



Fall 2024 Homeschool Program Parent Guide

Welcome to the Young Explorers Society!

Our Mission

To provide well-rounded outdoor adventure education that inspires and enables kids and their families to enjoy creation together.

Program Outcomes

The Young Explorers Society (Y.E.S.) encourages kids to think beyond themselves and consider the people and places around them as they learn and play outside. The following benefits are why we believe adventures are worthwhile, and we help participants notice and discuss them along the way:

1. **EXPERIENCE WONDER** – Outdoor exploration develops a strong foundation for spiritual growth by exposing us to the awe of creation and allowing space for introspection. We encourage observation and foster kids' natural curiosity to help them encounter the incredible power and intricate beauty all around them.
2. **GROW RELATIONSHIPS** – Real adventures are a fantastic catalyst to help kids build lasting friendships and bring families closer together. We open doors to share more quality time and make unforgettable stories.
3. **CULTIVATE CHARACTER** – Engagement in challenging experiences provides a rich environment for developing character attributes like gratitude, joyfulness, and perseverance. Along the way we teach fundamentals like responsibility, decision-making, and activity-specific skills all while helping kids realize opportunities for lifelong physical activity.
4. **STEWARDSHIP PLACES** – We need wild spaces and they must be cared for to thrive. By training responsible users and joining forces with other local community organizations we maintain and improve the places where we love to play.

Y.E.S. teaches outdoor skills not as an end in themselves, but as useful tools for participants to grow spiritually, relationally, and personally. Y.E.S. is not exclusive to families of faith, but our approach to these learning outcomes is informed by our Christian faith and biblical worldview. If you have questions about this, please give us a call!

Homeschool Program Details

Curriculum

Your child will receive age-appropriate skills instruction including (but not limited to):

- Adventure Sports

- Canoeing and/or kayaking (we start building skills on flatwater, and then older/more advanced groups will progress to gentle moving water at our discretion)
- Rock climbing (bouldering, top-roping, and rappelling)
- Hiking (emphasis on child-led exploration and integration of adventure skills listed below)
- Adventure Skills (may vary each semester)
 - Risk management (hazard identification, appropriate decision-making in various terrain, and proper use of safety gear)
 - Leave No Trace principles (as they apply to our specific activities and environment)
 - Land stewardship (we help local organizations with a service project each semester)
 - Trail etiquette
 - Self-care (layering, nutrition, hydration, sun protection, etc.)
 - Logistics (focus on kids helping along the way – adventuring is hard work!)
 - Land navigation (practical map & compass skills)
 - Fire building (emphasis on appropriateness and LNT considerations)
 - Plant & animal Identification
 - Local history
- Soft Skills - We typically share a discussion topic relating to one of our program outcomes (see above) each day, in addition to countless opportunities to experientially learn about these outcomes along the way.

We love to know our families, so we are happy to discuss your child's progress at drop-off and pickup, and you are welcome to ask us for more details at any time.

Ages & Program Prerequisites

The Homeschool Program is intended for boys & girls in 1st-8th grade. Groups are typically separated into 1st-4th grade and 5th-8th grade, though we may make exceptions in some cases. More experienced children in each group will be encouraged to lead and set an excellent example for the less experienced children. More advanced skills will be taught to those in the group that are ready.

The following are prerequisites to join the program. Participants should be:

- Able to hike 4 miles with a loaded daypack
- Able to pee AND poop in the woods independently
- Able to tie shoes and manipulate zippers without assistance
- Able to listen carefully and follow multiple instructions
- Able to respect the physical and emotional boundaries set forth by instructors
- Able to communicate personal needs to instructors
- Willing to be outside for extended periods in various weather conditions

Our program takes place in remote settings with real environmental risks. If your child has a disability or significant health condition, please give us a call to discuss specifics.

Tuition

Tuition for each 14-week semester is \$1500 per child (unless you qualify for financial assistance). A non-refundable deposit of \$200 per child is due at time of registration and will be applied to

tuition. Our registration system will allow you choose between the following options to pay the remaining tuition balance:

- Pay in full
- Four equal installments (due 8/31, 9/30, 10/31, 11/30)
- A \$120 sibling discount will apply to each additional child from the same family (1st child = \$1500, 2nd child = \$1380, 3rd child = \$1380, etc.).
- If you choose to pay via EFT (instead of a Credit Card), a \$20 per child discount (prorated for those receiving financial assistance) will be manually applied to your account after you register.

