

**VERMONT  
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SCHOOL**

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Dear Parents,

We are very happy to have your child with us for the week of Art of Mentoring! We look forward to the opportunity for your children to learn and grow with our exceptional staff of regional nature connection mentors.

The Art of Mentoring is a complex cultural system including youth, teens, adult participants, parents, staff, a working kitchen, the grounds & facility, and an overall organizational system to coordinate it all. From years of working with large groups of people in small spaces, we have learned a few guidelines and boundaries that support a happy and healthy community at AoM. The intention of this letter is to share those with you. Please read this letter and packing list thoroughly!

**Flexibility:** Throughout the week slight changes in scheduling will occur. We ask in advance for your flexibility and trust. 😊

**Parent Meeting:** There will be a **MANDATORY PARENT MEETING with the youth program leaders at 5:00 PM ON MONDAY AUGUST 29 (the first evening of the program)**. Essential information will be shared at this parent meeting – please don't miss it. Staff will be on hand to play with your children during the meeting.

**Communication:** There will be several support structures in place for clear communication between parents and youth staff. These will be presented at our 5 pm parent meeting.

**Youth Boundaries:** We ask that there be no children in the presentation hall during adult program/presentation times. Children are welcome in that space during our family programming in the evening. Kitchen and staff meeting spaces are off limits to youth.

**Bedtime:** We will do our best to end between 8:30 and 9:00 pm each night, creating a space for parents and children to go off to their bedtime routines. If your child needs to go to bed earlier, we request that you consciously tend to your child's needs for the sake of you, your child, and the whole community. We have found that after all day outdoors and the excitement of new friends and 100+ other people, the children may be more tired than they appear. We appreciate your effort!

**Drop off and pick up:** Starting Tuesday morning, there will be scheduled drop off and pick up times for the youth program. You will be required to be at the designated location at those times to deliver and receive your children.

**Overnight:** On Wednesday night of the program, both the adult program and youth programs will go on outdoor overnight adventures. Youth ages 7-11 (Red

Squirrels) go on their own overnight, with youth program instructors. Youth ages 4-6 (Chipmunks) generally join their parents and spend the night with the adult program's campout. Children under age 4 (not in the Youth Program) can also join the adult program's campout. We'll discuss the overnight in more detail during the workshop. In the meantime, please feel free to discuss any questions specific to your child with the Youth Programs Coordinator on arrival day.

**Mealtimes:** Meals take place in a large dining room. Children (age 12 + under), Adult Participants, Staff, and Volunteers all eat together (with one exception: the Wednesday overnight for ages 7+). Please be with your children during mealtimes.

**Medical Needs:** If your child has any important allergies or medical needs, please let the Youth Program Coordinator know in person on arrival day. This is **in addition** to writing it in your child's Medical Form. This will help ensure that we fully understand your child's needs.

**Packing List:** Please read the youth program's packing list on the next page in detail.

We are looking forward to seeing you all at Indian Brook Camp very soon!

Best regards,

Dan Yacobellis, Art of Mentoring Youth Program Coordinator  
Sam Stegeman, Director, Vermont Wilderness School

## ***For Parents with children aged 7 and under:***

So much about having young children at the Art of Mentoring is a delight: seeing your child woven into the multi-generational AoM village; watching your child's delight as they romp with the youth staff; sharing meals with other parents of young ones; and witnessing your child's growing independence within the community are all elements we see parents enjoying every year at the Art of Mentoring.

And there are aspects to having a young child at AoM that can be challenging. If you have never attended before, you may find AoM to be a very intense experience. There is always a lot going on, starting early in the morning and wending late into the night. The stimulation of the dining hall is very high and can be overwhelming. In addition, the transformational experience of the adult program may bring up strong emotions for you, which can be challenging to process while also caring for a very young child. Just getting yourself up and ready for the day can be taxing enough, and getting your child ready as well while camping with primitive

conditions can be exhausting. Your child may also need extra care and connection with you, pulling you out of your adult programming when you would really love to play with the grown-ups!

