

**ROOTS OF
CONNECTION
PARENT
HANDBOOK**

2017-2018 School Year

Welcome to Roots of Connection! Thank you for joining us for a fun-filled year learning about the natural world. We will spend the year exploring nature with all of our senses. With more offerings than last year, Roots of Connection (ROC) has a more diverse age range, and abundant challenges and opportunities for learners at every level. You can expect your student to make friends, cook meals using wild edible plants, climb rocks and trees, visit water birds at Greenlake, study plants, track animals, build shelters, and tend fires. This handbook covers all of our homeschool programs, for ages ~4 and up. Whether you are in the Wren Watchers, the ROCK program or the Pebbles, you will find complete information to prepare you for the school year in this packet. Please read it thoroughly even if you are returning to ROC, as some changes have been made from last year's handbook.

This year we are offering several different program options. All of our classes are **homeschool enrichment programs**, however many people still use our school for their complete preschool or Pre-K educational experience. More information about what it means to enroll in a homeschool enrichment program is included in this packet.

- The Pebbles: This class is open to children ages ~4-6 and it is based on the Forest Kindergarten model. The Pebbles class runs from **9:00 AM to 1:00 PM with an option for afternoon enrichment until 3:00 or 5:00 PM**. The Pebbles explore the natural world through play, hands on exploration, and with guided activities and stories from our experienced teachers.
- ROCK: The Roots of Connection KIDS program is designed for students ages 6-10. ROCK runs from **9:00 AM-3:00 PM with an option for afternoon enrichment until 5:00 PM**. ROCK is a fun and exciting outdoor adventure every day! Whether the students are being challenged to build a fire with no adult help, offered an opportunity to carve a spatula, or taking a break from a hike to play a game, they are having a blast.
- Wren Watchers: The Wren Watchers program is open to students ages 8 and up, or those who have spent a full school year with Roots of Connection and are approved by Brooke based on readiness. The Wren Watchers program is our most challenging and rigorous course, with a main focus on environmental science, as well as survival skills. We will conduct ecological monitoring studies and contribute our data to national citizen science databases. The Wren Watchers occurs on Mondays and Thursdays from **9:00 AM – 3:00 PM, (afternoon enrichment available to 5:00 PM.)**
- Afternoon Enrichment: Available after all programs, **from the end of the base program until 3:00 or 5:00 PM**. During our afternoon enrichment program, we will explore nature through art, and music. This program takes place at our "Nature Nook" which is located at 4918 Linden Ave. North. Several days a week we will be joined by professional artist Melissa Koch who will guide the students through nature based art projects. Brooke and Niall will lead music, theatre, art, and movement activities that build on the experiences the students have out in the park.

What to bring:

- **Backpack:** It is important that students at Roots of Connection have a comfortable backpack. It should rest on their shoulders without slipping or sliding off. We strongly recommend a backpack that has a chest strap for added support. We spend most of the day with our backpacks placed at a “backpack tree,” however, when we hike through the park, each child is expected to carry their backpack. This is usually less than 15 minutes at a time, however it is important for your student’s success that they can be comfortable with or without their backpack on. Their backpack should contain:
 - **Water Bottle:** Please pack a full water bottle each day. This allows your student to get out their water whenever they are thirsty.
 - **Metal Tea Cup:** *New Required Item* We often have tea to keep ourselves warm on cold days. Please send your student with their own metal teacup each day. This way, when we have tea, your nature explorer will always have their teacup at the ready. You can buy metal teacups at REI, at some grocery stores in the gift department, or online. If your child does not have their tea cup, they will miss out on having tea.
 - **Handkerchief or Tissues:** Please send your student with a handkerchief or some tissues in a waterproof container such as a Ziploc bag or small Tupperware. This is another measure to help students gain self sufficiency – if they need a tissue, they can grab one from their backpack.
 - **Change of clothes (if necessary).** Some of our youngest students are still working on always making it to the bathroom on time. Others are still working out the finer details of nature-peeing. Either way, students may need a change of clothes. If you think they will need a change, please send one. Better safe than sorry! We recommend one light weight pair of underwear, pants or leggings, and socks, packed into a gallon Ziploc.
 - **Nature Observation Tools:** Many children like to bring binoculars, magnifying glasses, compasses, or other nature observation tools! This is welcome, but not at all required. Please remember anything that is brought can be lost.