Schedule & Calendar

We have multiple group options to choose from. Each 12-child group meets once a week for the duration of the semester (excluding breaks). Day of the week, program times, age group, and rendezvous location varies for each group, please see our website for more details.

Important Dates:

August 19-23: First week of Fall adventures

October 14-18: Fall Break - No programming

November 25-29: Thanksgiving Break - No Programming

December 2-6: Final week of Fall adventures

Registration Requirements

All participants must have a completed Registration Form, Acknowledgement & Assumption of Risks/Release & Indemnity Agreement, and Insurance Acknowledgement (with copy of medical insurance or cost-sharing ministry card) on file before their first day. **If your child carries an epi-pen, an inhaler, or if any medications will need be administered during the program, the corresponding supplemental forms must be filled out and signed by a healthcare provider with prescriptive authority.**

Instructor-Child Ratio

While in the field, we will maintain a ratio of at least one instructor per 6.5 children. There will be a minimum of two instructors with the group at all times, with a third instructor joining for certain activities.

Absences, Cancellations & Refunds

We will intentionally be out exploring rain or shine (excepting extreme weather events), which will provide excellent learning opportunities. We are very fortunate that Tennessee's subtropical climate allows varied outdoor recreation opportunities year-round! **We need your commitment to your child's group for the semester.** Excessive absences negatively affect group dynamics and hinder skill progressions.

Refunds will not be given for missed days. If you have a scheduling conflict or your child becomes ill, please let us know as soon as possible so we can plan accordingly. **When space is available, your child may be able to join another group's outing that same week, or double up during another week, but rescheduling is YOUR responsibility (please note that ages, rendezvous locations, and program times may vary for different groups).**

Late cancellations are a bummer for our small program, since we are usually unable to fill semester-long spots on short notice. **A non-refundable \$200 deposit per child is due upon registration and will be applied to tuition. If you withdraw within the first 4 weeks of the program, you will owe 33% of total semester tuition. If you withdraw after the first 4 weeks, you will owe 100% of total semester tuition.**

Logistics

Contact Information

- Mitch Groothuis cell phone (administrative/lead instructor contact): 423-284-2868
- Golden Goss cell phone (lead instructor contact): 478-636-3190
- David Ragland cell phone (lead instructor contact): 205-612-3425
- Chad Smeiles cell phone (lead instructor contact): 706-512-5377
- Laura Groothuis cell phone (emergency basecamp contact): 931-273-2185
- Email: youngexplorerschatt@gmail.com
- Website: youngexplorerssociety.com
- Social Media: @YES.chatt (Facebook and Instagram)

Communication

The day prior to each program day, you will receive a group text to the primary parent or guardian's cell phone letting you know which activity your child will need to be prepared for the following day, as well as where we will be going. This allows us to choose the best activity and site available depending on weather conditions and the group's specific skill progression. We will also use this communication method for any severe weather updates or transportation delays (sometimes unexpected adventures may delay us in the field, in which case we will let you know as soon as we do).

If you are running late for drop-off or pickup, please let us know. **Keep in mind that some of these activities are logistically complex and we need the entire time slot to execute our plan for the day.** If you are more than 15 minutes late for drop off, we may need you to meet us at the recreation site, though depending on the nature of the day's activities that may or may not be practical.

What to Pack

Don't forget that involving your child in preparing for a day outside is a great opportunity to teach responsibility. They'll only forget their snack once (OK, maybe a few times)!

Sport-specific gear (Boats, PFDs, Paddles, Helmets, Harnesses, Climbing Shoes, etc.) will be provided by Y.E.S.

Feel free to ask us questions about gear – a shopping spree is probably not necessary! Please DO NOT send unnecessary items (phones, smartwatches, toys, money, other electronics, etc.) as they distract the group and could easily be damaged or lost in the field. Labelling items with your last name is helpful.

