direct supervision of a camp instructor at all times.

Leader-In-Training

VINS Nature Camps' Leader-in-Training Program involves teens in our camp community by offering them the opportunity to volunteer in our fun, recreational setting while giving them experience working with groups of children in the outdoors. This specialized volunteer program is offered to individuals who are ages 14 through 17 and who will be entering or returning to high school in the fall.

Your camper's group may have up to two L-I-Ts assigned to them for the week. L-I-T volunteers are closely supervised by VINS Nature Camp staff and are designated responsibilities as appropriate, which may include leading group games, assisting specific campers, or helping to lead lessons/activities for the week.

Required Forms

VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form

The VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form must to be completed and returned at least **two weeks prior** to your child's first day of camp. This important information helps us prepare to welcome your child to camp and must be on file with VINS Nature Camp before any child is allowed to participate in a VINS camp.

Your child's Instructors will review these completed forms before the start of each camp week to become familiar with any allergies or special health-related needs of campers.

If you indicate a special need or health concern for your child on the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form, the Lead Nature Camp may contact you directly to discuss your child's particular needs and accommodations VINS can make to best serve your child.

Drop-off & Pick-up

Camper drop-off and pick-up is located at the east end of the VINS Nature Center parking lot.

Important: As you enter and exit our camp locations **there is a speed limit of 10 mph** to ensure the safety of campers, visitors, and wildlife.

Drop-off Time: 9:00 AM Monday – Friday.

Pick-up Time: 4:00 PM Monday –Thursday, **3:30 PM Friday**.

You must provide VINS with a list of all adults who are authorized to pick up your child **INCLUDING** yourself. **Each person must show an ID at the point of pickup.** The authorized pick-up list is included in the [VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form](#).

In the event that you are running late to drop-off or pick-up your camper email camps@vinsweb.org, call VINS' main line: (802) 359-5000 or text or call the VINS Nature Camp Cell Phone: (802) 359-2091 to notify VINS.

Visits

For the safety and privacy of all our campers, visits from parents/guardians or other family members or friends during the camp day are not permitted. There is designated time for parents/guardians to get to know and communicate with their camper's instructors each morning and afternoon during drop-off and pick-up.

Late Arrivals/Early Departures

If your camper will be arriving late or leaving early, please notify VINS Nature Camp at least one day prior so staff can plan accordingly. Contact the Lead Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245 or email camps@vinsweb.org. All late drop-offs or early pick-ups must check in with staff at the VINS Welcome Center/Nature Store. **Adults may not go directly to any location on the VINS Nature Center campus to retrieve their camper.**

A Day at Camp

Daily Schedule for Camps

9:00 AM	Drop-off When campers arrive at camp they will be checked-in by a VINS Nature Camp staff member, then directed to their respective camp meeting spaces. Parents/guardians may walk their camper to their meeting space. Instructors will have some ongoing activity to occupy campers until the whole group has arrived.
9:15 AM	Official Week Kick-Off and Welcome (Mondays) Group Games (other days of the week) Each Monday campers gather at our Campfire Ring to welcome everyone to camp then briefly review behavior code and expectations. Other days of the week, camps usually gather on the playing field for all-camp games.
9:45 AM	Guided Exploration on Daily Theme- Built in snack time During this 2+-hour activity block, Instructors lead lessons and activities pertaining to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic. All camps plan to take about a 20 minute snack break during this activity block.
12:00 PM	Lunch and Free Play Lunch generally happens at each camp's meeting space however, Instructors may decide to take the group on a picnic lunch on the trail or somewhere else at the camp location. Following lunch, campers will have designated time for supervised free play.

1:00 PM	Continued Exploration of the Daily Theme During this 2.5 hour activity block, Instructors lead more lessons and activities pertaining to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic. On Fridays at 2:30pm, all campers gathers for a closing campfire. Campers share a favorite memory from the week and roast a s'more.
3:30 PM	Wrap Up Activity Reflection is an important part of the day. It is a good opportunity for campers to review what they learned and share their experiences.
4:00 PM (3:30 PM Friday)	Pick-up/Free Play Parents/guardian are encouraged to check-in with their child's Instructors for a review of the day. Campers must be signed-out before leaving camp at the end of the day. In order to sign out their camper(s), adults picking up a child must present a photo ID to staff and initial their camper out for the day on the camp roster.

Note: Peeps and Overnight camp schedules will differ from this one.

Extended Day

VINS Nature Camp offers an extended day option from the end of the camp day until 5:30 PM, Monday – Friday on various weeks. You may register your child for this option on a weekly basis for \$50 per camper when available. If you would like your child to participate in our extended day program or to learn more about availability, please call the Lead Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245.