Roots of Connection provides food a healthy, vegetarian lunch, snack, and all the required dishes and utensils for our meals. Because of that, you don’t need to pack a lunch or any personal snacks. In fact, we do not allow kids to bring personal snacks because this can lead to sharing, and we cannot properly monitor the safety of kids with allergies. Please do not bring any extra snacks. If your child is not happy with school meals, please talk to Brooke and she will work with you on finding a solution.

Please avoid bringing toys or objects with monetary or sentimental value. It is easy to lose things in the park – even our very favorite things that we PROMISE not to lose. There are lots of people who use Woodland Park, and objects that are lost often become permanently lost. If your child needs an item for security, one small item in the backpack is acceptable, but it should stay in their backpack, and if they want to take it out, they should be next to their backpack so that they can put their special object away before they leave the backpack area.

Proper Gear:

- Cold Weather: Often the weather can be quite cold, and having proper gear makes all the difference in a student's comfort during these cold days. Here are some guidelines to follow:
 - **Under Layers** – look for Wool blends or synthetic fabrics. AVOID COTTON. We recommend a long sleeve long underwear shirt, long underwear leggings, and wool socks. It is imperative to have no cotton in the layer that touches the skin, as cotton absorbs and releases moisture, creating a cooling, evaporative effect. This happens even if their rain layer is completely waterproof, because children do sweat under their rain gear from running around.
 - **Middle Layers** – Fleece or Wool recommended. A zip up fleece is a great choice that many kids find warm, yet not bulky. For legs, you may want a middle layer if the student's rain pants are not lined. For instance, most rain pants sold at REI are shell pants. If you use this kind, consider a layer of pants over the long underwear.
 - **Top Layers** – for the top layer, it is important to prioritize waterproofness over warmth. A puffy winter jacket can restrict movement, and become too warm, leaving the student with few clothing options to suit their needs. If you can get a shell raincoat, or a lined raincoat with a comfortably thin lining, this is the best. It will keep students warm as long as their middle layer(s) are sufficient. Then, your child becomes too hot, they can remove a middle layer, but remain waterproof. The waterproof shell will hold in body heat quite well when zipped up. For rain pants, look for whatever is most comfortable for your student. They carry fleece lined, shell, overall, standard pants, or even rain skirts! (Rain skirts are not as waterproof, obviously, but some people, like myself, are more comfortable in skirts and dresses, and rain skirts coupled with long underwear are an excellent option.)
 - **Boots** - For rainy days, we want waterproof rain boots. For Cloudy days, comfortable hiking shoes or tennis shoes are appropriate. For Sunny days, closed toe sandals are appropriate.
 - **Warmth Accessories** - A hat is a very important part of keeping your student warm during the winter. Please send your child with a hat, especially one made from wool or fleece. Gloves or mittens are imperative in the wintertime. Look for gloves or mittens that your student can put on with minimal adult assistance. For students ages 4-6, consider practicing at home, with an adult holding the glove, and your child working on the skill of getting each finger into its proper space. This really helps out the teachers, as kids love to take gloves on and off many times throughout the day. I personally recommend some gloves similar to the North Face Youth Etip Gloves, which have received top student satisfaction at ROC.

If you have any questions about specific brands or features of outdoor gear, please ask Brooke for additional information. You may always email Brooke at brooke.tarastots@gmail.com

Preparing Your Student:

At Roots of Connection, we do not overwhelm the students with a long list of rules. Instead, we use the framework of Non-Violent Communication and other peace-based conflict resolution techniques. Rather than list off things that they can't do, we prefer to let each experience offer an opportunity for students to develop empathy, and to adopt mutual understanding with teachers and peers about how certain behaviors or choices can affect their safety, their friends' feelings, and the group. To make this concept more clear, I'd like to tell you how Roots of Connection handled the issue of sticks during our previous school year:

