



2026 NATURE EXPLORERS SUMMER CAMP HANDBOOK



Essex County Environmental Center
A Facility of
County of Essex, Department of Parks
621-B Eagle Rock Avenue, Roseland, NJ 07068
P: 973-228-8776

[Visit our Environmental Center Website](#)
[Register for our Public Programs here](#)

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Welcome to Environmental Center Nature Camp!

Location: [Essex County Environmental Center, 621B Roseland, NJ 07068](#)

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are glad that you and your child have chosen to make the Essex County Environmental Center part of your summer! Here at the Center, we are preparing for a fun and active outdoor learning experience that your child is sure to remember for years to come.

So that everyone has a safe and fun experience, we would like you to review the following policies and procedures:

- Upon arrival at the Center, you will be greeted by the Camp Teacher. If someone other than yourself will be dropping off or picking up your child(ren), please let us know in writing prior to day of drop-off or pick-up.
- If a child shows symptoms of illness (including fever and vomiting) within 24 hours prior to each day of camp, they are required to stay home. If a child becomes ill during camp, they will be separated, and a parent/guardian will be contacted for pick-up.
- Children need to arrive and depart *promptly*. *Please note, a late fee of \$10.00 for every 15 minutes after a quarter past camp end time will be due at pick-up.*
- Weather permitting, we spend as much time outside as possible. Please have children dress for the weather. We recommend light colored, lightweight pants (shorts are OK, but pants are better), T-shirts, socks, and closed-toed shoes. For the safety of the kids, please **NO** sandals, open-toe shoes or flip-flops. Be prepared for wet/muddy conditions. Hats are optional.
- Keep a sweatshirt and/or raincoat on hand as we may still go outside if it is drizzling, and it can be cool inside the building. Please initial clothing to avoid lost items.
- We do take photographs during camp. If you choose to opt out, please let us know via email.
- Each child will be provided with a water bottle. This is kept at camp to encourage hydration.
- ***Due to allergy concerns, please DO NOT send items that contain nuts when packing a snack or lunch.***
- The staff is not permitted to administer medication, apply sunscreen or insect repellent. Please apply before arriving each camp day. Instruct your child(ren) on proper use of items before your session begins.
- If your child cannot self-administer medication like an EpiPen, please provide a note giving Essex County Environmental Center staff permission to administer.
- Ticks are part of the habitat here at the Center. While we do our best to keep children out of tick habitats, we strongly recommend that you [check](#) your child(ren).

**We are looking forward to an exciting summer,
filled with fun outdoor adventures!**

973.228.8776, tcasella@parks.essexcountynj.org

Environmental Center Camp Philosophy

Our program is designed to provide an enriching and educational experience for children. The overall goal of the Environmental Center camp is to introduce children to nature and cultivate better stewardship behaviors that foster an appreciation for our shared natural world. We achieve this goal through fun and impactful educational activities, games, crafts, and hands-on experiences.

Registration and Payment Policies

Pre-registration and advanced payment are required. Fees are set for each camp week and can be found in our registration brochure. If there are openings, *scholarships are available for families in need. For more information, please contact David Alexander, Program Coordinator, at 973.228.8776 or dalexander@parks.essexcountynj.org.*

Waitlist: We do not maintain waitlists for camps. You are welcome to check our registration page to see if any seats have opened due to cancellations. <https://essexcountyparks.org/calendar>

Age Requirements: Your child must be the minimum age for the camp session by the week of the camp. **We do not make exceptions to the age requirements.** Children from different age groups will not be placed into camps together. All activities and lessons are tailored to be age appropriate. Placing children in the incorrect age group compromises and disrupts the activities for the entire group. You will not be given a refund for registering children into their wrong age range.

Special Needs: The Environmental Center strives to welcome and meet the needs of as many children as possible. Our summer camp program takes place in a highly stimulating environment both in the classroom and on the grounds. Children are expected to stay with a group, especially when in public, care for their own basic needs, and participate in camp activities with children of the same age group. The Center provides a caring staff, knowledgeable in their subjects and interested in working with all children; however, we do not provide staff trained in specialized medical, physical, or behavioral needs nor does it have additional staff for one-on-one support. If your child has special needs or if you have concerns regarding your child's abilities and our camp, then you are encouraged to contact Program Coordinator David Alexander to discuss your child's needs or concerns prior to registering for camp (and/or prior to their participating camp session) so that together we can determine if our camp will provide the right fit and environment for your child. We do welcome Therapeutic Support Staff or Educational Aides if you provide them yourself, with proof of their certifications, clearances, and photo ID from their agency. The center also has a liability waiver and background check required.

