

Peeps Camp Handbook 2026



Contents:

Contact Information	1
Who We Are	2
General Camp Information	2
Drop-off & Pick Up	3
A Day at Camp	4
What to Bring to Camp	4
Photo Release	6
Health Care Policies	6
Behavior Policies	7
Cancellation Policy	8

Camp Hours*:

9:00 AM – 1:00 PM

Monday – Friday

**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.

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 of Nature Camp
ssrew@vinsweb.org

Kelly Marqua
Nature Camp Coordinator
kmarqua@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

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

VINS Nature Camp runs weeklong 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 preschool through grade 8. VINS uses the following designations to identify camps and campers by age group:

- *Peeps* are children age 4 & 5 and entering Pre-K or 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 with or in some cases exceed staff to camper ratios recommended by the American Camp Association

- *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
- *Falcons & 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 (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 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

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: 1:00 PM Monday - 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.**

If 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 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 Director of Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245 or email camps@vinsweb.org. All late drop-offs or early pick-ups must check in 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 Peeps 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	Guided Exploration on Daily Theme- Built-in snack time During this activity block, Instructors lead lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic. All camps take about a 15-minute snack break during this activity block.	
11:00 AM	Guided Arts & Crafts Project During this 45-minute activity time, Instructors lead a creative art project that relates to the theme for the day.	
11:45 AM	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.	
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 either supervised free play or exploration of one of VINS' many exhibit spaces.	
1:00 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. To sign out their camper(s), adults picking up a child must present a photo ID.	

What to Bring to Camp

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

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

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 for water play on hot days |
| <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 | |
-

What NOT to Pack/Wear

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cell phones, tablets, or other smart devices including any wearable tech | <input type="checkbox"/> Nice clothing/jewelry that should not get wet or soiled |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Items/toys of high monetary or sentimental value | <input type="checkbox"/> Prescription or over-the-counter medications not listed in the <u>VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Form</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flip flops or open-toed sandals | |

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 in hot weather. Please send your camper with a water bottle each day. Our camp sites have 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.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

Parents/guardians are responsible for applying any topical skin applications, such as sunscreen or insect repellent to their child. Sunscreen and 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.

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, will 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 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. 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 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.

Cancellation Policy

May 1, 2026, is the deadline to cancel your camp registration and receive a full refund (less a \$15 cancellation fee).

If you must cancel your child's camp registration after the deadline, 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 50% refund.
- Cancellations made **less than one month** before the first day of your camp session 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. 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 another wonderful summer of VINS Nature Camp!

