



Through The Trees Handbook

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Section One - About Through The Trees

Through the Trees is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization located in a beautiful forest setting in Freeport, Maine offering enrichment programs for youth and classes and programs for adults.

VISION

To bring more peace, freedom and sense of belonging into the world by connecting people to nature, themselves and a thriving community.

MISSION

To gently guide and invite people to connect with the wonders of nature by providing transformational experiences that awaken and enliven the mind, body and soul.

Our approach is three-pronged and caters to all ages; 1) We invite peace, freedom and deep healing opportunities through *Nature Immersion and Connection*. 2) We provide opportunities that forge resilience, confidence and humility through *Nature Engagement*. 3) We offer opportunities to take action in tending to our Earth, fostering a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging and fulfillment through *Nature Stewardship and Service*.

ROOT VALUES

Be Safe

Be Respectful

Be Kind

Be Responsible

Be Mindful

Be Your Best Self

Have Fun!

THROUGH THE TREES STAFF

Guide - Experienced Adult Program Leader

- CPR and First Aid Certified
- Registered Maine Guide
- Passionate about Nature and building Communities
- Proficient at leading and Managing groups in all 4 seasons in Maine
- Minimum of 1 year experience on the Through The Trees Staff

Mentor - Trained Adult Program Staff

- CPR and First Aid Certified
- Training to become a Registered Maine Guide
- Passionate about Nature and building Communities
- Compassionate leader

Junior Mentor - Teen Mentor in Training providing support for the Staff

Section Two - Community Agreement

At Through The Trees, we operate and are guided by our Root Values. Our goal is to share, teach and maintain these Root Values through modeling, conversation, gentle redirection, and the setting of clear boundaries. We expect our participants to show *investment* in and *progress* toward embodying these values. We do not expect perfection, however, participants, Guides, and Mentors in our programs need to work together to create a culture that personifies these values. If a participant is consistently showing that they are unable or unwilling to uphold a basic standard of behavior, they may be asked to take a break, adjust their schedule or discontinue participation in our programs.

A DEEPER LOOK INTO OUR ROOT VALUES

BE SAFE

Safety is our #1 value. We strongly believe that embracing a healthy relationship with risk taking and risk management is essential to maximize each individual's own personal safety, boundaries, creativity and development. At Through The Trees, safety and safety decisions are something that we discuss often and empower participants to make for themselves whenever possible.

Additionally, natural boundaries that are set and explained must be respected, so that our Guides and Mentors know where participants are at all times. If a participant is consistently unable to follow a basic instruction from a Guide or Mentor like: "Please don't add wood to the fire without permission," or "everyone please place your sticks on the ground," or "stay where you can see me and hear when I call," they may not be a good fit for our programs.

BE RESPECTFUL

We ask our participants to be respectful toward themselves, each other and our Guides and Mentors. This can manifest as listening when others are talking, honoring others' needs, and regarding others' words and feelings as important. All our participants are expected to treat one another with respect and avoid harsh or hurtful words and actions.

Our participants need to demonstrate a healthy respect for our Guides and Mentors whose job is to maintain the safety and enjoyment of the whole group. Our skilled Guides and Mentors lead with kindness and consideration for the needs of all participants to the best of our ability. We cannot tolerate blatant disrespect toward rules or expectations that are laid out by our staff.

We also ask that all members of our community respect one another's personal space and belongings. Any participant who consistently shows a lack of respect for others' personal boundaries or defaces property may be asked to leave our programs.

BE KIND

We foster an environment that feels emotionally safe. We work to create a culture of kindness and empathy. Social and emotional learning are a large part of our programs. Being together in the natural world creates ample opportunity to build teamwork and learn to overcome our differences. Disagreements are a natural part of life, but we ask our community members to work with us to resolve disputes with kindness and respect.

BE RESPONSIBLE

Participants are expected to be responsible for being prepared with the appropriate gear and provisions to help support their experience at Through The Trees. We expect them to keep track of and take good care of their own gear and group gear, as well as being good stewards of the earth by helping to keep trails and campsites clean. Taking responsibility for one's own actions, such as returning items when borrowed, letting a Guide or Mentor know if something is damaged or if a participant makes a mistake that needs to be remedied is also important.

