

CARD Nature School

Parent Handbook 2026-2027



www.chicorec.gov

Enrollment Questions?

Email Francesca at fshaffer@chicorec.gov



CARD
Chico Area Recreation & Park District

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Meet our Program Assistant, Ms. Ellen!



Hello, my name is Ms. Ellen, and I am so happy to be leading our Nature School program! I grew up in Chico exploring Bidwell Park and visiting the Nature Center. I love sharing these special parts of our community with others. I graduated from Chico State in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in psychology. Over the last 16 years I have worked in a wide variety of both childcare and classroom settings, allowing me to collect a unique combination of teaching strategies. I have a wonderful daughter of my own and know just how important it is to have a patient, nurturing, and joyful approach to working with children. I am passionate about early childhood education, art, and nature and feel so lucky to

run a program that incorporates all three! Preschool children are my absolute favorite age to work with. It is incredibly rewarding to watch our Nature Kids explore the world around them and develop so many exciting new skills throughout the year! Nature School is an amazing program, and I am so grateful to be a part of it!

We are so excited to begin the new year here with you at Nature School! Nature School is such a sweet program where children get to learn about themselves, their friends, and the natural world around them through play-based learning! We spend most of the day outdoors and have a rich curriculum spanning from plant and animal identification skills, age-appropriate academics, healthy body movement and SO much more that we can't wait to share with you!



Program Hours and Contact Info

Program Philosophy

At Nature School, not only do we create a unique space for children to begin developing school-readiness skills, both academically and socially, we do it all with a strong focus on nature. We believe that spending much of the day outdoors creates more hands-on learning opportunities than any other type of classroom setting. Our classroom rules are **(1)** We take turns talking, **(2)** We are kind to our friends and **(3)** We stick to the group like a peanut butter jelly sandwich. Our child focused, play based learning style guarantees that children's needs will always come first, and provides flexibility for children to help guide their own learning. We foster kindness, creativity, and a deep love of nature in our students. We provide a positive and meaningful first-time learning experience in the hope of beginning a lifelong love of learning and a true appreciation of nature.

About the Program

Our program provides fun and enriching new units every two weeks. During these units we incorporate themed:

- **Age-appropriate academics:** plant and animal identification, sign language, educational books and stories, letter sounds, name tracing, number and letter identification and tracing, counting, colors, shapes, introductory nature math, using scissors, rhyming, patterns, and opposites.
- **Social emotional growth:** expanding emotional vocabulary, sharing, personal space, first time listening, listening to others, respectfulness, helping hands, taking turns, meeting live animals, empathy, diversity, and inclusion.
- **Healthy body movement:** dancing, yoga, nature walks, climbing trees, playground play, and dipping our toes in the creek.
- **Comprehension:** making predictions and observations, comparing and contrasting, reading comprehension questions, playing games, following directions, and problem solving.
- **Creativity:** arts and crafts, music, imagination, sensory play, exploring nature, and building.

Program Units

A sneak peak of some of the fun themed units we will be providing throughout our rotating two-year-long curriculum include:

Nocturnal Animals, Trees, Birds, Music, Insects, Maps, Plants, Emotions, Lizards, Gratitude, Frogs, Animal Groups, Seasons, Bears, Outer Space, Snakes, Water, Pollinators, Underground, Flowers, Dragonflies, Friendship, Baby Animals, Forest Floor, Animal Care, Rocks, Rainbows and more!



Visit our website at www.chicorec.gov/nature-school for parent resources including forms, calendars, payment information and the current parent handbook.

Nature School Program Assistant: Ellen Flasch

Email: naturecenter@chicorec.gov

Program Phone: 530-519-5810

You can reach us on our cell phone during program hours. You may text or leave a voicemail during non-program hours.

