***How to Stay Warm and Dry at Forest School***

Forest School in the winter during our pilot program was quite a learning experience for our class!  It snowed on the mountain and temperatures dropped below freezing.  Many children experienced intense cold for the first time.  Much of the day was spent warming hands and toes up around the fire.  Some children realized they needed warmer clothing in order to feel comfortable enough to play and explore in the snow.   If children are warm and dry they can spend hours immersed in nature without complaint.

Unfortunately most American outdoor clothing for children, although costly, is cheaply made, non-insulating, and uncomfortable. Even clothing that is marked “waterproof” is barely water resistant when children are outside playing for extended periods of time and are sitting on the wet ground or on damp logs. Here are some clothing suggestions and brands that will ensure your child stays warm and has a positive experience while we are on the mountain**.**

In general winter clothes should be loose-fitting so the body’s natural layer of insulating warm air can surround the skin. Loose fitting clothes are also important so children can get their pants down in a hurry when they need to use the bathroom.

***Base layer:*** Thermal long underwear is recommended to keep away the chill.  Silk, Polyester and wool work well.  Some Target stores in town sell polyester thermals for children for $14.50, or you can order them from [target.com](http://target.com/).

***Middle layer:*** I recommend children have a middle layer of slightly thicker silk or wool leggings (cut off arms from a wool sweater work well for this and can be found at thrift stores for little money)

**Heavy Weight and Outer Layer:** On top of base and middle layer, children should wear a thick warm layer of clothing.  Fleece pants and shirt, or sweatpants and sweatshirt, are two good options.  Jeans are an option if you do not have warmer clothing but once they get wet are very heavy and cold.  Leggings may not be warm enough. I recommend fleece leggings if possible.

***Rain Pants vs. Snowpants:*** Rain pants are a crucial layer for protection against the wet ground and for additional insulation. I am encouraging true rain pants and not “snow” pants since, although snow pants are warm, they tend to absorb water easily. It is crucial that rain pants have a closure, such as Velcro at the ankle so the pants cinch tightly over the boots to keep the water out. I highly recommend that all children wear Oakiwear, Lands End or REI rain pants.

**Jackets**

I strongly recommend an investment in a good quality jacket for forest school. The Columbia brand Omnitech or Bugaboo have a removable fleece lining. These jackets must be washed very carefully and according to the manufacturer’s instructions to maintain the integrity of the waterproofing. Again, the jackets should be loose fitting so as not to compress the body’s own insulating layer of warmth that surrounds the skin. A good jacket can make all the difference in having a positive experience.

***Boots:*** Tall snow boots (not rain boots or street boots) are needed to keep feet warm and dry.  Boots warm enough for freezing temperatures have a layer of wool felt on the inside and a waterproof rubber layer outside.  Check the bottom of the boot for good traction in the snow. I recommend Bogs boots brand since the neoprene material ensures that feet stay warm no matter what. Another important consideration for keeping feet warm is that boots must fit loosely. Even though these boots cost more at the onset, they will last much longer and will ensure that your child can focus on their extended nature experience. Whatever, the boot choice, it is important that the socks are not so thick that they cause the boots to be too snug, prohibiting circulation in the feet.

**Hats:** Hats should be high enough on the brow so they do not cover the child’s eyes. Many attached hoods are so tight around the child’s head that they inhibit a child from hearing well. I encourage parents to provide wool hats with ear flaps rather than relying on hoods for hats. I discourage scarves in the forest as they frequently snap in the underbrush.

***Gloves/Mitten:*** Snow gloves are waterproof on the outside and have insulated lining inside. Knit gloves or fleece gloves without a waterproof outer layer get wet and cold quickly. I suggest the long Gordini or Outdoor research brands of waterproof mittens in the “sleeping bag” style, which means they unzip from wrist to fingertip, adequately covering child’s wrist.

***Resources:*** In town, check REI and Kid to Kid (a gently used clothing store in Summerlin) for coats, pants, boots and gloves.  Inexpensive online options are [target.com](http://target.com/) and [walmart.com](http://walmart.com/).  Amazon.com offers a free trial of amazon prime, so items will ship in 2 days. Examples of keywords for online searches are “girls snow gloves,” “boys snow coat,” or “children’s thermal underwear.”

***Donations and Loans:*** Our class would greatly appreciate donations of snow gear; especially socks, snow gloves and hats.  Just place it in the Forest School basket in our classroom.  If you want to *loan* snow gear for our Forest School outings, just write your name on the inside tag, and it will be returned to you at the end of the school year. Or has your child outgrown their snow gear and there are no more little ones in your home to pass on too? Consider donating outgrown items to our “stash” to outfit those kids that consistently don’t come in the proper gear and struggle to stay warm.