We don't share this to deter you from bringing your child. On the contrary, having young children at AoM adds a special joy that feeds the entire community. We just want you to come with realistic expectations around how your adult experience may need to be adjusted in order to meet the needs of your child within this new environment.

Having experimented with many ways to work with parents and young children at the AoM over the past 15 years, we are aware that every family is different and every child is different. Some young children are ready to run off with the youth staff without a glance back at mom or dad. Others take half the week adjusting to the new environment and weaning themselves of the comfort of familiar arms to hold them.

For this reason, **we require that parents children 3 and under bring a designated caregiver** that will be connected with the child all week. This allows the parent to fully attend the program, while keeping the emotional needs of the child fully met. The caregiver/young child pair is welcome to participate in the youth program, or stay close to the village hearth where there are staff facilitating the village hearth experience. There is one staff member solely dedicated to supporting this group of young children and their caregivers.

**For families of children 4-5 years old, bringing a caregiver is recommended but not required.** This can be decided in conversation with Dan Yacobellis, our Youth Program coordinator. The following questions may help guide you to a decision about whether bringing a caregiver is the right step for your family:

- Does your child currently participate in outdoor programs?
- Has your child been involved in full day activities without you or other family members?
- Does your child have napping needs? What happens if naps are skipped?
- Is potty training complete?
- How would you feel if your child wanted you to stay with him or her after lunch instead of returning to your adult program?
- Are you prepared to miss major components of your program if your child needs you?
- How does your child flow with changes to his or her routine?
- How do you think your child would do if you are involved in evening programming without them?

## ***For parents with children aged 6-11:***

***Your child can participate in the youth program independently,*** and we do not anticipate that your program experience will be curtailed, with the exception of some evening programming. Our youth staff is off duty after dinner and you will need to put your child to bed before the evening programming is complete. However, each child is different, and no one knows your child better than you do! Please discuss your child's anticipated needs with the Youth Program coordinator before AoM.

## Youth Program - Packing List

*Below is a list of clothing and equipment your child will need during the youth program sessions (2 sessions per day, plus the youth overnight).*

***This list is in addition to the items on the Adult Program Packing List.***

### Footwear

- ❑ **Socks** Medium-heavy weight synthetic or wool
- ❑ **Hiking boots** Waterproof and ankle high (sturdy sneakers are a poor second choice)
- ❑ **Sturdy Sneakers** Or other non-waterproof shoes for dry weather days

### Clothing

*Depending on the day's weather, your child may need some or all of the warm clothing listed below. Bring EARTH-TONED clothing that you don't mind getting dirty! **We may be outside in cold, wet weather**, so our clothing needs to keep us warm. **It is essential to have good raingear, waterproof boots, a warm hat, and non-cotton insulating layers** to avoid being cold and uncomfortable and to prevent dangerous chilling (hypothermia). **Cotton loses all insulating value when wet.***

- ❑ **Long Underwear** Top and bottom. Synthetic, wool or silk is preferred.
- ❑ **Warm Pants** Wool or fleece pants are best. Cotton with rain pants will do.
- ❑ **Layers for Torso** Wool or fleece sweater, shirt, etc. **Wool or synthetic is strongly preferred over cotton or 50/50. Make sure TWO layers can fit over each other.**
- ❑ **Warm Hat** Wool or synthetic.
- ❑ **Jacket** A warm jacket or coat.
- ❑ **Rain gear** Rain jacket or poncho.
- ❑ **Day pack** Big enough to contain extra clothing, water bottle and other gear.
- ❑ **Knife** Optional - if your child has experience using knives safely. Locking blade or sheathed (preferred), sturdy with a 3-4" blade

### Miscellaneous

- ❑ **Water bottle** Quart sized
- ❑ **Towel & swim gear**
- ❑ **Pencil or pen** Optional
- ❑ **Pocket notebook** Optional
- ❑ **Sun hat/Sun screen** Optional
- ❑ **Insect Repellent** Optional

***Final Weather Reminder:*** It can be rainy and cold in the low 50s and as warm as the high 80s in the end of August in the Green Mountains. Plan for being outside in the worst of it, and you'll be fine.