



YMCA of Barry County Nature Based Learning Program Handbook

**SPROUTS Preschool Age Learning 3-4 Years
"Skills-Play-Recreation OUTSide"**

YMCA of Barry County
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ABOUT THE YMCA

YMCA Mission

To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all.

Program Purpose

To provide a high-quality youth program that acknowledges the individuality of children while fostering connection, appreciation, respect, and love for the world of nature and those around us.

Our Core Values

The YMCA is guided by four core values:

Caring: to demonstrate a sincere concern for others, for their needs and well-being

Honesty: to tell the truth, to demonstrate reliability and trustworthiness through actions that are in keeping with my stated positions and beliefs.

Respect: to treat others as I would want them to treat me, to value the worth of every person, including myself.

Responsibility: to do what is right—what I ought to do, to be accountable for my choices of behavior and actions and my promises.

Our Focus Areas

For Youth Development

To empower youth to reach their full potential by discovering new things about themselves and their values and use their knowledge and skills to explore the world around them.

For Healthy Living

We promote healthy lifestyle choices by providing opportunities for a healthy spirit, mind and body through programs, interactions and healthy food choices.

For Social Responsibility

At the YMCA of Barry County, everyone is welcome. Youth will have the opportunity to learn how to give back through programs and interactions within our community.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Parent Checklist

Please take the time to look through this handbook before the beginning of the program and complete the following online paperwork and return it prior to your child's first day:

- Registration
- General Liability Waiver & Media Release
- Activity Release
- Participant Information Form
- Medical Form
- Handbook Acknowledgement

You can find these documents online at

<https://ymcaofbarrycounty.campbrainregistration.com/>

Our Staff

Staff are carefully chosen and interviewed for their skills, abilities, and belief in the ideals of the YMCA. Our staff are required to be certified in CPR, First Aid and AED, and child abuse prevention. They also have opportunities for training in topics including behavior management, customer service, risk management, outdoor cooking, nature skills, waterfront skills, and child development. We are committed to providing your child with a safe environment that is managed by caring staff.

The staff partner alongside the children by working and communicating with them in different ways. The hands-on environment encourages the children to explore various learning materials and interact with adults and peers. We focus on supporting early learners as they make decisions, build academic skills, develop socially and emotionally, and become part of a community.

Learning Environment

We believe that by being in nature, children benefit physically, emotionally, and intellectually. Nature inspires, refreshes, and nurtures us. Our play-oriented activities are often offered outdoors when the weather allows. Some outdoor topics and activities may include recycling, wildlife, gardening, weather, music, art, and the natural world around us. Letters, numbers, colors, and shapes are incorporated into daily activities.

Our program provides opportunities for your child to develop curiosity, physical development, communication skills, and basic learning skills. When visiting, you will see the children engaged in many different kinds of activities, such as:

- Climbing a tree which helps build large and fine motor skills as well as learning about analyzing risk.
- Fort building that allows for experimenting with materials, gravity, balance, and learning about collaborating.
- Digging in the mud/dirt which allows for experimentation with materials, a tactile experience and imaginative play.

Participation Age and Skills

Children enrolled in the SPROUTS program must be 3 years of age by the start of the program unless otherwise arranged with the director. Before enrollment, it is necessary that your child has the following skills:

- They can participate in an environment with an average staff-to-child ratio of 1 to 5 (SPROUTS).
- They are fully potty trained and able to use the bathroom independently. We understand that accidents occur. Extra clothing will be kept for each student so children can change if they have an occasional accident.
- They can actively participate for the duration of the entire 3 ½ hour program.
- They can follow simple/single instructions.
- They can eat and dress independently in most situations.
- They can be in both indoor and outdoor environments.

Inclusion

We make every effort to work with families to mainstream children living with special needs into any of our programs at the YMCA of Barry County. Staff facilitates opportunities to enhance interactions between children with and without disabilities, as we believe all children learn from each other. Communication with families is ongoing, while staff and families collaborate to meet the child's individual needs.