In the event that you are running late to pick-up your camper from our Extended Day program and it is after regular VINS Nature Center business hours (5:00 PM), email camps@vinsweb.org or call or text the VINS Nature Camp Cell Phone (802) 359-2091 to notify VINS staff. **Do not leave a voice message – You must speak to someone.**

Packing List

Your child should come to camp each day in casual, comfortable clothes, ready to hike, run, and likely get wet and dirty. Your camper should be dressed for the weather and be prepared to spend most of the day outdoors.

What to Pack/Wear

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Day pack to carry belongings | <input type="checkbox"/> Raincoat |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch | <input type="checkbox"/> Rain boots/shoes, if desired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> One or two snacks | <input type="checkbox"/> Empty plastic bag for bringing home wet clothes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle (water is available for refills) | <input type="checkbox"/> Medications (complete list of medications must be provided in the <u>VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Form</u>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complete change of clothes | <input type="checkbox"/> Bathing suit and towel ¹ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sturdy walking shoes (ex. sneakers or closed-toed sandals) | <input type="checkbox"/> Water shoes, if desired (ex. aqua socks, water sandals, or old sneakers) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insect repellent and sunscreen | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Baseball cap or sun hat | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sweatshirt or lightweight jacket | |

¹ This camp location does not have a swimming facility, however there are options for water play on hot days.

What NOT to Pack/Wear

- Video games, iPods, cell phones or any other electronic toys or devices
- Personal items or toys
- Flip flops or open-toed sandals
- Nice clothing that should not get wet or soiled
- Prescription or over-the-counter medications not listed in the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Form

Be sure to label all of your child's belongings. At the end of the camp season, all unclaimed lost and found items will be donated to the L.I.S.T.E.N. Center in White River Junction, VT.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

Parents/guardians are responsible for applying any topical skin applications, such as sunscreen or insect repellent to their child. Sunscreen along with insect repellent are strongly recommended. With permission from parents, VINS camp staff may assist children with the re-application of sunscreen or insect repellent. Permission for assistance applying sunscreen or insect repellent is given on the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form.

Transportation Policies

If your camper is participating in a camp that includes a field trip to an off-site location, you will be informed when registering for that camp offering. VINS will be responsible for transporting campers to and from any off-site field trip location.

All operators and passengers must wear seatbelts and/or other child restraint devices when riding in a VINS or VINS-rented vehicle. Parents/guardians must provide booster seats or other child restraint (if needed) on days when children are to be transported by camp staff.

VINS will have copies of driver's licenses on file of any staff member driving VINS Nature Camp participants. Campers will never be transported in a staff member's personal vehicle.

Photo Release

Parents/guardians will be asked to sign a photo release permitting VINS to use photo images of campers in newsletters, on our website, and in brochures and other promotional materials. If a parent/guardian has refused the photo release, VINS staff will not take photographs of that camper or if they do, must delete or crop out the image of the child.

Health Care Policies

Medication

If your camper will be taking any prescribed or over-the-counter medications while at VINS Nature Camp you must notify camp staff by completing the medications section of the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form. You must provide any necessary medication for your child and give that medication directly to your child's Camp Instructors.

All medications, including Epi-Pens, inhalers and any other lifesaving medications or medical devices, will be carried in the first aid kit of your camper's Instructor at all times.

Illness and Minor Injury

Please do not send your child to camp if s/he is ill.

If your child is injured or becomes sick or upset during the camp day VINS Nature Camp staff will provide any necessary care, including First Aid. If the injury or illness limits the child's ability to participate in camp activities, a camp staff member will contact you to pick up your child.

You will be notified by VINS Nature Camp staff at the end of the camp day of any minor First Aid administered to your child that does not limit their ability to participate in camp activities.

Emergencies and Serious Injury

All VINS camp staff members are certified in First Aid and CPR and are trained to respond to emergencies. In the event of a health emergency or serious injury, you will be contacted immediately. If VINS Nature Camp staff are unable to reach you, your emergency contact will be notified.

If necessary, your child will be transported by ambulance to the nearest appropriate medical facility. Camp participants will never be transported in a VINS staff member's personal vehicle. A camp staff member will remain with your child, including during transport, until you or your designated emergency contact arrives.

If an emergency or last minute change may influence pick-up times or locations, parents/guardians will be contacted by the Lead Nature Camp via email broadcast as well as by phone.

Food

You should plan to pack a lunch as well as one or two snacks each day for your camper. Additionally, please send your camper with a refillable water bottle each day. Hydration is important and for your camper's convenience, we have a filtered water filling station available.