PERSONAL ITEMS TO SEND EVERY DAY:

- Backpack – One that will hold the following personal gear and water bottles INSIDE, and is not too heavy/loose for your child carry comfortably for extended periods. Backpacks with sternum and waist straps are ideal since they stay put when scrambling over uneven terrain.

- Lunch – We eat a late lunch once we reach our activity site each day (if that's too late in the day for your child, feel free to feed them before drop-off). Please send food that does not require refrigeration and that is packaged to create the minimum amount of trash possible. We will let you know if anyone in your child's group has a severe food allergy that requires adjusting what you pack.
- **Snacks – Send more than you think they will need (calories are extremely important on cold days)!** Something that can be stuck in a pocket and eaten on-the-go is ideal.
- Water – Two FULL, 0.75-1.0 liter water bottles that DO NOT LEAK. Hydration bladders and metal vacuum insulated bottles are NOT recommended – bladders cannot be removed easily for canoeing days and love to leak on critical warm layers, and vacuum bottles are heavy and may sink when full.
- Footwear – Shoes or boots appropriate for hiking and with good traction (ideally closed-toe). Consider waterproof options if possible. Poor footwear choices are responsible for many first aid incidents, so this is equipment worth spending money on! **See below for water day and cold/wet weather footwear advice.**
- Clothing appropriate for the weather – Synthetics are ideal if you have them. Multiple layers enable customization based on output level and conditions (ex: a fleece plus a rain jacket is preferable to an insulated rain jacket). Insulating layers should fit underneath rain jacket.
- **One outer layer IN ADDITION TO what your child is wearing at drop-off.** In warmer months, a rain jacket qualifies.
- Rain Jacket that will not soak through in heavy rain (**bring every day, no matter the forecast**). Taped seams are best.
- Hat and Sunscreen - Please do not send aerosol sunscreen or bug spray...the group's lungs thank you in advance. **Please apply sunscreen before drop-off.**

ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR WATER DAYS (paddling or swimming):

- Sun hat
- Footwear that can get wet AND will stay on your child's foot. Crocs and Flops look awesome but unfortunately do not qualify. Chacos or Keens are ideal if you have them, but old tennis shoes are just fine if they still have tread. Water shoes with stretchy uppers do not work well for hiking to/from/in creeks.
- Swimsuit OR synthetic shorts & shirt (long-sleeve rash guards are great for sun protection). Shorts over swimsuits are recommended for girls for abrasion resistance. **On water days, please have swimsuits already installed on your child before drop-off.**
- Towel for the van ride home (we will NOT have time for everyone to change)

ADDITIONAL ITEMS FOR COLD/WET WEATHER (any time the high is below ~60 °F):

- Synthetic or wool base layers
- Extra insulating layer in your child's backpack (in case their primary insulating layer gets wet). **This provides a critical margin of safety and should be considered MANDATORY.**
- **Extra change of clothes appropriate for the weather** (including socks and underwear) in a gallon Ziploc
- Waterproof boots or hiking shoes (While not mandatory, these make rainy days much more pleasant. Please note that rubber rain boots are sometimes not comfortable for extended hiking, so please test them ahead of time.)
- Thin wool socks

- Warm Hat (on colder days)
- Warm Gloves or Mittens (on colder days)
- Rain pants (optional but make wet/cold days more pleasant)
- Towel for the van ride home (we will NOT have time for everyone to change)

Drop-off & Pickup

Our rendezvous point each day varies by group (see website for more details). Only individuals listed on your registration form will be allowed to pick up your child. If you need to add someone to the list of authorized people at any time, please let us know via text or email.

Transportation

Y.E.S. provides transportation via 15-passenger van from the rendezvous point to each day's recreation site and back. We take this responsibility very seriously. Transportation rules are as follows:

- We will provide backless booster seats for children who need them (anyone under 4'9" tall).
- No child will be allowed to ride in the front seat.
- Children will remain seated and wearing a seat belt at all times.
- Children will not be left unattended in the vehicle.
- Children will not be permitted to stand or sit on the floor of a moving vehicle and their arms, legs, and heads will remain inside the vehicle at all times.

Risk Management

Approach

Risk is inherent in outdoor activities and must be approached with respect, skill, and experience. The presence of risk also provides excellent and varied opportunities to teach children situational awareness, decision-making skills, and responsibility. Whenever practical, Y.E.S. instructors will help children anticipate and understand what the primary risks are in a particular situation, and how to respond appropriately as an individual and as a group to reduce the likelihood of an accident.