Many outdoor schools start off the year with a strict rule about sticks. No stick fighting, or no sticks taller than yourself are extremely common safety rules at other outdoor programs. At ROC, We don't start there. We actually wait for a situation to come up... Usually it takes longer for stick-battles to start, since we don't put that idea into their heads – but when it does, my first question is always, “Hey, are you both/all enjoying this game?” This is my way of ensuring the play is emotionally safe for all the kids. If one says no, it is very easy to repair that situation. If all the participants are enjoying the game, we can move on. I then crouch down to talk to the stick-fighters, and point out they are quite close to other kids who aren't stick fighting. I ask them, “What would be a good way to make sure that you can enjoy your stick fight without scaring or accidentally hitting other kids?” They quickly decide that playing farther away from others was the safest plan. Then, we gather up the whole group, and tell them, “Some people are choosing to play stick fighting, and came up with a plan to make sure everyone is safe – if you want to stick-fight, you must play far away from the group so that nobody gets hurt or scared who isn't playing. Does that sound good for everyone?” By involving them in the reasoning behind the rule, they don't have to memorize it because they understand it. I then ask the whole group, “So when we stick fight, should our sticks touch people's bodies, or only other sticks?” Proud to find this answer obvious, the kids shout “Only other sticks!!” Through this method, the kids have found the knowledge within themselves on how to create a safe and orderly environment. I never once told them what the correct choice would be. Because they came up with these rules, I have never had a student struggle with refusing to follow the rules. For the remainder of the year, all I had to do was check in to make sure everyone was enjoying the game, and often sprinkle in a, “Thanks for making a safe choice by moving yourselves away from the group,” We have had zero injuries caused by stick fighting.

This being said, we only have two strict rules at ROC. Please go over them with your student. We will also go over them at school, but we want the students to know these rules the moment they arrive. These are the only strict rules we have, and they are both very important.

1. **Always stay with the group.** It is important to stay where a teacher can see you. If you want to go somewhere, or go see something, ask a teacher to take you there, and very often, they will be willing. If a teacher asks you to come closer, it is important to listen.
2. **If you see litter of any kind, do not touch it!** We love taking care of the earth, so if you see any type of litter, you may ask a teacher to pick it up. Students do not touch litter because, “Some litter is sharp or yucky, and can hurt you.” I explain to them that adults know how to safely discern which litter is safe or unsafe, and kids do not, so just don't touch any litter. (Teachers carry around trash bags, gloves, hand sanitizer, and sharps disposal containers – we also use the find it fix it app to report any dangerous litter to the city.)

Where to Drop Off and Pick Up:

There is a spot, that we lovingly named, “**The Campsite,**” where we conduct all morning drop off and our 1:00 pick up for ROC. This spot is located right in between picnic shelters one and two. As you enter Woodland Park using the entrance off of 50th, follow the one way loop past picnic shelter one, and then look for us on the left. We will be in the same general area each day, however often using different picnic tables due to the changes in weather. For the first few weeks of school, we will put out a chalkboard sign. Also, you may use Brooke’s yellow VW Beetle as a landmark.

Afternoon Enrichment Pick Up: **If your student is staying until 3:00 or 5:00, pick up is at the “Nature Nook,”** Which is our school house just a couple of blocks from the park. The address is **4918 Linden Ave N, Seattle WA 98103**. We are in a big red house, right on the corner of Linden Avenue and 50th (We call it “Upper 50th – the stretch of 50th that leads to Aurora). (Occasionally, the afternoon program will stay at Woodland Park. If that is the case, Lead Teacher, Brooke, will text parents to update pick up location. This will be a rare occurrence.)

When you arrive, we will have a “Good Morning Table” set up with an activity or nature artifact for students to explore. They may set their backpack down at a backpack tree, and dive right in! Because we don’t have a fence, we ask for support from parents at drop off time. Please discourage students from goodbyes that are near the parking lot. Instead, please bring them to our “Good Morning Table” and give goodbye hugs and kisses there. This helps keep students safe during high traffic drop off times. Similarly, we will end each day with a closing circle. Parents are invited to walk up and join our circle, or to wait in/near your car, but please note that students will not be released from circle until we make our end-of-the-day sound. This procedure helps us ensure safety at pick up time.