BE MINDFUL

Mindfulness is an important part of interacting with the natural world. We must learn to slow ourselves down and widen our awareness as we seek to develop wilderness skills and learn what nature has to teach us. We invite our participants to incrementally become more mindful. Everyone begins from a different place, but we ask our participants to be open to slowing down and becoming more aware of themselves and their surroundings.

BE YOUR BEST SELF

We embrace the philosophy that we are all students of life and are constantly striving to grow, learn and become better versions of ourselves everyday. We know everyone is at different places and phases of life and we respect everyone's individual nature and path. We expect all participants to bring their best selves to Through The Trees on most days and on the days when a participant is not feeling their best, they are open and honest about it so we can help support them through their hard day.

HAVE FUN!

We want Through The Trees to be a place everyone wants to be! Enjoying time together in a light-hearted and joyful manner helps everyone to feel safe, welcome and free to be themselves. We strive to create a "yes" environment where there are lots of smiles, laughter, learning and growth.

BEHAVIOR IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

If during our program a participant lacks self-control, particularly in the areas of safety, kindness, and respect, a Guide or Mentor will separate them from the group and sit with them until they regain their control to resume normal activity. It is understood that all participants need to learn to respond to their emotions in a constructive manner, and for various reasons, not all are able to do this regularly. At no time will harsh punishment be used, nor will the participant be neglected. One function of the programs at Through the Trees is to guide participants through this process of developing self-discipline and self-awareness in a group setting.

Our program is not staffed for extended one-on-one time between our staff and a participant. If a participant shows some of the following behavior day after day and it cannot be modified and/or they begin to require one-on-one attention for extended periods, we may request that they have a reduced schedule or leave the program.

Unfavorable behaviors includes:

1. Being overly aggressive
2. Repeated physical or verbal assaults to others
3. Distracting behavior when the group is meeting to discuss safety
4. Wandering away from the group area
5. Inability to follow simple requests or instructions
7. Destructive to the space, group gear or others' belongings

If the above behavior occurs on a frequent basis, and has not improved after redirection, we will follow the following protocol:

1. The Guide will initiate a conversation with appropriate parties to discuss the behavior and ways we can help support a change in behavior.
2. Possible adjustments may occur to help change behavior:
 - a. Reduce the participant's schedule for example, participant comes for half a day instead of a full day.
 - b. Take a break from the program until a later date.
 - c. Withdraw from the program.

The measures taken are in the best interest of the participant, the parents, the other participants and our staff.

Section Three - COVID-19 Protocol

Because Maine State guidelines are constantly changing, our Covid policies also change. For our current policy please visit our [FAQ page](#) on our website. Fortunately, our program is completely outdoors with little to no surface contact, and based on current research, transmission is rare in outdoor spaces. It is important to us to support all of our families with their needs and comfort levels with Covid.

Section Four - Fire, Knife and Tool Protocols

Participants in our programs learn to work with fire, pocket knives and tools. Our Guides and Mentors walk them through understanding how to mitigate risk by employing the following protocols. We encourage parents to review these policies and if you are comfortable allowing practice at home, please try to follow similar procedures to help maintain safety and consistency.

Fire Safety Protocol - Through The Trees Fire Safety Agreement

STOP - *Make sure you have permission and are in a good physical, emotional and mental space.*

1. Did you get permission from a TTT's leader before you begin?
2. Physical - Make sure no one else is within arm's reach.
3. Emotional - You are in a controlled state where you are able to make smart and safe decisions.
4. Mental - You are feeling alert and ready to focus on what you are doing and what is happening in your surroundings.

PREPARE - *Before building the fire: Look at your space, clear an area and remove leaves, sticks, and other burnable materials. Look above and around you. Use rocks that you find to make a fire ring/area if available.*

OVERSEE - *Make sure your fire is safely under control.*

1. Don't make the fire too big. A standard rule of thumb, 12x12x12 - fire ring is no more than 12 inches in diameter and flames are no more than 12 inches high.
2. Never leave a fire unattended.
3. Stay at least three feet away from the fire unless you have to get closer to tend to it.
4. Don't poke the fire needlessly or throw things in the fire.
5. Do not run around or near a fire.