Location: Chico Creek Nature Center- 1968 E. 8th Street, Chico, CA 95928

Ages: 3-5 years old

Days: Monday/ Wednesday/ Friday or Tuesday/ Thursday

Hours: 9:00am-1:00pm

Dates: See program calendar on last page of handbook



Payments and Fees

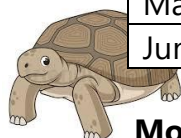
This program has a \$10 non-refundable registration fee. The parent or legal guardian who registers the child is responsible for all program fees and charges. Fees for the 2026–27 school year are listed below. Billing is processed on a month-to-month basis, and monthly fees vary depending on the number of program days. Please note that **CARD does not prorate for missed days or if a child leaves the program mid-month. If you plan to withdraw from the program, we require a minimum of two weeks' notice. This allows us time to fill the spot; otherwise, you will be responsible for payment until the space is filled.**

CARD's TAX ID # 94-1156263



Nature School- Mon/Wed/Fri			
Yearly Fee		\$ 4,070	
(Monthly fee is calculated at \$37 per day)			
Month	Days	Fee	Processing Dates
Aug	7	\$ 259	8/10/2026
Sep	12	\$ 444	8/25/2026
Oct	13	\$ 481	9/24/2026
Nov	10	\$ 370	10/26/2026
Dec	8	\$ 296	11/24/2026
Jan	11	\$ 407	12/28/2026
Feb	11	\$ 407	1/25/2027
Mar	11	\$ 407	2/22/2027
Apr	13	\$ 481	3/25/2027
May	12	\$ 444	4/26/2027
June	2	\$ 74	5/25/2027

Nature School- Tues/Thurs			
Yearly Fee		\$ 2,812	
(Monthly fee is calculated at \$37 per day)			
Month	Days	Fee	Processing Dates
Aug	4	\$ 148	8/10/2026
Sep	9	\$ 333	8/25/2026
Oct	9	\$ 333	9/24/2026
Nov	6	\$ 222	10/26/2026
Dec	6	\$ 222	11/24/2026
Jan	8	\$ 296	12/28/2026
Feb	8	\$ 296	1/25/2027
Mar	7	\$ 259	2/22/2027
Apr	9	\$ 333	3/25/2027
May	8	\$ 296	4/26/2027
June	2	\$ 74	5/25/2027



Monthly Payment Plan

Payment for the school year may be made in full at the time of registration, or families may choose to enroll in a monthly payment plan. Payment plan processing dates are outlined in the calendar on the last page of this handbook. If a payment is declined, you will be contacted and must complete the payment no later than the last day of the month prior to care being provided. **If payment is not received by that deadline, your child's spot will be forfeited.**

Late Pick-Up

Your child must be picked up no later than 1:00pm. If your child is picked up late 6 times, they will be removed from the program. If your child is not picked up by 1:20pm and no contact has been made with people on the emergency form, Chico Police Department will be called.

Behavior & Bathroom Expectations

Questions to consider prior to registration:

Our goal is for your child to be successful at the program. If your answer is "NO" to one or more of these questions, your child may not be ready for this program.

- Can they meet Behavior and Bathroom Expectations? (see below)
- Are they able to stay with the group and not run away when upset or overwhelmed? Our programs maintain set ratios and are not designed for one-on-one care.
- Are they able to go on long walks without being held? We go on nature walks every day.
- Is your child overwhelmed with loud noises? At times, the program can be loud.
- Is your child comfortable when you are not present?
- Does your child warm up to new situations where they do not know anyone?

Behavior Expectations

At CARD, we believe that positive behavior creates an environment where all participants can thrive, build meaningful relationships, and enjoy recreation experiences. Behavior expectations are designed to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all participants, foster respect for others and property, and help children develop important social skills. By maintaining consistent expectations across all our programs, we create predictable environments where children feel secure and can focus on learning, growing, and having fun. The following expectations apply to all participants in CARD programs.