Staff will supervise campers during lunch and snack times to encourage them to eat a good portion of their lunch and ensure that campers are not sharing their food with others. Campers should be informed not to share food for health and safety purposes.

Instructors will be aware of any food allergies in their group and take steps to ensure that campers avoid contact with their allergen. **PLEASE NOTE: VINS is NOT a peanut/tree nut-free site.** VINS cannot control the contents of lunches that our public visitors and other campers bring to our camp site and nature center. Children with severe nut or other food allergies will be provided a separate table to eat at and camp staff will check the lunches of other campers sitting with them to ensure their allergen is not present.

Behavior Policies

VINS Nature Camp is committed to providing each camp participant, whether a camper, Leader-In-Training, or staff member, with a safe, nurturing camp experience that accommodates individual needs and learning styles.

VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code

In order to maintain the safety and quality of our camp program, we expect that everyone understand and adhere to our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code. Please review the VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code with your child prior to their first day of camp.

VINS NATURE CAMP BEHAVIOR CODE

VINS Nature Camp's Behavior Code is based on the Five Finger Contract used by many adventure and challenge-by-choice programs. In our behavior code, we embrace five values, represented by each of the five fingers, which direct how we conduct ourselves at VINS Nature Camp.



- The **Pinky Finger** is the smallest and easiest to hurt which is why it represents **Safety** in our behavior code. When we look at our pinky, it reminds us to look out for the emotional and physical safety of others and ourselves, by following safety rules, using kind language, and keeping our hands to ourselves.
- People traditionally wear wedding bands on their **Ring Finger** to represent their **Commitment** to their partner. VINS Nature Camp expects participants commit themselves to the camp experience by participating in the activities of the day, being willing to try new things, and being open to facing challenges. This allows campers to get the most out of their camp experience.
- At VINS Nature Camp, the **Middle Finger** represents **Respect** for each other, ourselves, and the world around us. Camp participants practice working with others and seeing the capacity for good in everyone. While at camp, participants are also encouraged to think about ways to respect our camp environment.
- The **Pointer Finger** points; people often use it to point at others; at VINS Nature Camp we point this finger at ourselves. This finger reminds everyone about their **Responsibility** as part of a group. Everyone gets to choose how he or she behave. At VINS Nature Camp, children are taught to make their own choices and to take responsibility for their actions.
- “**Thumbs up**” is a universal gesture of approval. At VINS Nature Camp, the thumb reminds us to keep a positive attitude, encourage others and **HAVE FUN**. VINS Nature Camp curricula are designed so that campers will have fun while exploring nature and through those experiences build a better understanding of and appreciation for the natural world.

Behavior Management

VINS Nature Camp staff are trained in behavior management techniques and work with campers to resolve issues with their conduct. However, certain behaviors are deemed unacceptable at VINS Nature Camp; including, but not limited to, intentionally harming others, bullying, using abusive language or disobeying camp rules established at the start of the camp week.

In the event of unacceptable behavior, staff may issue the camper a ‘Strike’. VINS Nature Camp operates on a three-strike policy when dealing with discipline issues:

1st Strike – Parent or guardian will be notified of the behavior and ensuing ‘Strike’ at the end of the camp day. VINS Nature Camp staff will work with parents/guardians and the child to prevent the behavior in the future and make a plan for the rest of the week.

2nd Strike – Parent or guardian will be notified during camp hours of the behavior and ensuing ‘Strike’ and asked to pick up the camper immediately. Camper will be removed from camp for the remainder of the day. VINS Nature Camp staff will continue to work with parents/guardians and the

child to prevent the behavior in the future and make a plan for the child's return to camp the following day.

3rd Strike – Parent or guardian will be notified to pick up the camper immediately. The child will be removed from camp for the remainder of the week. No refund will be given in the event of an expulsion.

If you have any questions about our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code or our policies regarding discipline or expulsion, please contact Lead Nature Camp, at 802-359-5000 x245.

Cancellation Policy

If you must cancel your child's camp registration, refunds will be issued according to the following schedule:

- Cancellations made at least one month before the first day of your camp session will receive a full refund less a \$35 cancellation fee.
- Cancellations made one month - two weeks before the first day of your camp session will receive a 50% refund.
- Cancellations made less than two weeks before the first day of your camp session camp are not eligible for a refund.
- VINS will not provide refunds if a child misses one or more days of camp due to dismissal, illness, unexpected family obligations, or any other unforeseen factor.

VINS reserves the right to cancel camp programs due to low enrollment. In the event that a camp is cancelled due to low enrollment, VINS will work to place campers in other camps or refund the entire camp fee.