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## **Important information for parents and caregivers attending the Art of Mentoring with children!**

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 their delight as they romp with the youth staff, and witnessing your child's growing independence within the community are all elements we see parents and caregivers enjoying every year at the Art of Mentoring.

And there are aspects to having a young child at AoM that can be very challenging. If you have never attended before, you may find it to be an 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 high and can be overwhelming. Combining all these factors with primitive camping conditions or bad weather can lead to an exhausting experience.

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 in this new environment.

### **AGES 0-3**

In 2017 we created the Oaks & Acorns program for **children 3 and under**. The child is joined in this program by you, their parent, guardian, or caregiver. You will not be away from your child during the week, and you can expect to fully participate in the Oaks & Acorns program. You will not be participating in the Adult First Year program, but certain events throughout the week are inclusive of everyone present, young and old. Parents and caregivers report that Oaks & Acorns is a nourishing experience— it's designed to support you rather than stress you out!

### **AGES 4-5**

**The trickiest ages, we have found, are 4 and 5, for a few reasons:**

- You will be separating from your child twice a day, for two sessions (a total of 6 and a half hours). We are aware that every family is different, and every child is different. Some 4- and 5-year-olds are ready to run off with the youth staff without even a glance back to you. Others take half the week adjusting to the new environment and weaning themselves of the comfort of familiar arms to hold them. Our experienced staff will work with you to support easing these transitions. Also, your child will be able to choose between going on an overnight trip with the youth staff or staying with you for the night.
- You will be participating in an immersion experience during the times you are away from your child. The experience of the Adult Program may bring up strong emotions for you, which can be challenging to process while also caring for a young child. Your child may also need extra care and connection with you at times, pulling you out of your adult programming when you would really love to play with the other grown-ups!
- If you do not have a partner or caregiver present, you will miss some elements of the Adult Program. The format of programs is similar to a day camp running from Tuesday morning through Saturday morning. (Monday the children are fully incorporated in community events with their parents.) The Youth Program makes it possible for you to participate in most of the Adult Program activities throughout the week, including a possible overnight campout (on which your 4-5 year old can join you). However, parents and caregivers must supervise their children at all **meal times** as well as during the **early evening and bedtime**. For this reason, unless you have a partner or caregiver present you will not be able to participate for the evening workshop sessions.

Having seen many families with 4- and 5-year-olds at AoM since 1999, we can say that a very helpful approach is to bring with you an additional person who will be a **designated caregiver** for your child all week. This allows you to fully attend your program, while keeping the emotional needs of your child better met. The caregiver is welcome to participate in the youth program, or they can stay close to the village hearth, where there is always something interesting going on. The cost to bring a caregiver is \$275, which covers food and overhead costs.

The following questions may help guide you to a decision about whether bringing a caregiver is the right step for you:

- Does your child currently participate in outdoor programs?
- How does your child flow with changes to their routine?
- Has your child been involved in full day activities without you?
- 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 them after lunch instead of returning to your Adult Program?
- Are you prepared to miss parts of your program if your child needs you?
- How do you think your child would do if you are attending evening programming after they have gone to bed?

**For families of children 4-5 years old, bringing a caregiver is recommended but not required.** Please contact send an email to [office@vermontwildernessschool.org](mailto:office@vermontwildernessschool.org) to be put in touch with our Youth Program Director if you want to talk it through.

### **AGES 6-12**

For parents with children aged 6-12, your child can participate in the youth program independently, and we do not anticipate that your adult programming 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!

Thank you. We look forward to seeing you in August!

-The AoM Staff