Discipline

Y.E.S. strives to establish clear expectations at the beginning of each program. If expectations are not met, we utilize logical or natural consequences applied in problem situations, redirection of children to more acceptable behavior, and encouragement of appropriate behavior. We will help children respect each other emotionally and encourage cooperation and constructive verbal communication to solve problems. We will sometimes encourage children to solve problems rather than giving them a solution.

Y.E.S. will make every effort to resolve recurring behavioral issues in conjunction with parents, but reserves the right to dismiss any participant from the program that we believe, in our discretion, presents a safety concern or medical risk, is unduly disruptive, or otherwise conducts him/herself in a manner detrimental to the program. Examples include but are not limited to: threatening, fighting, bullying, inappropriate behavior, etc.

Notification of Illness, Accident, or Injury

Y.E.S. instructors are required to attain a minimum of CPR and Wilderness First Aid training, and will carry a first aid kit at all times in the field. Instructors will handle everyday scrapes and bruises that occur. Parents will be notified when they pick up their child of any minor incidents.

For accidents that are not life threatening, but require medical attention, Y.E.S. instructors will immediately notify a parent/guardian. If the primary parent/guardian cannot be reached, emergency contacts on the injured child's registration form will be notified. If instructors cannot reach any of the emergency contacts, the injured child's physician will be contacted and appropriate actions taken.

Should a life-threatening accident occur, Y.E.S. instructors will immediately contact 911. After emergency assistance has been requested, the parent/guardian will be notified of the situation. If necessary, the child will be transported by ambulance to the nearest hospital or other medical center specified by parent. The Y.E.S. Acknowledgement & Assumption of Risks/Release & Indemnity Agreement gives permission for medical care in an emergency situation.

A child with any of the following symptoms will be sent home: a fever of 100 degrees or higher, diarrhea, vomiting, or symptoms of a contagious disease. The ill child may return to the program 24 hours after the last episode of fever, vomiting or diarrhea.

If a child becomes ill during the day, he/she will be immediately separated from the other children and a parent or emergency contact will be notified. Items used by the child will be disinfected before use by another child. It is expected that the ill child will be picked up as soon as possible.

Administering Medications

Whenever possible, we encourage parents to administer medications to their children outside of program hours. If your child requires the administration of routine medication(s) (prescription or non-prescription) during program hours you must provide a signed Medication Administration Permission form signed by a healthcare provider with prescriptive authority. If your child carries an inhaler or epi-pen the corresponding Health Care Plan form must be filled out and signed by a healthcare provider with prescriptive authority. Medications must be kept in the original bottle or container. Prescription medications must have the original pharmacy label intact, non-prescription medications must be labelled with the child's first and last name. Instructors will carry medications in the field (except in the case of epi-pens and inhalers IF self-carry is indicated on the appropriate Health Care Plan form).

Family Adventures

Enabling families to spend more outside together is a big part of our mission! Here are a few ways we hope to help make that a reality:

- **Advice – Just give us a call if you need:**
 - New places to explore
 - Help knowing what gear to buy (or not buy)
 - A pep talk to get out the door more (it's a lot of work, but it's worth it!)
- **Networking**
 - Annual Family Campout

- Sometimes finding the right group to adventure with is half the battle. We hope that you will meet other families with similar interests through this program. Let us know if we can help connect you!
- **Gear**
 - If you need additional equipment for your own adventures and have the ability to transport and use it safely, we're more than happy to let you borrow gear (excluding some climbing items) as long as we do not have a program running that day. Just be sure to return it promptly.
 - We have an extensive library of maps and guidebooks for our local area (and beyond) that you are welcome to borrow.
 - If you have kid-sized outdoor gear items that you don't need anymore, please consider checking with other parents in your group to hand them down!
- **Education**
 - Custom Parent Skills Clinics – Adventuring (especially with kids in tow) can be daunting. If you're unsure about the skills required to tackle a particular activity or trip, let us know and we'd love to help you gain the confidence you need to get out with your own family and friends.

If you have other needs in this department, please let us know how we can help!