

Family Camp Handbook



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Owl Prowl Add-on
End of camp day to 5:30 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, camp location, 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 camp starts.

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 family.

Warm regards,

Sarah Strew
Director of Nature Camp
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Courtney Leo
Nature Camp Coordinator
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Contact Information

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Who We Are

Organization

The 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 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, our core values 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 Locations

Your family will be participating in a camp 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

Our Family Camp is designed for families with children ages 5 – 11.

Leader-In-Training

VINS Nature Camps' Leader-in-Training (L-I-T) 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 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 camp group may have up to two L-I-Ts assigned to them for the day. 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 day.

A Day at Camp

Parking for our Family Camp participants will be 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 that lot 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.

Start of Camp: 9:00 AM

End of Camp: 4:00 PM

Owl Prowl Add-on Time: End of camp day to 5:30 PM

If you are running late for camp 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.

Daily Schedule

9:00 AM	<p>Arrival When campers arrive at camp they will be checked in by a VINS Nature Camp staff member, then directed to their camp meeting space. Camp staff will have some ongoing activity to occupy campers until the whole group has arrived.</p>
9:15 AM	<p>Official Welcome and Introductions Group Games The first activities of the day will include a welcome to camp and brief review of our behavior code and expectations along with some name games and other nature-themed games.</p>
9:45 AM	<p>Guided Exploration on Daily Theme- Built-in snack time During this 2+-hour activity block, staff will lead lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to day's theme and lesson topics. There will be about a 20-minute snack break during this activity block.</p>
12:00 PM	<p>Lunch and Free Play There will be approximately 25 minutes designated for eating lunch. Following lunch, camp participants will have time for supervised outdoor free play, activities usually include sledding and playing in the snow.</p>



1:00 PM	Continued Exploration of the Daily Theme During this 2-hour activity block, camp staff lead more lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic.
3:00 PM	Closing Campfire Reflection is an important part of the camp experience. At the end of the camp day, we gather for a closing campfire, share a favorite memory and roast a s'more.
4:00 PM	End of Day
4:00 PM	Owl Prowl Add-on Families staying for the Owl Prowl will have a brief snack break before heading out on the trails to call for owls. The Owl Prowl will end at 5:30 PM.

What to Bring to Camp

Your family should come to camp in casual, comfortable clothes, ready to run, play, and likely get dirty and wet. Everyone 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 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 bottles (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
- Necessary medications
- Snowshoes (if you have them)
- Headlamps or flashlights (if attending the Owl Prowl)

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

Food

You should plan to pack a lunch as well as one or two snacks for your family members. Our camp participants are outdoors and moving most of the day, we encourage families to pack high energy, high protein foods that will sustain everyone for the whole day.

Hydration is important as campers move about, even in cold weather. Please bring water bottles for your family members. Our camp site has access to potable water for refilling water bottles.

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. If one of your family members has a severe nut or other food allergies please inform camp staff upon your arrival. We can provide a separate table for your family to eat at 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 them and their child(ren) 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 camp participant or if they do, must delete or crop out the image of the individual.



Health Care Policies

Medication

If any member of your family will be taking any prescribed or over-the-counter medications while at VINS Nature Camp you must notify camp staff upon arrival for VINS' Family Camp. You are responsible for keeping that medication secured in your bag and administering it to your family member.

All medications, including Epi-Pens, inhalers, and any other lifesaving medications or medical devices, should be carried on your person all times.

Illness and Injury

If one of your family members is ill, please do not bring them with you to Family Camp.

All VINS camp staff members are certified in First Aid and CPR and are trained to respond and give care.

In the event of a health emergency or serious injury, VINS will contact emergency medical services on your behalf.

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 family member 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 family member 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 that individual in our unique camp environment.

Behavior Policies

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 family before arriving at 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. This behavior code highlights five principles, represented by each of the five fingers. Each principle informs 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 camp participants. Our staff are trained to help camp participants 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 camp participants 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 children 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 camp participants are unwilling to make an effort to meet our expectations, that individual 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.

Inclement Weather

Winter weather can be unpredictable. In the event that the VINS Nature Center closes due to inclement weather all programs, including Family 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 Family Camp registration, refunds will be issued according to the following schedule:

- Cancellations made at least two weeks before the program date will receive a full refund (less a \$10 cancellation fee for Vacation Camps).
- Cancellations made less than two weeks before the program date will not be eligible for a refund.
- VINS will not provide refunds if a participant misses 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.

We look forward to lots of fun this winter!