Cancellation/Refund Policy: **All cancellations include a \$50 non-refundable administrative fee.** If you cancel 3 weeks prior to the first day of your child's scheduled week, a refund will be issued to you. If you cancel less than 3 weeks, you will not be eligible for a refund. **All cancellations must be put in writing.** This policy will prevent any chance of an error being made. Cancellations requesting a credit (less than 3 weeks' notice) due to a family emergency or illness, or other extenuating circumstances will be handled on a case-by-case basis and require documentation to substantiate the request.

Length and Setting: All Camps begin promptly at 9:30am. Sessions for children ages 4 and 5 end at 12:30pm; sessions for children ages 6 and older end at 1:30pm. Activities are held inside and outside the Environmental Center. Select camp sessions include one off-site field trip per week and a canoe trip.

Weather permitting, all children are expected to explore the outdoors; prepare for wet/muddy conditions.

About Camp Staff:

Our camp instructors have been chosen based upon educational background and experience working with children. Camp staff is typically comprised of one full-time Center naturalist and a part-time educator. We may also have volunteers in grades 9 and older assisting with camps. Camp staff have attended a camp training course aligned with the NJ Youth Camp Safety standards policies. Camp instructors and assistants all share a love for working with children and are passionate environmental educators. Lead and assistant instructors are certified in basic CPR and First Aid. They are also certified educators with the state of New Jersey.

Essex County Personnel Policy and Employee Handbook is available from the Office of Human Resources.
<https://essexcountynj.org/office-of-human-resources/>

Background Checks:

All lead paid camp instructors have passed a criminal background check (Human Resources/Sheriff's Office) prior to being hired by Essex County Parks/Environmental Center.

- If the person is a County employee, those records are kept by HR. Volunteers 18 and older who are not a County employee will have background checks completed through Trionaid screening.
- Staff/Volunteers 15 and older need to be screened under the National Sex Offender registry. The Center utilizes <https://www.familywatchdog.us/> and will escalate any findings through the Sheriff's Office as required.

Allergy Free Zone

The Environmental Center Camp often has children participating with allergies severe enough to require EpiPens in response to certain allergens. This has prompted us to ask that we all work together to make **the classrooms peanut and tree-nut free zones** so they are safer for the children we serve. Please support our efforts by packing lunches that **do not contain peanut or tree-nut products** when attending camp at the Center.

Sign In

Each camp day, campers are required to be signed in and out by a parent or guardian at the Center's front desk. If you are unable to pick up your child(ren) at dismissal time, please coordinate with someone and advise the Center of the change in writing. Please note, a late fee of \$10.00 for every 15 minutes after a quarter past camp end time will be due at pick up.

Attendance Policy

If an emergency arises such that your camper can no longer join us for camp, please notify us. If your child will be absent, please contact us at 973.228.8776. Leave a message with your child's name so we know not to expect them. There are no refunds for missed days of camp.

Late Arrivals/Early Dismissals

A staff member will be contacted to meet you and your child or tell you how to join the group. Please give us as much advance warning for an early dismissal as possible so that pick-up locations and times can be built into the camp day for your child and the staff.

Campers are only dismissed to an adult who is listed on the camp registration application form. Dismissal time is no earlier than 5 minutes before the end of camp unless you have made prior arrangements to minimize the disruption to the end of the day. You will be expected to sign your child (in and) out with the Center front desk staff each day. **Children will not be released to an adult whose name does not appear**

on the authorized list. Please notify the Center in writing prior to drop-off/pick up, when a change is required.

Camp Registration Forms

Unique registration information must be completed for each individual camper. These forms must be completed prior to the start of the camp so we can better prepare for the needs of your child. Waiver Forms and Immunization records will be required for all campers. No child will be permitted to attend without the completed registration information.

