



# Little Valley Daycare LLC

Nature Inspired, Play Based Childcare.

Parent Handbook

Updated 3/28/2024

## **Welcome!**

**Who We Are:** Hello! My name is Kriya Miller, the owner and operator of Little Valley Daycare. My husband Matt and I are the Co-Founders of Human Nature School in Traverse City and have spent the last 12 years as the Co-Executive Directors, designing and running nature connection programs for all ages. I am the primary care provider, but Matt may make regular appearances to help as needed.

Our oldest son, Wilder is 14 and will likely be working as my assistant during the summer and has been volunteering as a helper with the young ones at Human Nature School since he was 9! ***(despite my absolute trust in Wilder, we will follow the policies for assistants required by the state and he will never be left alone with the children and will not be helping anyone with bathrooms or preparing any food. He is here to play with the kids, make things more fun and interesting and help support and guide them through any personal or group dynamics:)***

And then there's Robbert, who will be 3 this summer! If your attending daycare, I'm sure our kids will become great friends! We look forward to getting to know you and your family and strengthen the weave of community, support, and camaraderie for families in our area. And finally, there's our dog Kuna! She loves people and kids, but we will be keeping her in a separate area during childcare hours. (We will visit her to say hi sometimes, but only while direct, up-close supervision can be offered).

**Where We Are:** We are conveniently located just off M-72 on Tager rd, about 15 minutes west of Traverse City along the Leelanau/Benzie County line. Tager rd. is a gravel rd that doesn't get much traffic and our driveway heads up a little valley within a valley to our cabin, tucked away within the forest. (\*4-wheel drive will be needed for winter pick up and drop off). We have a fenced in yard for lots of outdoor free play, gardening, bird feeding, snow play, sand play, water play and can take little walks as well throughout our 7-acre property if we need to stretch our legs even more. Inside our cabin we have an open living room/kitchen with lots of games and toys and things to climb and slide on with big, beautiful windows to view the outdoors.

**Our Approach to Childcare:** *We offer Nature Inspired, Play Based Childcare!*

### **Mentoring Principals:**

- **Childs Passions:** Nature and the Nature of the Children lead the way. We will lean into child's passions, aka the things kids naturally love to do (Ex: running, jumping, hiding, seeking, singing, dancing, digging holes, catching ants, collecting leaves, building things, water and sand play, throwing things, playing games, make believe, climbing, building forts, the list goes on!)

- Serve and Return:** Your children are already observing and communicating about sooo much! This is the “serve”. Whether it’s pointing to the moon and making a sound I can’t recognize as a word yet or bringing me a piece of bark they found and trying to show me the tiny snail shell on it or pointing happily to all the milkweed seeds blowing in the wind... My job is to acknowledge what they are showing me with a “return”. So I might point at the moon too and help them say moon! Or I might pause long enough to really look at the bark and see the shell they are showing me. By “returning” what they “serve” I am teaching them that their observations are important and that they matter. We all do this with our own kids without even thinking about it but it’s one of the most important things we can “teach” our kids. In doing this we are teaching them their observations matter and to keep it up!
- Risk vs Reward:** There is always risk in life. But we will seek to minimize the risk while maximizing the reward. All too often, we minimize the risk while also minimizing the reward. An example of minimizing risk AND reward often sounds like “No” (No climbing, No throwing, No running!!!) Minimizing the risk while maximizing the reward often sounds like “Yes, And” (Yes and throw the rock over here instead of toward other people, Yes and use the foam to play to swords instead of the sticks... etc) We will always aim to keep your kids safe and minimize the risk while maximizing the reward. There will be falls and scrapes and bonks and bumps from time to time. These are all a part of exploring the world and learning to be in bodies. We will do everything in our power however to prevent any serious harm or injury in any way. Your child’s safety, both emotionally and physically is as important to me as the safety of my own children. As is the freedom to explore their own nature:)
- Titration:** We aim to create a safe and loving space for the children. And from that foundation, they can choose to push their own boundaries in their own time. Often, we see children needing to titrate, or move back and forth between safety and security to new adventures and challenges and back again. By providing both opportunities, they can move back and forth on their own terms. An example of this is setting up a sprinkler that the kids can choose to run into and they can choose when to run back out of. They have the choice of when and how much they push that edge for themselves. If I were to be spraying them with the water, it might be fun for some, but it’s running the risk of losing their choice and their safety in the moment and getting sprayed well beyond what they are comfortable with. We aim to set up activities and opportunities in a way where kids have the most choice. And if/when they get to wet, they can learn to make a different choice for themselves and find empowerment from the experience.

- **Natural Consequences vs Punishment:** If you spill something, that's okay, you can just help me clean it up! If you get covered in wet mud that you don't like having on you, that's okay, we'll help you get cleaned up and then we can explore how it happened and decide whether or not you want to do it again.
- **Boundaries:** Your body, your choice (includes your personal clothing or gear, what make believe character you are today, you get to be the boss of your body and who you want to play as.) We are here to help give you tools and words to honor your self and your boundaries, in a peaceful way. And we will also practice listening to and respecting the boundaries others. In time, you will not need our help anymore to do this!
- **Taking Turns:** The toys and equipment we play with are not a part of our bodies and selves, even if we love them A LOT. If more than one kid wants to play with a toy at the same time, we will practice taking turns. If kids are unable to take to turns, even with lots of support to do so, we will likely put that toy away for a while and try again later.