EXTINGUISH - *Make sure you safely conclude your fire experience.*

1. Have a means to extinguish the fire - have a water bucket, snow or dirt/soil.
2. Make sure the fire is completely out before you leave it. This means that you can put your hand where the fire was and not feel any heat.

LEVELS OF FIRE PROFICIENCY

We have designated five levels to clearly distinguish fire building proficiency. This helps us and the participant be aligned on where they are on their fire building journey and what they are allowed to do while at Through The Trees.

Level 1: *Learn and accept basic fire safety rules and have been introduced to the Through The Trees Fire Safety Agreement. Can safely light a match.*

Level 2: *Demonstrate enough self control that allows Guides and Mentors to feel comfortable teaching fire building. Practice reciting the Through The Trees Fire Safety Agreement. Understand the fire triangle and natural materials needed to build a fire. Can practice building a fire with a Guide or Mentor.*

Level 3: *Collects own materials, builds and lights own fire with supervision and permission.*

Level 4: *Complete challenges: three-match challenge, one-match challenge, timed fire challenge, water boil challenge. Practice making flint and steel fire.*

Level 5: *Build and tend a fire of your own with permission. Know how to choose a site for fire and create a fire ring or pit. Demonstrate an understanding of leave no trace principles. Helps support others in their fire building skills.*

Knife and Tools Safety Protocol & Agreement

STOP - *Make sure you are in a good physical, emotional and mental space.*

1. Did you get permission from a TTT's leader before you begin?
2. Physical - Make sure no one else is within arm's reach.
3. Emotional - You are in a controlled state where you are able to make smart and safe decisions.
4. Mental - You are feeling alert and ready to focus on what you are doing and what is happening in your surroundings.

AWAY - *always cut away from your finger or other body parts*

SHARP - *a sharp, clean knife is a safe knife*

STORE - *knives are closed, in a sheath and put away when not in use*

LEVELS OF KNIFE & TOOL USE PROFICIENCY

We have designated five levels to clearly distinguish knife and tool use proficiency. This helps us and the participant be aligned on where they are on their knife and tool use journey and what they are allowed to do while at Through The Trees.

Level 1: *Able to recite and apply our Knife and Tool Safety Agreement - SASS*

Level 2: *Use a knife to cut vegetables, use a peeler to shave bark off sticks, basic hammer skills. Discussion and recitation of basic knife/tool safety.*

Level 3: *Use a saw with protective glove and begin whittling with a knife protective glove, both with close adult supervision.*

Level 4: *Use a saw or pocket knife with permission. Understand and recite hatchet safety rules. Use a hatchet with close Adult supervision.*

Level 5: *Use your own tools responsibly. Use a hatchet with permission. Can carry your knife on your person.*

Section Five - Gear & Food List

At Through the Trees, we are outdoors every day, in rain, snow or shine! We love to fully immerse ourselves into the elements which means we often leave pretty dirty. Only extreme weather may bring us into a tent or shelter for short periods of time during our day. To help ensure a comfortable day at Through The Trees, it is required that all participants bring the items below (labeled) each day. We have provided links to where you can buy these items.

As you prepare for a day at Through The Trees, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What does the weather forecast tell me about the day ahead?
2. What should be worn to program and what should be packed in their backpack based on the weather forecast? If it is at all wet or snowy, please make sure waterproof layers are on their body at drop off.

It is best to avoid cotton clothing in cold weather as cotton absorbs moisture when we sweat. Because it dries slowly, it makes us work harder to stay warm. We recommend good quality wool, fleece or synthetic layers for year round comfort.

SUMMER

- FOOTWEAR
 - Light wool or synthetic socks
 - Sneakers, hiking boots or closed toed sandals (like Keens) for dry days
 - Rain boots on rainy days
- STANDARD CLOTHING
 - Long pants that can be tucked into socks (for tick management)
 - Short AND Long sleeve shirt
- LAYERS - Based on your answers to the questions above about weather
 - Extra layer - long sleeve fleece or wool shirt in the their backpack
 - Top layer - **Waterproof** Rain Pants or bibs & Jacket if needed for weather
- HEAD & HANDS
 - Sun hat
 - Work Gloves (optional but helpful)
- EXTRA CLOTHING - Pack extra clothing in a plastic bag in a backpack.
 - Pants
 - Short sleeve Shirt
 - Long Sleeve Shirt
 - Socks
 - Underwear
 - Water shoes or other shoes that can get wet
- FOOD & FOOD GEAR
 - Kids are very active all day and eat a lot of food. Good options are foods with healthy fats and protein like nut/seed butter, nuts, trail mix, cheese, jerky, bacon, hard boiled eggs. Avoid foods high in sugar. Kids get extra hungry being outdoors, so pack extra!
 - Full Water bottle
 - Camp mug
- OTHER
 - Camp hammock (optional, but very helpful)
 - Journal and pens/pencils/markers
 - Small Tarp and 50ft. of paracord (optional)
 - Sunscreen
 - Bug Spray

