



FRANCISCAN
MONTESSORI EARTH SCHOOL
EXPANDING MINDS. NURTURING SPIRITS. STEWARDING THE EARTH.

Founded 1977

Earth Experience Handbook

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Introduction

Earth Experiences (“E2s”) are designed to give students meaningful opportunities to apply their classroom learning in real-world settings. These experiences are a core component of the curriculum, but they are not a requirement. It is understood that since parents know their children best, it is the parents who will make the decision about whether their child of any age will participate in E2s.

E2s have thrived for decades, thanks in large part to the support of parent volunteers. These parents choose to become part of the FMES community by serving as chaperones or drivers. To do so, they must complete background checks, Safe Environment training and submit a driving record.

This unique program allows students, staff, and the parent community to participate in a process that is unique to FMES school, instilling both an awareness of nature and ability to gain an ongoing sense of community growth and development.

The goals and objectives of the Earth Experiences are:

1. to provide a concrete field experience to integrate the concept of the interdependence of man to the universe (e.g., space, solar systems, man/planet);
2. to provide a concrete field experience to integrate the concept of the human family and its place in time (e.g., miracle of human life, origins of humanity, self-improvement, cosmic education);
3. to provide a concrete field experience to integrate the concept of mutual respect of man for his environment (e.g., ecology, animals);
4. to give the students a safe and challenging opportunity to be independent, thus enhancing their sense of self;
5. to give the students the benefit of interests and skills of adults other than staff members in an environment away from the city setting;
6. to work with their Guides in a setting other than the classroom, enhancing and motivating lessons in the classroom;
7. to improve group dynamic skills outside the classroom setting; and
8. to provide a vehicle for parent education.

Notification of Outings & Permission

Parents will receive advance notice for each outing (i.e., OMSI, zoo, day field trips, etc.) directly from their child’s Guide. A *Permission for Outing Form* (see Appendix A) will be sent home prior to each outing, detailing the date, destination, departure and return times and a description of the activity. A release of liability and indemnification statement will also be included (see Appendix B).

To participate, each student MUST return the signed permission form, and any required payment before the day of the outing. Students who do not return their signed form and payment (if applicable) will not be allowed to attend.

How the Earth Experiences “Work”

Earth Experiences are part of the curriculum, all children are encouraged to participate but not required.

Children’s House

Children’s House students participate in garden or neighborhood walks that are developmentally appropriate and designed to support their natural curiosity, movement and connection to the environment. **If there are not sufficient parent volunteers to ensure the safety of the children, the E2 will be canceled.**

Lower and Upper Elementary

Earth Experiences typically involve overnight stays at established locations carefully evaluated by the Guide. Guides assume overall responsibility and delegate specific responsibilities to parents and volunteers for the safety and well-being of the children. **If there are not sufficient parent volunteers to ensure the safety of the children, the E2 will be canceled.**

1. Parents assist in:
 - Coordinating and procuring equipment
 - Coordinating transportation
 - Coordinating communication
 - Being a Certified Volunteer
2. Children assist in:
 - Meal planning and preparation
 - Researching activities
 - Recruiting transportation or chaperones on behalf of the Guide
3. Guides are responsible for determining curriculum and activities.
4. Staff members attend a Survival Workshop.

What Parents Need to Know

What is Expected of all Parents

1. Prior to the E2, there will be a mandatory orientation so that parents understand the purpose and procedures of E2. Parents and volunteers should have read this handbook before the orientation.
2. To return permission slips on time (see: Notification of Outings and Permission).
3. To fill out medication forms, if necessary, and have them and the medication at school before departure. For safety reasons, all medications must be handed directly to the Guide or designated staff by a parent or guardian. Please do not send medications with your child.

4. To adequately prepare your child for the Earth Experience see: How to Prepare your Child for the Earth Experiences.
5. To facilitate the Earth Experience by helping out before, during and after the Earth Experiences.
6. Volunteer drivers return Driver Permission slips before leaving the school.
7. To notify the Guide a week prior to the Earth Experience of any changes in your commitment.

When to Expect Earth Experiences

Fall:

- Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary are usually scheduled soon after school begins.

Spring:

- Lower Elementary Earth Experiences may be in April or May—Keep in touch with your Guide for the approximate dates.
- Upper Elementary may be in April or May—Keep in touch with the Guide for the dates.