### **Nature Inspired, Play Based Learning:**

- **Nature Inspired:** Early childhood is such a potent time to get to know the earth we got to be born in to! That's why many of our books and toys and are nature inspired and much of our time will be spent outside.
- **Academics:** There will be plenty of exposure to words, numbers, colors etc. and the kids will certainly pick up a lot as they play and explore. We will follow the curiosity of the kids and help them dive deeper into their own interests in their own time. *We will not facilitate sit down, didactic, group learning time, like we experience in a classic classroom setting. But we will certainly fan the flames of passions and help kids learn with what they are excited about.*
- **Hands on/Building things:** Lots of toys and activities for building things, blocks, puzzles, train tracks, forts, sandboxes, etc. It's such a cool thing to get to create!
- **Arts & Music:** Art supplies and musical instruments are here to play with!
- **Imagination Play:** Kids can play and explore and "be" whoever they want (but they don't get to dictate who other people are:)

- **Screens:** We do not utilize screens as learning tools however, we may use a short show to aid in the transition into quiet time and to help kids regulate and rest after a big morning of play play play. Often times this can help them slow down enough to rest and tune into their bodies, go to the bathroom, drink water and such.
- **Holidays:** We will not be teaching the meaning behind holidays (that's up to families), But I do like to hold a space for everyone to get to talk about what they are excited about or believe in. And I like to put up decorations sometimes and get in the holiday spirit which often coincides with the natural flow of the seasons and what is happening in nature. I like to join them in their excitement and honor it but I aim to not be an authority on what is or isn't real or correct.

## FLOW OF THE DAY

*General Flow of the Day, may shift based on what's happening in nature and with the nature of the kids:)*

8:00 am- 9:30 am: Flex arrival time and free play with both quiet and active play options (art, music, books, toys, games, depending on the needs of the kids) A rolling breakfast will be provided and as they arrive which they can snack on at their own pace throughout the morning as needed.

9:30 am- 9:45 am: Morning clean up, bathroom checks, get ready to go outside!

9:45 am-11:00 am: Outdoor play (as much as the weather permits:)

11:00 am-11:30 am: Head in, wash up, do bathroom breaks, get water and the kids get to watch a 15 min episode of a kid show while Kriya cooks lunch.

11:30 pm -12:00 pm: Lunch time and then one more 15 minute episode of a kid show to help shift into quiet time.

12:00 pm- 1:00 pm: "Quiet time" Kids who need to nap can nap and we'll put on some quiet time music and get all our cozy matts set up to encourage kids to rest. Most kids do not sleep but it's been good to have this rhythm of slowing down and tuning into your

own needs and body. Often time we start out very chill and then as the kids start stirring we'll read books and then doing restful activities like play dough or coloring and by the end of the hour they are fully ready to get moving again.

1:00- 1:30: Clean up, bathrooms and get ready to go outside time.

1:30-3:00 Outside time!

3:00-4:00 Head in and get ready for pickup, shift into more restful play, take care of our bodies (eat, drink, bathrooms) start tidying up and make sure everyone is taken care of before launching into any last activities for the day.

### **Hours of Operation:**

#### **2023/2024 School Year:**

8 am – 4 pm, Tuesdays -Thursdays

#### **2024 Summer:**

8 am- 4 pm, Tuesdays-Thursdays

#### **2024/2025 School year:**

8 am- 4 pm, Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays

[Click Here to Access the Google Calendar for Specific Dates](#)

## **Enrollment Process**

1. [Fill out the interest form and join our waitlist here!](#)
2. I will reach out to you in the order I received your interest form, on or before the enrollment date for your program (enrollment dates for programs are listed above for each program:)
3. If space is available, we will schedule a site visit. After your site visit, you will have 1 week to decide if you'd like to enroll.
4. Complete enrollment forms and we'll see ya daycare!

## Payments

- All program costs are based on a \$60 per day flat rate. You will be billed each week we are open through bright wheel (this is an app I will invite you to once your program begins and all payments will be tracked and billed through the brightwheel app and you can either pay directly through them or you can pay any other way you prefer but we'll just keep track of it in brightwheel so we can both track everything easily together and be on the same page and when tax time comes, Boom! All your hours and payments will be right there for you to report and hopefully get some nice credits and deductions for.)
- \*Assistance from the state is [available here!](#)
- Summary/Example of Available Assistance: Your monthly income must be:
  - For a family of 4: Entry level income: \$4626 per month (Once qualified your income can increase to \$6224 before you no longer qualify)

**Sick Days:** Please keep your kids home when they are sick! Especially at the onset of sickness when both fatigue and contagions are at their highest. If the onset of a sickness happens at daycare, we will call you for an early pickup and take good care of them in the meantime. If a child has largely recovered and just has a lingering cough or runny nose, and their energy is back, that's usually just fine:) If you are not sure whether to keep them home, ask me for my recommendations.

**Cancelations/Closing:** If I am sick and unable to provide care, I may need to close for the day. If there is extreme weather or power outages, I may also need to close for the day, in which case you will not be required to make a payment for that day. I will be sure to communicate with you as soon as possible and no later than 7 am on your day of care.

**Payments:** Payments are generally due each week, but individual payment plans can be created. If you are receiving assistance from the State, they will make biweekly payments and we will follow their payment schedule.

**Payments for missed days:** If I close due to weather or sickness, ***you will not*** be charged for those days. If you do not attend due to your own sick or vacation days, ***you will*** still be charged as usual. (You can always request that I waive your fee if you are

sick or on vacation and have a good reason. I will consider waiving these fees on a case-by-case basis and will consider a variety of factors that aim to find a commonsense balance between respecting and honoring all of us.)

**Communication:**

Clear and open communication is key to working together to best support your kid/s! Drop off and pick up is great time to touch base about the basics in person but is a tricky time to go deeper. If time and space is needed for additional matters, please just text to set up a phone call or in person chat time. I've been working with families for the last 15 years and have never once been upset or offended when someone speaks up about something they are questioning or concerned about. 100% of the time this has led to deeper understanding and trust.