Based upon the request and/or type of modification requested, participation in the program depends on such things as scheduling, staffing, and other participants already registered. Therefore, in order to create a successful and enjoyable environment for your child, it is preferred that your request be received at least 20 days before the start of the program or as soon as you register.

We are unable to provide 1-on-1 support for students with special needs at this time. However, we do welcome anyone, upon being background checked, who is professional support for your child that your family is able to provide. We also want to disclose that not all of our staff are trained specifically in special education.

Holidays & Birthdays

Holidays and birthdays will be celebrated as a class with popcorn and a cupcake provided by the YMCA of Barry County. If your family would like to provide a special treat instead, please notify the staff. We will sing a special birthday song as well. We will celebrate any holidays or birthdays that fall on the weekend on the Thursday before. If your family would prefer your child's birthday not to be celebrated or have specific holidays your family would like to make sure we learn about, please let the staff know at the beginning of the program. We look forward to partnering with families to include their culture into our program.

If you would prefer that your child does not celebrate any birthdays or holidays, we ask that you keep your child home for the days of celebration.

Animals and Pets

Animals play a part in our program and we will have visiting animals as well as permanent pets. We currently have a YMCA Camp dog, a golden retriever named Quin, who will be present on many days. We also have a baby turtle, named Biscuit, and we are planning to get a few more small pets over time. Please notify the staff of any animal or other allergies your child may have, or other concerns you have regarding animals. **Please do not bring family pets at drop-off or pick-up times without prior approval.**

Payments and Cancellations

Tuition for this program is due as follows:

- \$100 non-refundable deposit due upon registration
- If tuition is not paid in full or a payment plan is not in place by the start of the 4th week, your child(ren) will be removed from the program.
- Participants will not be allowed to enroll in the next session until the current session is paid in full.
- No sibling discounts
- 25% or 50% Off Financial Aid is available

Tuition can be paid at the YMCA of Barry County's main office, over the phone, or through your online account. For convenience, we also offer the ability to enroll in automatic withdrawal payments which we recommend. These payments can be set up weekly, bi-weekly or monthly.

If your child needs to stop attending this program before the end of the current session, a two-week written notice is required to cancel their registration for a refund to be given for the remaining prorated amount. Registration deposit fees are non-refundable.

Tuition is not affected by absences due to illness, family vacations, snow days, power outages, or other days off. You are responsible for all months of tuition. There are no fees for when SPROUTS is scheduled to not be in session such as at Spring break and other holidays.

Late Pick-Up Fee

Pick-up is from 11:50 to noon at the parking lot unless there is inclement weather. In the case of inclement weather please come to the main office lobby and wait there.

Our staff are busy both before and after the program, preparing, cleaning, and taking care of various responsibilities within the YMCA. Thus, we have a \$1.00 per minute late fee when students are not picked up at the designated time. We recognize that everyone has busy schedules, and sometimes things happen, which is why we allow a 15 minute grace period before charging the late fee.

GENERAL PROGRAM POLICIES

Transportation Policy

All transportation to and from the YMCA is to be provided by the child's parent/guardian. The Y has booster seats on hand if there is an emergency.

Field Trip Policy

NOTICE: Due to COVID-19, field trips may be limited, if at all.

You can expect about 1-2 field trips per session as permitted. Some examples of places we may take trips to include the Battle Creek Outdoor Education Center, Pierce Cedar Creek, Mooville, and other local organizations. When taking field trips, you can expect us to travel by Barry County Transit, YMCA vehicles, or by parent volunteers. Parents/guardians will be included in field trip planning. On field trip days we will request for families to leave their child's car seat for transportation.