Birthdays:

We LOVE Birthdays at Roots of Connection! When your student’s birthday is coming up, let Brooke know so that we can schedule a birthday parade. The child celebrating their birthday gets to be the leader of the parade, and all the students dress up with animal costumes and musical instruments to parade through the forest. Our usual schedule for birthday parades is as follows:

12:15 Birthday-kid’s family arrives, set up for parade begins

12:30 Parade begins!

12:45-12:50 Parade ends

12:50-1:00 Birthday Snack!

If this time of day doesn’t work for you, talk to Brooke and we can discuss other options. Parents are invited but not required to bring a birthday treat. We ask for these treats to be vegan (no meat, dairy, eggs) and peanut free. Some favorites are hot cider or hot cocoa made with coconut milk (We can warm it on our camp stove – let us know if this is what you plan to bring), mini donuts from Mighty-O, fruit snacks, muffins, or fresh fruit. Please feel free to go with your creativity – do not feel restricted to the list above. We will let you know if there are kids with other allergies on the day of your student’s parade, and if so, we can bring an alternative treat, or you can incorporate that into your snack choice.

Parents' Facebook Group:

Many parents love to see photos of their kid's day at school. With respect to photo release permissions, we can't post much publically, but we want to share these precious moments with you! Most families allow photos of their child to be posted on our private Facebook group that is only open to ROC families. Please join the group so that you can see these wonderful photos and connect with your student's experience at school! Search for Roots of Connection on Facebook, and two things will come up: Our public page and our private group. You can request to join the private group, and Brooke will approve you! (Please like our public page while you're at it!) We appreciate you considering granting as many photo release options as you feel comfortable, as it helps us grow our program. The private Parents' Facebook group is also a great resource for arranging play dates, and keeping in touch with your child's school community.

Afternoon Enrichment Program:

Students participating in our afternoon enrichment program will be coming from our morning program in the park, from the Robins preschool program, or from other local elementary schools. If your child is transferring from ROC or ROBINS to our afternoon program, they will complete the transition at school. If they are coming from another school, you will need to make arrangements for them to be brought to our Linden location. Because we have an indoor space, there are no required supplies like our morning program. Students just need themselves, and their willingness to learn and play. Our afternoon program occurs in two time blocks: 1:00-3:00 PM and 3:00-5:00 PM. Students will attend one or both of the time blocks. A healthy snack is served at 3:15. Pickup is offered at 3:00 and 5:00. Legally, we are required to be firm with pickup times. Any pickups after 3:05 will be billed for the next session, until 5:00 (So go get a coffee or run an errand!). Any pickups after 5:00 are billed \$5/minute late. Thank you for your cooperation and dedication to picking your kids up on time. We recommend exchanging contact information with at least one parent who can pick up your child and wait for you in the play yard if you are running late – that way you won't be billed!

The Afternoon Enrichment program will be filled with exciting opportunities to learn about nature through art, music, research, and play based exploration. Brooke will lead research and music lessons, and support play based exploration all five days a week. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, we will have professional artist and art teacher Melissa Koch to lead art projects. Monday she will lead projects for the Wren Watchers students, and Tuesdays and Wednesdays she will lead art projects that are open to all afternoon students. As our program grows, we will be fortunate to have Niall and Kayla join our afternoon programs and bring their gifts to the children as well.

All students who participate in our Afternoon Enrichment Program are required to sign our homeschool agreement form. More information about homeschooling is included on the next page of this packet.

Homeschooling:

What does it mean that Roots of Connection is a Homeschool Enrichment Program? If you are new to the idea of homeschooling, it might sound daunting or overwhelming, particularly if you are just looking for a Preschool or Pre-K program. This section of the handbook is to inform you on what it really means to attend a homeschool enrichment program. Let's start by diving into homeschool laws in Washington.