EARLY FALL/LATE SPRING

- FOOTWEAR
 - Light to mid-weight wool socks (For feet that get cold easily, double up on light to mid-weight wool or use a moisture-wicking sock liner.)
 - Sneakers or hiking boots for dry days
 - Waterproof** boots for wet days
- STANDARD CLOTHING
 - Long pants
 - Long sleeve shirt
- LAYERS - Based on your answers to the questions above about weather
 - Extra layer - long sleeve fleece or wool shirt in the their backpack
 - Top layer - Heavy Duty & **Waterproof** Rain Pants or bibs & Jacket
- HEAD & HANDS
 - Warm winter hat
 - Waterproof mittens
 - Sun hat (optional)
 - Sunglasses (optional)
 - Work Gloves (optional but helpful)
- EXTRA CLOTHING - Pack extra clothing in a plastic bag in a backpack.
 - Pants
 - Long Sleeve Shirt
 - Socks
 - Underwear
- FOOD & FOOD GEAR
 - Kids are very active all day and eat a lot of food. Good options are foods with healthy fats and protein like nut/seed butter, nuts, trail mix, cheese, jerky, bacon, hard boiled eggs. Avoid foods high in sugar. Kids get extra hungry being outdoors, so pack extra!
 - Full Water bottle
 - Camp mug

LATE FALL/WINTER/EARLY SPRING

- FOOTWEAR
 - Light to mid-weight wool socks (For feet that get cold easily, double up on light to mid-weight wool or use a moisture-wicking sock liner.)

- Waterproof** winter boots for wet days
- STANDARD WINTER CLOTHING - Layers!!!
 - Base layer pants and shirt (aka: high quality long underwear)
 - Extra layer - long sleeve fleece or wool shirt and pants in the their backpack
 - Top Layer - Heavy Duty & **Waterproof** Rain Pants or bibs & Jacket ***We strongly encourage you to invest in good quality waterproof rain gear and use this year round instead of snow pants and jacket.
- HEAD, NECK & HANDS
 - Warm winter hat
 - Fleece or wool mittens (to go under the waterproof mittens)
 - Waterproof mittens
 - Neck warmer (optional but helpful)
 - Sunglasses (optional)
 - Work Gloves (optional but helpful)
- EXTRA CLOTHING - Pack extra clothing in a plastic bag in a backpack. (On rainy, wet days we will provide protection for backpacks to keep them dry.)
 - Pants
 - Long Sleeve Shirt
 - Socks
 - Underwear
 - Warm layer
 - Winter Hat
 - Extra mittens/gloves
- FOOD & FOOD GEAR
 - Kids are very active all day and eat a lot of food. Good options are foods with healthy fats and protein like nut/seed butter, nuts, trail mix, cheese, jerky, bacon, hard boiled eggs. Avoid foods high in sugar. Kids get extra hungry being outdoors, so pack extra!
 - Full Water bottle
 - Camp mug

Section Six - Weather Policy

We find that as long as participants are dressed properly, being outside in almost any type of weather is comfortable. It's important that participants have good waterproof clothing and footwear and have adequate backup clothing packed. Please see our detailed clothing and gear list for each season to help make sure your child is properly prepared for all weather conditions.

The woods often provide adequate shelter from the elements, we have large tarps to provide extra protection from rain, wind and the hot sun when needed. We also have two large bell tents equipped with wood stoves to support participants who get wet and/or cold.

During extreme weather or storms where safety could be compromised and/or travel on roads is unsafe, program days may be cancelled and a make up session will be scheduled. On questionable weather days, we will email families the night before or early that morning.