Food Policy

Snacks will be provided each day and should not be brought from home. Please advise us of any food allergies your child may have or any food your child may not have for religious reasons (alternative options will be available). If we have anyone with major allergies in the classroom, we will require all food brought in for parties or celebrations to be in an original store-bought food container. Children are allowed to receive second helpings of snacks once every child has received their snack. If this does not meet your child's needs, please notify us. **We do ask that a labeled water bottle is left. We will wash them at least twice a week.**

COMMUNICATION

The following are ways in which we will communicate about events, progress, or general news about your child and the program:

- We will use our Facebook group to send weekly updates for reminders for field trips, themes, and special activities happening. Once your child is registered, we will communicate with you on how to join this group.
- Progress Reports - Your family will receive at least 1 progress report per season. This report will be a detailed report on where your child is at with general preschool assessments.
- Daily interaction at arrival and dismissal - please approach us any time to share a concern or a joy, or tell us what is going on in your family.

Contacting Staff

YMCA of Barry County: 269-945-4574

- SPROUTS Director: Hanna O-Toole, hanna@ymcaofbarrycounty.org
- Registration/Payment:
Alyssa Branham or Emily Hayward, office@ymcaofbarrycounty.org

Know that the program staff are working directly with your child so they may not promptly be available. If it is an emergency and no one answers the phone, please leave a voicemail and continue to call the YMCA of Barry County's main office.

Emergencies

In an emergency situation, the staff will make every effort to speak with parents/guardians directly. If unable to do so, the designated Emergency Contacts will be contacted. Please provide Emergency Contacts that are different individuals than the listed parents/guardians. Our facilities have an Emergency Preparedness Plan that includes procedures for staff to follow in the case of an emergency. The Emergency Preparedness Plan is available upon request.

Family Involvement

NOTICE: Due to COVID-19, in-person family activities may be limited. Your child will benefit from your support and understanding as they begin to grow outside the home. We encourage dialogue as a family about what they experience and learn throughout the program. We ask that your involvement include:

- Attending the family open house held before the beginning of the program. You will have a chance to meet the staff, see the indoor classroom, drop off items, and ask any questions you may have.
- Attending any end-of-program family event.
- Read information sent home with your child.
- Become part of our class page on Facebook upon receiving the link.
- Show interest in the work they complete and volunteer when able.

Classroom Visitors

NOTICE: Due to COVID-19, visitation may be limited, if allowed.

If you would like to visit your child's program or want to have someone working with your child come and observe him/her in the program, you must receive prior approval. We welcome all family members with prior approval, including parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, nannies, and other caregivers. When in the classroom you can play with your child and other small groups of children. We ask that each child only has 1 visitor per week. This allows them to grow independently. When volunteering, you may read books, pull sleds, assist in fort building, and enjoy expeditions. We ask that you allow staff members to manage child behavior according to our policies. Volunteers are always under the supervision of staff. No child is ever left alone with a volunteer. Family volunteers must complete a statement about whether or not they have been convicted of child abuse or neglect or a felony involving harm or threatened harm to an individual. This statement is kept with the child's records.

WHAT TO SEND WITH YOUR CHILD

Children will be participating in both indoor and outdoor activities in all types of weather. We want to make sure you send your child prepared. We recommend that children are "DRESSED FOR MESS" and wear comfortable clothing suitable for active & messy outdoor play. We do not allow sandals, crocs, and flip-flops. WE SPEND TIME OUTSIDE EVERY DAY. The only exceptions will be thunderstorms or extreme wind chills and/or temperatures.

- Closed-toed shoes aka tennis shoes are required daily. We will be outside hiking and exploring and need sturdy, comfortable shoes that will stay on feet.
- Clothing should be durable, weather appropriate, and something you don't mind getting dirty.
- Our activities encourage exploration inside and outside. Play clothes that can be easily washed are recommended.

When your child comes home dirty from exploring, we have done our job!

Please label coats, boots, snow pants, and anything else possible.