- **Be Safe** (includes staying with the group, keeping hands and feet to themselves)
- **Be Respectful** (includes listening and following directions, using appropriate language, being kind to others, using equipment properly)
- **Be Responsible** (includes using the restroom independently/no bathroom accidents, keeping track of personal items, telling the truth)

If behavior expectations are not met, staff will use their best judgment when deciding what level of discipline is most appropriate for the circumstances. CARD programs are committed to being safe and enjoyable places for all. Our programs maintain set ratios and are not designed for one-on-one care. Staff may choose to suspend or expel a child from the program for recurring behavioral concerns or for extreme situations.

CARD will not tolerate participants compromising the safety of themselves or others, causing or threatening physical injury to another person, bringing weapons or illegal contraband to the program, or vandalizing the program equipment or space. Any of these actions or other actions deemed dangerous, illegal, or harmful will result in immediate expulsion from the program.

If a child is expelled from a program and would like to re-join the same or another program, a spot is not guaranteed.

Bathroom Expectations

All children must be fully potty trained and able to use the restroom independently (no pull ups). Staff may verbally assist children with bathroom usage; however, your child must be able to independently do the following:

- communicate their need to use the bathroom.
- use the toilet without making a mess.
- wipe and pull up their pants.
- flush the toilet.
- turn on and off the water.
- get soap and paper towels from the wall dispenser.
- change their own underwear.

In the event of a bathroom accident, staff may contact parents or guardians to request immediate pick up or assistance with cleaning and clothing change. Reoccurring bathroom accidents may result in removal from the program. Please send your child with a change of clothes stored in a large zip lock bag labeled "clean", and a second large zip lock bag labeled "dirty". These items will be stored in their cubby baskets and replaced as necessary.

Behavior Management

We adhere to developmentally appropriate practices and guidelines which recognize that each child is unique, with distinct growth patterns, personalities, learning styles, and family backgrounds. While certain behaviors are common at specific ages or stages, we acknowledge that children acquire social skills at their own pace. With this in mind, we carefully observe each child and create individualized behavior plans when necessary.

Our approach emphasizes "positive discipline," which focuses on reinforcing positive behaviors rather than addressing negative ones. We may redirect children and discuss appropriate behavior with them. When needed, we speak in a firm yet caring tone. At times, it may be necessary to remove a child from the rest of the group. If a behavior continues, we will schedule an Action Plan meeting with the child's parents or guardians to develop an individual behavior management plan.

The following techniques are used according to age-appropriateness and the individual needs of each child:

- **Distraction and redirection:** Suggest appropriate behavior without using time-outs.

- **A quiet, private talk:** Showing respect for children's feelings, getting down on the child's level, looking at the child directly in the eye and giving him or her our undivided attention.
- **Praise:** Acknowledge and encourage positive behavior by catching and celebrating "good choices."
- **Indirect praise:** Commend nearby children who are exhibiting positive behavior to encourage others.
- **Modeling examples:** Demonstrate expected behaviors, such as using a calm whisper to encourage quiet voices.
- **Contingency statements (if/ then):** For example, "If you put away the blocks, then we can..."
- **Positive redirection:** Redirection is done in a positive manner. Teachers give a forewarning of behavior that needs to be corrected and follow through with redirection to another area in the classroom or yard. If inappropriate behavior continues, a teacher may shadow the child until they're ready to resume appropriate play. The teacher then explains why the redirection occurred and discusses making better choices.
- **Social guidance:** Staff guide children in learning and expressing socially appropriate behavior that is individual to that child.
- **Transition warnings:** Provide a 5-minute notice before moving from one activity to another.
- **Questioning vs. Telling:** Teachers may ask the child a question such as, "What kind of voice should we use inside?" or "How do we treat our classmates?"

Aggressive or Disruptive Behavior in Children

We are dedicated to ensuring a safe environment for your child. Our program fosters cooperation, respect for others, and non-aggressive problem-solving among children. However, behaviors such as biting, tantrums, defiance, sharing conflicts, or physical aggression may occasionally arise in young children. Despite our best efforts and close supervision, these behaviors can sometimes occur before an adult can intervene, even when a teacher is nearby.

Aggressive behavior includes, but is not limited to, actions such as biting, hitting, pushing, physical aggression, sharing conflicts, or provoking altercations. For older children, this may also involve verbal abuse or the use of inappropriate language.