Procedures at Earth Experiences

1. ALL VOLUNTEERS, GUIDES AND STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO FOLLOW ALL FMES POLICIES AND PROCEDURES. THIS INCLUDES, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO RULES REGARDING DRESS CODE, HARASSMENT, ANTI-BULLYING, SOCIAL CONDUCT, ETC.
2. Guide will select volunteers to be either a chaperone, driver or both. All volunteers MUST have successfully completed all requirements as defined in the Volunteer Packet and provide current information (e.g., insurance, driver's license, etc.) as well as completing background checks, Safe Environment training and providing a driving record.
3. Guide or designated staff is responsible for obtaining a copy of the Certificate of Insurance (COI) from the entity hosting the E2. The COI should list Franciscan Life Center Network, dba Franciscan Montessori Earth School as "Additional Insured."
4. Guide will provide each volunteer with a contact list of all participating volunteers, including assigned driving groups. Driving groups will be paired to form a "caravan," ensuring that vehicles travel together, arrive at the same time, and can assist one another if any issues arise during the trip.

5. A buddy system will be observed at ALL times. Students are not permitted to be alone without supervision from assigned parent volunteer, Guide or designated staff.
6. Meals will be centralized.
7. Clothing should be appropriate for the environment and activities defined in Permission for Outing Form.
8. Closed toe shoes are always required, except in the shower or beach, if applicable.
9. Electronic devices are not allowed, unless required for medical reasons.
10. No drugs or alcohol allowed.
11. No non-elementary siblings.
12. No pets.
13. No volunteer sleeps with his/her own child.
14. Students will be expected to go to their designated volunteer for their needs.
15. Students will be transported in volunteer vehicles with properly operating seat belts. All students must be in a seat belt when the vehicle is in motion.

How to Prepare your Child for Earth Experiences

1. Positive expectations—Your attitude and expectations have great influence on your child. Share your own experiences, good or not so good.
2. Include your child in the packing activity. Your child needs to know:
 - a. What is each item and how to use it.
 - b. What his/her gear looks like and how to be able to recognize it as their own.
 - c. Where to find each item, on their own, in their own bag.
3. Prepare your child for traveling and living with others.
 - a. Courtesy and manners.
 - b. Respect for others – their feelings and their property.
 - c. How to keep track of his/her belongings in a crowded environment.

Packing List

Each Earth Experience is unique. Your child's Guide will make you aware of the specific needs your child will have at each Earth Experience. Below is an example of what may be requested by your Guide:

Sleep Gear

1. Sleeping bag (must be a good camping bag to 25°F) 4 mil. Minimum. Fall E2s can be chilly at night.
2. Extra blanket (optional).
3. Insulated pad (thin camping pad is sufficient).
4. No air mattresses, no down bags

Clothing (minimal list, adjust to length of trip and location)

1. Two (2) pairs of heavy, long pants
2. Two (2) pairs of shorts
3. Two (2) long-sleeved shirts
4. Underwear and socks adequate for the length of trip (extra socks recommended)
5. One (1) pair of thermal underwear
6. One (1) to two (2) warm, long-sleeved sweaters or sweatshirts
7. A warm jacket
8. Rain gear: jacket with hood, rain pants, boots
9. Wool stocking cap or a warm hat
10. Two (2) pairs of tennis shoes
11. One (1) pair of well-fitting, broken-in hiking boots. Hint: New hiking boots will typically result in blisters!
12. One (1) pair of warm gloves
13. One (1) pair of pajamas
14. Broad-brimmed hat for sun protection

Other

1. Toiletries (e.g., toothpaste, toothbrush, lotion, etc.)
2. Hairbrush, comb, etc.
3. Hand towel to dry face
4. Sunscreen
5. Bug repellent spray

ALL CLOTHES AND EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE MARKED WITH THE CHILD'S/ADULTS NAME. FMES IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR LOST ITEMS.

How to pack the "Gear"

1. Gear should be packed to keep it clean and dry. It should be in soft bags and of a size and weight that the child can carry.
2. **ALL BAGS NEED TO HAVE THE CHILD'S NAME ON THE OUTSIDE.** You would be surprised how these bags look alike!

Volunteers

Being a Volunteer is as energy-consuming a task as you may ever undertake! The young people under your care need and deserve all your time, energy and knowledge. To be with them for the duration of the Earth Experience will take considerable love and patience on your part.