Suggested Clothing

- Spare set of clothes (can be left in their cubby)
- Water Bottle (can be left, we will wash regularly)
- Fall/Spring: rubber rain boots, jacket/sweatshirt, rain suit OR rain jacket with hood and rain pants, light hat
- Winter: winter coat, snow pants, waterproof mittens, winter boots, hat, scarf/neck cover, wool/fleece socks

If you would like suggestions on clothing brands please ask us.

Items To Leave At Home

- Nice clothing that may get ruined from outdoor and messy play
- Pocket knives or other weapons both real and pretend
- Any item that would cause distress if it was lost or damaged
- Electronics

ATTENDANCE, WELLNESS AND SAFETY

Attendance & Health

Regular attendance is important for your child to get the most from the program. When there are frequent absences, children may feel uncomfortable as they may not know the songs, activities, or other children. Friendships are more natural when children attend regularly.

That being said, there are times when it is best for a child NOT to be here. If your child has one or more of the following symptoms within the 24 hours before the program, please do not send him/her to school:

- A temperature of 100+°F
- A low-grade fever & acting ill
- An infectious disease
- Vomiting or upset stomach
- Pain
- Diarrhea- more than 2 loose/watery stools
- Constant runny nose
- Coughing non-stop

If your child misses more than 10 days of the program each session without doctor's notes or other appropriate documentation your child may be removed from the program to create space for other individuals on the waitlist. Please notify the YMCA as soon as possible when you know your child will be absent.

Examples of excused absences include illness, hospitalization, serious injury, ongoing health-related concerns, and a death in the family.

Head Lice

At this time, MDCH and MDE recommend a policy that focuses on the exclusion of active infestations only. Active infestations can be defined as the presence of live lice or nits found within one quarter inch of the scalp. Nits that are found beyond one quarter inch of the scalp have more than likely hatched, or are no longer viable. Any student with live lice (or nits within one quarter inch of the scalp) may remain in school until the end of the school day (see recommended procedures, page 23). Immediate treatment at home is advised. The student will be readmitted to school after treatment and examination. If upon examination, the school-designated personnel find no live lice on the child, the child may reenter the school. Any student with nits (farther than one quarter inch from the scalp) should be allowed in school. Parents should remove nits daily and treat if live lice are observed.

Medication

If your child requires a prescription and/or nonprescription medication, a Medication Authorization Form or Health Form with appropriate information must be completed by a parent/guardian and/or physician. Our staff will administer all age-appropriate medication per the labeled instructions. If you are able, please give your child any medications at home before arriving.

Over-the-Counter Medication

All medication must be:

- In the original container with the prescription label or direction label attached
- Labeled with the child's name, the name of the medication, the dosage amount and the time/times to be given
- Any utensils needed to administer

Policy for Over-the-Counter Skin Products

Our staff will administer sunscreen and/or insect repellent as we feel it is needed. If you are not ok with this, or if your child has skin irritations, please let the staff know. We also ask that if your child is sensitive to the sun you put sunscreen on before arriving each morning.

Suspected Child Abuse

All staff members are familiar with the procedures for identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. Per our program license, all staff are deemed mandated reporters. By law, we are obligated to report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the Social Services Office.

DISCIPLINE EXPECTATIONS CODE OF CONDUCT

Expectations for Behavior

To provide a safe learning environment, we work with our students to maintain the following school behaviors:

1. Come prepared and be ready to have fun!
2. Being outside or walking on the trails is always with teachers or parents.
3. Walking feet are for inside.
4. Running feet are for outside in safe running spaces.
5. Wash your hands with soap before eating a snack, after using the bathroom, and after you blow your nose.
6. Hitting, pushing, or biting classmates is hurtful and not permitted.
7. Tell an adult when you need to use the bathroom.
8. Toys are to be left at home or in the family car if they are not to be shared with all friends in the program.
9. If playing with pretend weapons program participants are never to pretend to shoot at other people.