Disruptive behavior includes, but is not limited to, situations where a child requires continuous one-on-one intervention from a teacher, shows disrespect toward adults, has frequent tantrums, consistently ignores or refuses to follow instructions, is often unkind to peers, or regularly disrupts the classroom environment.

Disenrollment Policy

CARD reserves the right to disenroll any child at any time if we determine that disenrollment is in the best interest of the child and/or the program. Our primary goal is to provide high-quality care and early education for all enrolled children, but in rare cases, disenrollment may be necessary. Reasons for involuntary disenrollment may include:

- **Difficulty Adapting:** Most children adjust to a new program within a reasonable period. If a child is unable to adapt despite efforts by both parents and staff to support their integration, disenrollment may be necessary so that parents can seek alternative care.
- **Reoccurring Bathroom Accidents:** Occasional potty accidents are expected at this age and will not result in immediate dismissal from the program. If continuous accidents occur, disenrollment may occur.
- **Aggressive or Disruptive Behavior:** If a child displays aggression, harm toward others, or consistently disruptive behavior, CARD will make every effort to guide them toward respectful and socially appropriate behavior. However, if these behaviors persist, disenrollment may occur to protect the well-being of other children.
- **Safety Concerns:** Given the setting and style of our program, safety is a top priority. During park visits, we navigate parking lots, share trails with pedestrians, dogs, and horses, and encounter potential hazards such as poison oak, the creek, and occasional cars or cyclists. This setting requires children to listen carefully and stay with the group, emphasizing the importance of staying close to an adult for their safety. If a child consistently needs to be held by the hand to remain with the group or requires staff to chase after them, disenrollment may be necessary to ensure the safety of all participants.
- **Non-Cooperation with Behavior Plans:** Failure by parents or guardians to support and cooperate with an individual behavior management plan may result in disenrollment.
- **Inappropriate Parent Behavior:** CARD reserves the right to disenroll a child if a parent exhibits behavior that is disruptive, abusive, malicious, or harmful toward staff, their child(ren), or other children and families.
- **Non-Payment of Tuition or Fees:** Continued failure to pay tuition or family fees may lead to disenrollment.
- **Irreconcilable Differences:** Parents may have specific expectations for their child's care and education. If CARD cannot meet these expectations, we reserve the right to disenroll the child, allowing the family to find a program that better suits their needs.

We are committed to partnering with you to help your child learn to participate, cooperate, and become a responsible member of the group. If a child's behavior poses a

risk to themselves or others or disrupts the classroom environment, our policy includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- **Firm but Caring Guidance:** When needed, we address the child using a firm yet compassionate tone. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove the child from the group temporarily.
- **Office Intervention:** If a child is sent to the office due to their behavior and cannot safely return to the group— either for the protection of others, their own well-being, or the program's functionality— the child must be picked up within one hour of notification.
- **Temporary Suspension:** We may request that you keep your child home for a period ranging from one day to one week, depending on the situation.
- **Behavior Documentation:** Staff will maintain a record of the child's behavior.
- **Parent Communication:** We will inform you about any persistent disruptive behaviors and discuss individualized guidance strategies to address them.
- **Action Plan Development:** If the behavior continues, the Program Assistant, Coordinator, and/or Supervisor will meet with parents to explore potential solutions and develop a mutually agreed-upon behavior plan.

In cases where one child repeatedly harasses another— whether verbally or physically— we will inform the parents of both children involved. For confidentiality reasons, we do not disclose the names of other children in any written or verbal incident reports.

If we determine that a child's behavior poses a risk to others or requires more focused supervision than we can provide, we may require the child's immediate withdrawal until they can effectively manage the behavior.

Our goal is to help your child become a successful and responsible individual, and we are committed to working closely with you if any issues arise. However, if parents are unable to provide support or if, despite collaborative efforts, the behavior does not improve, we reserve the right to have you "take a break" and withdraw the child.