After payment, registrants will be emailed so that parents/caregivers may complete any required WAIVERS and IMMUNIZATION RECORD FORMS before camp begins.

Camp Drop off and Pickup

Please drive slowly on our driveway! Drop-off and pick-up locations are determined by the camp locations and take place at the entrance of the facility. Our Nature Explorers Camp begins and ends at the Environmental Center front entrance located at 621B Eagle Rock Avenue, Roseland, NJ 07068.

Parents must sign their child in and out of Camp daily. Children must arrive at check-in accompanied by an authorized adult (as designated on Camp registration documentation). Children should not be released in the parking lot to walk into Camp on their own or be encouraged to meet after Camp in the parking lot.

As per our letter to parents, we inform them that they *must* sign their child in and out each day with the front desk staff. This is a standard procedure practiced by all childcare facilities. If someone other than a designated parent is picking up a child, then the *parent* must inform us in writing prior to drop-off and pick-up.

WHAT EACH CHILD SHOULD BRING

- Their best attitude, positive behavior, and language
- A peanut and nut-free lunch (with cold pack if needed, please avoid breakables)
- Close-toed and close-heeled shoes (athletic shoes, casual comfortable shoes, or boots)
- Appropriate length shorts or long pants suitable for the expected daily weather
- Tote bag or backpack
- Change of clothing
- Raingear
- Sunscreen (self-applied)
- Insect repellent (self-applied)
- Please label all personal items with your child's name

WHAT NOT TO BRING

- Negative attitudes, behavior, or language
- Money
- Peanuts and tree nuts; major allergenic foods
- Personal items such as toys, games, cards, stuffed animals, etc.
- Anything that you or your child would be upset about if it were lost
- Electronics such as cellphones, iPods, iPads, and video games
- PLEASE NOTE: Essex County and its staff and volunteers are not responsible for a camper's lost or stolen items

Lost and Found

Any items left at Camp will be retained for one week past the summer program end date. All unclaimed items will be discarded or donated to a charitable organization. It is highly recommended that your child's items be labeled with his or her name.

Health and Safety

The Environmental Center reserves the right to refuse entrance to camp or to call you for an early pick-up if your child is exhibiting any of the symptoms or illnesses listed below. If a camper becomes ill during camp hours, then Camp staff will notify the parent or guardian listed on the Health/Permission form, followed by those listed as emergency contacts. The camper will be quarantined (in the Center's Glassroom or Library), and you will be asked to pick your child up immediately.

- If your child is sick, please do not send them to Camp until they are feeling well again without the use of fever-reducing medications.
- Lice (must be treated and free of lice, nits, and eggs for 24 hours before returning to camp, with a doctor's note)
- Fever of 100° F or more
- Vomiting
- Severe or persistent cough
- Sore throat
- Severe headache
- Pink eye, Ringworm, other contagious illnesses (e.g. COVID-19, Coxsackie, etc.)

Essex County continues to follow updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and is guided by the Essex County Department of Health in maintaining a healthy and safe environment for all campers.

Medications, Sunscreens and Lotions

We have a [First Aid Kit held](#) that meets the requirements of camp licensing at the front desk. The Center has a Patron Accident/Incident Form available should any accident/incident occur.

The Environmental Center staff will not administer medications or topical treatments/preventatives of any kind. Children must be able to self-administer or a parent/guardian should apply the treatment before camp starts. Your child may bring along any required medications, but they must be clearly labeled.

A ziploc bag with the child's full name, name of the medication, dosage, and the medication section of the registration forms must be complete. Please indicate the medication(s) your child must bring, as well as any details explaining what it is for, when and how your child will take the medication, and any important storage or other information. This ensures that the staff will be aware of your child's needs and can encourage compliance with the schedule. Most medications will be kept in the classroom.

Inhalers and EpiPens must have the camper's full name on them and will always be kept with the instructors. Campers will self-administer inhalers and injectable medications. If your child requires assistance with an EpiPen, please send a signed letter stating that staff are allowed to assist or administer with specific instructions for an emergency.

