

# Vacation Camp Handbook



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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 best 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 of Nature Camp  
[sstrew@vinsweb.org](mailto:sstrew@vinsweb.org)

Courtney Leo  
Nature Camp Coordinator  
[cleo@vinsweb.org](mailto: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](mailto: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.

### **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. Our goal is that campers develop friendships, learn new skills, and grow more comfortable in a natural setting.

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 upholding these core values, VINS Nature Camp strives to create an environment where every camper, volunteer and staff member feels valued for who they are and what they bring to our community. VINS is committed to ensuring that our camp program is free of harassment or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, genetic information, or any other category recognized by law. We are committed to respecting the rights and dignity of all by providing training for our staff who in turn model this culture of inclusion with campers.

## 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.

### **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.

### **Drop-off & Pick-up**

Drop-off and pick-up for our Vacation Camps is at VINS' Administration Building. At the bottom of VINS' paved entrance, bear left and follow the driveway to an eventual "U-turn" to the right which 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

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.**

If you are running late to drop off or pick up your camper email [camps@vinsweb.org](mailto: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 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 of Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245 or email [camps@vinsweb.org](mailto: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.**

### **After-Camp Care**

VINS Nature Camp does not offer After-Camp care for either Holiday or February Vacation camps.

## A Day at Camp

### Daily Schedule for Vacation Camps

<b>9:00 AM</b>	<p><b>Drop-off</b> 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.</p>
<b>9:15 AM</b>	<p><b>Official Welcome, Introductions and Games</b> 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.</p>
<b>9:45 AM</b>	<p><b>Guided Exploration on Daily Theme- Built-in snack time</b> 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.</p>
<b>12:00 PM</b>	<p><b>Lunch and Free Play</b> 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.</p>
<b>1:00 PM</b>	<p><b>Continued Exploration of the Daily Theme</b> 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.</p>
<b>3:00 PM</b>	<p><b>Wrap Up Activity</b> Reflection is an important part of the day. It is a good opportunity for campers to review what they learned and share their experiences.</p>
<b>3:30 PM</b>	<p><b>Pick-up</b> 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 <b>must present a photo ID</b> to staff and initial their camper out for the day on the camp roster.</p>



## What to Bring to Camp

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.

Be sure to label all your child's belongings so that lost items can be returned to you.

### **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)

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### **What NOT to Pack/Wear**

- Cell phones, tablets, or other smart devices including any wearable tech
- Items/toys of high monetary or sentimental value
- Nice clothing/jewelry that should not get wet or soiled
- Medications not listed in the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Form

### **Food**

You should plan to pack a lunch as well as one or two snacks each day for your camper. Our campers are outdoors and moving most of the day, we encourage families to pack high energy, high protein foods that will sustain campers for the whole day. If campers eat all the food packed for them and still report being hungry, we may offer them a snack item stocked by VINS.

Hydration is important as campers move about even in cold weather. Please send your camper with a water bottle each day. Our camp site has access to potable water for refilling water bottles.

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 groups 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.

### **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 of Nature Camp via email broadcast as well as by phone.

### **Support and Accommodations**

VINS Nature Camp is committed to providing each camp participant with a safe, nurturing camp experience that accommodates individual needs, abilities, and learning styles.

We work to keep camp programs as accessible as possible given the limitations of our facilities, terrain, the scope of our staff training, and our camper to staff ratios. If you are registering a camper with medical or behavioral support needs, please contact the Director of Nature Camp so that we can discuss a plan to provide your camper with a positive, safe, and empowering camp experience.

If you are registering a camper with a disability, please contact the Director of Nature Camp to discuss accommodations and support that VINS Nature Camp may be able to provide to support your camper in our unique camp environment.

## 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. It reminds us to look out for the emotional and physical safety of others and ourselves, by following safety rules, using kind language, and respecting boundaries.
- People traditionally wear wedding bands on their **Ring Finger** to represent their **Commitment** to their partner. VINS Nature Camp expects participants to commit themselves to the camp experience by participating in each day's activities, 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 natural spaces and wildlife.
- 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. VINS Nature Camp participants 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 believes in ensuring a safe, welcoming community in which all our camp participants can thrive. We recognize that everyone can make mistakes and approach behavior management through the lens of fostering growth within our campers. Our staff are trained to help campers take ownership for their mistakes, recognize what they could do differently, and make a plan to prevent that behavior in the future.

At any time, if behavior is unsafe (to self or others) including, but not limited to, causing physical harm, bullying, leaving the group, or using abusive/discriminatory language, a camper will be removed from the activity and required to take some time to refocus, make a plan to move forward, and make amends, if appropriate, before rejoining their group.

VINS Nature Camp recognizes that parents/guardians are our best allies in helping campers work to meet our expectations for behavior at camp. VINS Nature Camp staff will communicate and work closely with parents/guardians to develop plans for managing negative or unsafe behavior at camp.

If negative or unsafe behaviors continue or campers are unwilling to make an effort to meet our expectations, a camper may be dismissed from VINS Nature Camp at the discretion of the Director of Nature Camp. No refund will be given in the event of dismissal from camp.

If you have any questions about our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code or our policies regarding behavior management, please contact the Director of Nature Camp, at 802-359-5000 x245 or email [camps@vinsweb.org](mailto:camps@vinsweb.org).

## 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.

## Questions/Comments/Concerns?

Thank you for taking the time to read through our policies. If you have any questions about this handbook, please contact the Director of Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245 or email [camps@vinsweb.org](mailto:camps@vinsweb.org).

**We look forward to another wonderful  
season of  
VINS Vacation Camps!**