What does taking a break mean?

Fall semester

- August- October: families can try again in the Spring.
- November-December: families will need to wait and try again the following school year.

Spring semester

- January-March: families can try again the following school year.
- April-May: families are welcome to add their name to the following school year waiting list but will need to wait until spring to try again.

General Information

To access and/or create your CARD online account, click [HERE](#).

Registration

Families enrolled through the end of the school year have priority to re-enroll for the following year. Re-enrollment information will be emailed at the beginning of April, and we begin offering any remaining spots to new families on the waitlist in May. In addition, enrolled families receive sibling priority. Families have priority to enroll siblings alongside their currently enrolled child during re-enrollment. If a sibling is not eligible to start at the beginning of the year but turns three during the school year, they will receive priority for the next available opening. Each year this Parent Handbook is updated and available on the CARD website under Nature School.

Attendance

CARD does not have attendance requirements; your child may attend days/hours as needed. However, consistent attendance is strongly encouraged for the benefit of your child, fellow participants, and the overall program. It is helpful for you to notify our staff if your child will be absent. **Unexplained absences will not be confirmed by CARD staff.** All children must be signed in each day. Only authorized pick-up people will be allowed to sign a child out.

Emergency Contacts and Pick Up Authorization

CARD Programs longer than 3 hours utilize an authorized drop-off/pick-up process. Parents/legal guardians **listed during the registration process** are the only individuals who may make changes to the child's pick-up list or emergency contacts. Anyone listed as an authorized pick-up person may sign out the child but cannot make changes. **Photo ID will be checked!** For your child's safety, these rules are strictly enforced, and no exceptions will be made.

To add individuals to the authorized pick-up list for your child, you can

- add people in person to your child's account at the program site or CARD office.
- provide a written note with your signature to the program. If you are unable to give this note to staff in person, you may write a note and text a picture of it to the site cell phone. CARD does not allow phone-ins as an authorized release of a child.

Snacks/Lunch

Food is not provided by CARD. Please send your child with a large healthy lunch, plenty of small healthy snacks for snack time, and a full water bottle daily. Please be mindful of choking hazards when packing lunches and keep candy at home. Food and water should be in containers the child is able to open independently- **no glass please!**

Personal Belongings

Children should not bring valuables to the program. Please label your child's belongings such as water bottles, jackets, and backpacks. CARD is not responsible for lost or stolen items. Please send your child with a change of clothes stored in a large zip lock bag labeled "clean", and a second large zip lock bag labeled "dirty" for the occasional potty accident or wardrobe change. These items will be stored in their cubby baskets and replaced as necessary.

Program Attire

Be prepared for the weather each day! Layers are always strongly recommended. In the spring, please send children wearing hats, pre-applied sunscreen and bug spray, waterproof closed toe sandals with a heel strap for playing in the creek, and a change of clothes. In the winter, please send children wearing warm coats, rain jackets (we will still go for our daily nature walks rain or shine), mittens they can put on independently, and warm shoes with a good grip for climbing trees.

Health Policies & Medication

CARD does not store or dispense routine medication. While children may bring their own sunscreen and bug spray to the program, CARD staff are **not** permitted to apply to children. Please drop off your children with sunscreen and bug spray already applied. If your child requires emergency, life-saving medication please submit an accommodation request as outlined below.

If your child becomes ill at the program, you will be notified and must arrange to have your child picked up immediately. Once your child has been fever-free for 24 hours, they are welcome to return to the program. **Please notify staff if your child has been exposed to any contagious disease or condition such as COVID-19, chicken pox, lice, pink eye, mumps, measles, etc., so we can notify other parents immediately.**

- Do not send your child to the program if they are not feeling well, have excessive coughing, have an excessive runny nose or have a temperature over 100.4°. Children must be fever-free 24 hours before returning.
- If a child indicates they do not feel well or exhibits signs of illness, you will be called for immediate pick up.