I – Compulsory Attendance

RCW 28A.225.010

- *Compulsory attendance age in the state of Washington is 8 years old OR the age at which a child is officially enrolled in public school.*
- *If a child is under 8 and has been officially enrolled in public school, the parent must formally withdraw the child. RCW 28A.225.015 However, we do not file a declaration of intent for children under age 8. The Home-Based Instruction law affects children 8 years old and older.*

This means that any child under 8 needn't have any paperwork filed to declare homeschooling status, as long as they haven't already been enrolled in public school. If they are over 8, parents are responsible for filing a bit of paperwork, as well as tracking student learning and keeping records. For more information, visit the Washington Homeschool Organization, who have complete resources available for homeschool families.

Many of our students are under 8 years old – so what does this mean for them? Though this is an enrichment program, **we provide a complete preschool and pre-K curriculum measurable against the NAEYC Standards** (National Association for the Education of Young Children). So why, then, are we a homeschool program? This allows the parents to oversee their child's education and have more control to ensure it fits your family's need. This allows us to give you free choice. How many days a week would you like to attend? How long of a day is appropriate for your student and your family? **By attending a homeschool enrichment program, you are assuming complete control of your child's educational journey.**

Roots of Connection provides resources for homeschool families of any age. **Each quarter, we will be offering curriculum conferences** to provide parents with resources for documentation of your student's learning. During these conferences, we will go over specific activities your child has completed at school, and which educational standards they meet. Record keeping for your child is important whether you continue homeschooling as they get older, or send them to kindergarten when they are 5. We want to ensure you have everything you need to keep great records. For older homeschoolers, these curriculum conferences will be particularly useful. (Wren Watchers)

If your child is approaching school-age and you want to keep them at Roots of Connection, but don't have the resources to be your child's teacher, consider alternative options, such as k-12 online education, which is a tuition free online homeschool program. Your child is enrolled in a public school program, but they have the schedule flexibility to attend programs like ROC to enrich their education. This option works for many families, as there are teachers overseeing your student's progress and making sure they are up to grade level so that transitions to any other school are smooth.

Homeschool Enrichment FAQ:

- **I only plan to enroll my student in Roots of Connection for Preschool/Pre-K. Will their transition to Kindergarten be the same as if I had sent them to a “regular” preschool?**
Yes! Many people use ROC as their only preschool education, and transition excellently to kindergarten. Because ROC students have such strong social and emotional development, they enter school with great readiness to take on new academic challenges.

- **Homeschooling sounds like a lot of extra work – I just want to send my kid to preschool!**

Homeschooling carries a lot of responsibility. Particularly as your student grows and is ready for more complex curriculum, homeschooling presents unique challenges to parent-educators. For children in the 4-6 age bracket, you are in luck because our program aligns with the NAEYC standards. By sending them to ROC, you can be assured that they are achieving a complete preschool-level education. By homeschooling, you are taking on the responsibility of overseeing their education – in this case, you can oversee their education by picking a program that meets your needs. (This is not to say that we endorse minimal involvement. It has been proven again and again that children have much higher rates of success if their parents are involved in their education by asking questions, helping with homework, volunteering at the school, or meeting with the teacher to discuss progress.)

- **Can my child attend another preschool even though we are enrolled in a homeschool program?**

Yes! There are no restrictions about joining other programs. Many people attend ROC for half of the week, and another preschool the other half of the week. This is a common practice, and no preschool will turn you away for attending a homeschool program or identifying as homeschoolers.

- **I have an older homeschooler and am concerned about record keeping to ensure my student can transfer into middle school in a few years. What do I need to know?**

The Homeschool Law in Washington states:

IV – Required Subjects

RCW 28A.225.010 (4)

- *The 11 required subjects need to be included in your curriculum.*
- *The 11 required subjects are reading, writing, spelling, language, math, science, social studies, history, health, occupational education, and art and music appreciation.*
- *These do not have to be taught separately. A unit study on frogs could include reading, writing, spelling, science, math, art and occupational education.*

We keep track of our projects and activities, and break them down into individual subject areas and educational standards met. ROC offers curriculum conferences to parents so that we can give you specific information about your student’s participation and the subjects and standards they have covered most heavily.