

Vacation Camp Handbook '23-'24



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Camp Hours:

9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

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 underway for an exciting camp full of adventure and discovery.

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.

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. 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.

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
Director Nature Camp
sstrew@vinsweb.org

Courtney Leo
Nature Camp Coordinator
cleo@vinsweb.org

Contact Information

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

Office Phone: 802-359-5000 EXT: 245
Cell Phone: 802-359-2091
Email: camps@vinsweb.org
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. Thousands of schoolchildren, teachers, conservation volunteers, and other adult learners from throughout New England participate in VINS' environmental education, research, and rehabilitation programs each year.

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 Location

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.

Camper Supervision

Campers will be under the direct supervision of a camp instructor at all times. Our Vacation Camps will be staffed to ensure a staff-to-camper ratio of 1 instructor to 7 campers.

Required Forms

VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form

The VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form must be completed and returned at least **two weeks before** 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 the camp week to become familiar with any allergies or special health-related needs of campers.

A link to this form is included in your registration confirmation or can be downloaded from the Camp Forms page on our website at <https://vinsweb.org/nature-camp/forms/>.

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

Drop-off & Pick-up

Drop-off and pick-up for our Vacation Camps is at VINS' Administration Building. When you come down VINS' driveway, bear left at the "T" and follow the driveway. An eventual "U-turn" to the right will bring you down to our staff parking lot. Park in the roundabout next to the large green Administration building and look for signs welcoming you to VINS Nature Camp.

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

Pick-up Time: 3:30 PM

If you are running late to pick up your camper email camps@vinsweb.org or call the VINS main line at (802) 359-5000. If you are calling after VINS Nature Center business hours (4:00 PM) call or text the VINS Nature Camp Cell Phone (802) 359-2091. **Do not leave a voice message – You must speak to someone.**

Authorized Pick-up List

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.

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 in advance so staff can plan accordingly. Contact the Director 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.**

Extended Day

VINS Nature Camp will not be offering an extended day option after the end of the camp day for either the Holiday or February Vacation camps this winter.

A Day at Camp

Daily Schedule for Vacation 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 camp meeting space. 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 Welcome and Introductions Group Games The first day of camp includes a welcome to camp and brief review of our behavior code and expectations. Other days of the session, campers will play various name games and other nature-themed games.
9:45 AM	Guided Exploration on Daily Theme- Built-in snack time During this 2+-hour activity block, Instructors lead lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to daily theme and lesson topics. There will be about a 20-minute snack break during this activity block.
12:00 PM	Lunch and Free Play There will be approximately 25 minutes designated for eating lunch. Following lunch, campers will have time for supervised outdoor free play, activities usually include sledding and playing in the snow.
1:00 PM	Continued Exploration of the Daily Theme During this 2-hour activity block, Instructors lead more lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic. On the last day of the camp session, campers gather for a closing campfire, share a favorite memory from the week and roast a s'more.
3:00 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.
3:30 PM	Pick-up Parents/guardians 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.

Packing List

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

What to Pack/Wear

- Day pack to carry belongings
- Lunch
- One or two snacks
- Water bottle (water is available for refills)
- Shoes for being indoors
- Snow boots
- Warm jacket
- Snow pants
- Complete change of clothes
- Long underwear or extra warm layers for going outside
- Hat and gloves/mittens
- Empty plastic bag for bringing home wet clothes
- Medications (complete list of medications must be provided in [VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Form](#))

What NOT to Pack/Wear

- Video games, iPods, cell phones, or any other electronic toys or devices
- Personal items or toys
- 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](#)

Please 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. Thrift Store in Lebanon, NH.

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 they are 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 Director 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 at VINS.

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 campsite 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

To maintain the safety and quality of our camp program, we expect that everyone understands and adheres to our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code. Please review the VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code with your child before 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 they 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 Director Nature Camp, at 802-359-5000 x245.

Inclement Weather

Winter weather can be unpredictable. In the event that the VINS Nature Center closes due to inclement weather all programs, including camp, will be cancelled. If VINS cancels a day of camp, parents/guardians will be informed via email no later than 7 AM that day. If VINS cancels camp, full refunds will be issued for that day's tuition.

Cancellation Policy

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

- Cancellations made at least two weeks before the first day of your camp session will receive a full refund (less a \$10 cancellation fee for Vacation Camps).
- Cancellations made less than two weeks before the first day of your camp session will not be 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. If a camp is canceled due to low enrollment, VINS will work to place campers in other camps or refund the entire camp fee.