Accommodation and Inclusion

CARD is committed to providing equal access to our recreation programs for participants of all abilities. We strive to create inclusive environments where all participants can fully experience the benefits of recreation activities. Accommodation requests are evaluated on an individual basis to determine reasonable modifications that do not fundamentally alter the nature of our programs or create an undue burden.

To request accommodations, participants must register for an activity or program and submit a completed Accommodation Request Form a minimum of four (4) weeks prior to the start date.

Our approach focuses on what participants can do rather than limitations, emphasizing involvement and empowerment in our programs. While we may not be able to fulfill every accommodation request, we will work collaboratively with participants and families to explore alternative solutions whenever possible. For more information about our accommodation request process, please visit <https://www.chicorec.gov/inclusion>.

Code of Conduct

To ensure the safety of all children and staff in our programs, individuals are responsible for adhering to the program rules and expectations. This includes use of appropriate language, a civil tone of voice, calm demeanor, respecting personal space, and maintaining personal and professional boundaries. Any person who does not meet conduct expectations will be asked to leave the premises immediately and the participant may be removed from the program.

Photo/Video Release

CARD reserves the right to photograph and video record activities and program participants for potential promotional purposes.



Frequently Asked Questions

- Birthdays: You are welcome to bring a store-bought, nut-free treat for the class on your child's birthday, if you would like. Staff will distribute this at lunchtime.
- Halloween: Children are welcome to wear a costume to school for Halloween if there's no blood, weapons, or easily lost props.
- We have three events each year where families are invited to stay and play during Nature School: Our beginning of the year meet the teacher, end of the semester pizza party and end of the year pizza party. Our pizza parties include cheese and pepperoni pizza, juice, and salad. You are welcome to contribute a store-bought, nut-free item to the pizza parties, if you would like.
- A late drop-off and/or early pick-up is allowed. Please let us know in advance if you can and call the site phone when you arrive. We recommend allowing an extra ten minutes for appointments in case we are out and about in the park when you arrive.
- Families trickle in between 9:00 and 9:30AM during free play. If your child finds drop-offs difficult, you are welcome to come at 9:30AM when the structured portion of our day begins. We have noticed this helps some children focus on something other than feeling sad or nervous and have a smoother transition.
- We recommend quick confident drop offs if your child finds them difficult. If a child remains upset and is unable to transition to the program, we will call parents for an early pick up. We want Nature School to be a fun experience, not a forced one.
- If you choose to step away from the program and return later, a spot is not guaranteed. You will need to add your name to the waitlist and will be called in the order received as spots open.
- Email is our primary form of communication. Ms. Ellen sends email updates every two weeks to recap what they have learned and introduce the next unit.

Program Flow

9:00 AM Free Play with Stations (30 minutes)

9:30 AM Clean-up Song (5 minutes)

9:35 AM Morning Circle (30 minutes)
Schedule, rules, name song, short lesson & stories

Potty & Water Reminders

10:10 AM Yoga & Dancing (10 minutes)

10:20 AM Art & Wash Hands (20 minutes)

10:40 AM Snack & Playground (15 minutes)

Potty & Water Reminders

10:55 AM Nature Walk with Nature Identification & Free Play (30-50 minutes)

11:30 AM ***Mon. & Thurs. Only* Animal Visits with Teacher Kurt**

12:00 PM Wash Hands (10 minutes)

12:10 PM Lunch & Playground (30 minutes)

Potty & Water Reminders

12:30 PM Optional: Sensory Play/ Group Exercise Game/ Outside Toys (15 minutes)

12:45 PM Closing Circle (15 minutes)
Review what we learned today and read stories until parents arrive.



NATURE SCHOOL CALENDAR

AUGUST 2026-JUNE 2027

AUGUST 2026	SEPTEMBER 2026	OCTOBER 2026
S M T W TH F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	S M T W TH F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	S M T W TH F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31
NOVEMBER 2026	DECEMBER 2026	JANUARY 2027
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FEBRUARY 2027	MARCH 2027	APRIL 2027
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MAY 2027	JUNE 2027	KEY
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