Staff Strategies when Handling Behaviors:

- Maintaining realistic expectations of children
- Encourage children to use their words to express their feelings
- Providing clear and simple limits
- Positive redirection
- Modeling appropriate behaviors
- Conflict resolution skills
- Allowing natural consequences to play out
- Removing children from the situation until discussions can happen

Discipline and Behavior Concerns

We set clear expectations. The goal is self-discipline, which guides children to be responsible and cooperative with others and is a learning process for the child. An uncooperative child will be counseled about their behavior by one of the staff. If necessary, they will be removed from the situation.

Examples that would result in being removed from the situation include hitting, pushing, biting, or forcefully taking an object from another child. When the child demonstrates that they are ready to be part of the group appropriately, they will then be encouraged to participate. They will also be encouraged to apologize for their actions to the appropriate people.

Children are always offered choices, and removal is always the last resort. During group activities, all children are expected to remain as part of the group; however, no pressure is ever exerted to participate in group activities. Serious problems will be discussed with parents.

Program Dismissal Policy

Dismissal from the program may result when serious disciplinary challenges such as but not limited to, failure to abide by Code of Conduct, inability to participate within established ratios, or inability to stay with the group. In these types of situations, the following procedure will be followed:

- First Offense – Verbal
- Second Offense- Written Warning (Staff will talk to child & notify parent)
- Third Offense - Meeting with a parent/guardian, child, and staff.
- Fourth Offense – Determine the next course of action up to and including suspension or dismissal from the program.

This policy can be modified at the discretion of the director. Refunds will be denied for such circumstances. Dismissal from the program may also result when customers are repeatedly late with making payments and/or non-payment of program tuition or fees.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Please be prepared to wear a mask when dropping off or picking up your child when coming indoors.

Arrival

We will open the classroom doors at 8:30 AM. When arriving at the YMCA, an adult must accompany their child.

An adult may accompany their child into the room to help hang up their backpacks, etc. Please let the staff know ahead of time if you need help walking your child into the room. If you know in advance that you will be bringing your child late, please inform one of the staff. Please try to bring your child to school on time so that they do not miss out on daily planned activities.

Departures

On normal weather days, plan to wait in the parking lot for your child to come out. During poor weather, parents/guardians should walk down to the YMCA's main office to pick up their children. **Please refrain from coming to the program room to pick up your child.** We will be actively participating until dismissal. If you need to pick up early, please let us know at arrival. If something comes up after dropping off your child please notify us via phone. When picking up your child early, please come to the main office.

We will only release your child to someone listed as an authorized person to pick up your child. Authorized people who we do not recognize or know will be asked to show identification.

If there is a court order regarding the custody of children, then a copy of the court order must be on file at the YMCA. Staff is not permitted to deny access of a parent to a child without a court order on file.

Inclement Weather

We follow the Hasting Public School policies and procedures on Inclement Weather:

- If Hastings Schools are closed–YMCA programs will not meet.
- If Hastings Schools are delayed, the SPROUTS program will not meet.
- If there are days missed beyond three, the director will then make decisions as to what further action needs to be taken, up to and including household credits or proration of tuition. Any adjustment tuition or household credits would be applied at the end of the program.
 - **Three days or less in one program season will not be made up or prorated.**
 - **Any days canceled beyond 3 days will be subject to make-ups, household credits, or tuition proration at the director's discretion.**

SPROUTS PROGRAM SCHEDULE

“Skills-Play-Recreation OUTSide” Sprouts is a partial day program from 8:30 AM to 12:00 PM Monday through Thursday. There are no full-day options.

Typical Daily Schedule

8:30 am Arrival and Free Play Indoors
9:10 am Group Meeting
9:20 am Whole or Small Group Lesson
9:30 am Snack
9:45 am Hike, Free Play in Woods, and Exploration
10:45 am Storytime or Reading in the Woods
11:30 am Clean Up
11:40 am Group Meeting
11:50 am Pack Up and Dismissal

We value spontaneity in our activities and take advantage of the “teachable moments” however you can expect a majority of this schedule to be touched on each day, weather dependent.