Weather

Use www.accuweather.com or www.weather.com. If a heat advisory or chill advisory is in effect, all children *must stay indoors* for the duration of the advisory. If the weather changes while outdoors, staff will gather all children together, take a head count and find the safest route to the closest shelter. See

<http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/outdoors.htm> for details about summer weather dangers, specifically lightning. Threatening or dangerous weather will prevent us from going outside.

Bear Policy

We have never seen evidence of a bear at our environmental Center however we will cancel outdoor activities if a bear is sighted in the immediate area. We'll follow the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) policies.

Behavior Expectation Policy

Environmental Center Summer Camp has basic rules of behavior and conduct including respecting staff, fellow campers, visitors, camp materials, and the outdoor environment and animals. These rules are reviewed with campers each day before camp activities begin. Disrespectful behavior, foul or hurtful language, and violence (including, but not limited to hitting, kicking, biting, hair pulling, or any bodily harm) toward Camp staff, fellow campers, guests, or the animals will not be tolerated. If the discipline policy is disregarded, the Environmental Center reserves the right to dismiss the child from the Summer Camp program without refund.

Discipline Policy

To ensure the safety and well-being of your child, fellow campers, the staff, and the animals, the following policy will be enforced:

Minor Infractions

Disrespect shown to staff members, fellow campers or the plants and animals:

- 1st Offense: Verbally remind camper of expected behavior
- 2nd Offense: Verbally remind camper of expected behavior and remove from activity
- 3rd Offense: Remove camper from group to an office and discuss the behavior and better behavioral choices; staff contacts the parent/guardian to review the issue
- 4th Offense: Staff/Center Director removes camper from the program without refund and contacts the parent/guardian for pick-up.

Serious Infractions

Behavior that is potentially harmful to the child, other campers, staff, or animals:

- 1st Offense: Remove camper from group to an office and discuss the behavior and plan better behavioral choices; staff contacts parent or guardian to review the issue
- 2nd Offense: staff removes the camper from the program without a refund for that day; parent/guardian must pick up child immediately. If a camper is sent home after an offense, the child will be welcomed back the next day at the discretion of camp management. If the behavior prompting the early dismissal re-occurs, the child will not be welcomed back for the remainder of the camp and no refund will be given.

Immediate Dismissal will occur for: Violence of any kind; terroristic threats; sexual harassment; possession of drugs, alcohol, or weapons; stealing; serious injury to campers, staff, park guests, or animals.

Essex County Environmental Center Staff are Mandated Reporters of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect. Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) is the State agency in New Jersey that receives and investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranges for the child's protection and the family's treatment. By law, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected by a parent or caregiver is required to immediately notify CP&P. Reporters are protected from civil or criminal liability, discharge from employment, and discrimination if they make a report to CP&P in good faith.

Camp staff closely observe and interact with your child (as our camper) daily. We will report any suspected child abuse or neglect to CP&P and any other authorities as directed by CP&P. If your family is struggling with behavioral health, disabilities, or substance abuse, CP&P recommends reaching out to PerformCare – NJ Children's System of Care (877-652-7624). PerformCare provides youths and their families with the services, resources, tools, and support they need to optimally participate in treatment within their homes, schools, and community settings. PerformCare provides the avenue for families to request clinically appropriate, needs-based services with a single phone call any time of the day or night.

**County of Essex WARNING, WAIVER, AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY
as seen and consented upon on-line registration:**

I hereby waive, release, and discharge any and all claims for damages for death, personal injury or property damage which I may have, or which hereafter accrue to me, against the County of Essex as a result of my participation in the above listed Event. I realize that accidents and injuries can arise out of the Event, and accordingly, this release is intended to discharge the County, its trustees, officers, employees, commission members, and volunteers, and any public agencies from and against any and all liability arising out of or connected in any way with my participation in the Event. This waiver and release is binding upon my heirs and assigns.

I acknowledge that I have been fully informed of the risks and dangers involved in this activity. I acknowledge that I have read, agree, and fully understand the above Warning, Waiver, and Release of Liability. I further acknowledge and agree that the reasons for my being requested to sign this Release have been fully explained to me and I understand them. If any provision, including any exception, part, phrase, term, or the application thereof to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the application to other persons or circumstances shall not be affected thereby and the validity of this waiver in any and all other respects shall not be affected thereby.