There is an important separation you must make when dealing with your own child. Your child will have been assigned to another adult who is totally responsible for the care of your child during the Earth Experience—just as you will be for other children. You can make the job much easier for your child's assigned volunteer. by accepting that separation as a matter of fact and by thoroughly preparing your child for the fact that he/she needs to go to his/her own volunteer for his/her needs. Trust your child's volunteer to give the same loving care you will give to your group. If you feel that you cannot make this separation with your child, please do not volunteer.

Volunteer Duties: Lower Elementary

Children in Lower Elementary may need extra comfort and reassurance, especially if this is their first time away from home without family. Volunteers should be attentive to signs of homesickness or sadness and offer gentle encouragement and support to help them adjust to the new environment. Other key responsibilities include:

1. Please be sure that children are always safe and under your observation.
2. The buddy system must be observed at all times. (e.g., two students with one volunteer).
3. Students are not allowed to return to their tent/cabin alone.
4. Students must get permission from you to leave your sight (e.g., to go to the bathroom). At all other times, they must be visible to you.
5. Students are not allowed to be unsupervised.
6. Assist the students in choosing a site and setting up their tents.
7. After the tents/cabins are set up, help them arrange their sleeping places, lay out their pad and place, in their sleeping bags, what they will need to prepare them for bedtime – flashlight, toiletries, towel, pajamas, etc.
8. After the tent/cabin is arranged, seat them on their sleeping bags and discuss how the tent/cabin is to be kept clean and neat; e.g., where to remove shoes and boots.
9. Check to be certain all food is taken out of the tent/cabin and placed in the kitchen area.
10. Help students with general hygiene needs as necessary, especially in the morning and evening.
11. As the volunteer, be prepared to remain with the children throughout the night, be ready to share a story with them (no scary ones, please!).
12. When all children are settled, assure them that two (2) adults are with them to tend to their needs throughout the night.
13. Make sure the students are at their chosen activity on time and with everything they need.
14. Check with the Guide at breakfast for changes of activities. Tents/cabins are to be in order before the day's activities.

15. Help with cooking and cleaning up during mealtime(s).
16. As a volunteer, you will be responsible for preparation to return home.
17. As a volunteer, you may be responsible for the additional free time supervision.

Volunteer Duties: Upper Elementary

The Upper Elementary students have gained additional maturity. Such being the case, the volunteer's responsibility is to assist the Guides as necessary.

1. Please be sure students are always safe and under your observation.
2. Students are to be responsible for themselves as much as possible.
3. Students are to set up their campsites/volunteers assist the Guide as requested.
4. Oversee tent/cabin inspection.
5. Stay with students at base camp.
6. Remind students of general hygiene needs as necessary.
7. After the students are quiet, meet with the Guide and other volunteers to discuss the day and plan for the following day.
8. Make sure the students are at their chosen activity on time and with everything they need.
9. Check with the Guide at breakfast for changes of activities.
10. Help with cooking and cleaning up during mealtime, at Guide's request.
11. Minimum of two (2) adults are expected to sleep in a cabin with the students. Special accommodations can be made available, if needed, for the volunteer.

Conclusion

Earth Experiences are a unique opportunity for students to explore the natural world, build independence, and strengthen their sense of community. Through hands-on learning, shared responsibilities, and time spent in nature, students gain valuable life skills and lasting memories.

We thank all parents, volunteers, and staff for their support in making this experience possible. Your involvement ensures a safe, enriching, and meaningful journey for every child.

We encourage families to continue fostering curiosity, responsibility, and respect for the environment at home and beyond.

APPENDIX B: Volunteer Checklist—Lower Elementary



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Volunteer Checklist

Earth Experiences: Lower Elementary

Introduction

This document provides a summary of your key responsibilities and expectations during E2s. Your Guide will share additional details about the schedule, activities, and logistics. Please review the information carefully and don't hesitate to ask questions.

Volunteer Responsibilities & Duties

- Please be sure that children are always safe and under your observation.
- The buddy system must be observed at all times. (e.g., two students with one Volunteer).
- Students are not allowed to return to their tent/cabin alone.
- Students must get permission from you to leave your sight (e.g. to go to the bathroom). At all other times, they must be visible to you.
- Students are not allowed to be unsupervised.
- Assist the students in choosing a site and setting up their tents.
- After the tents/cabins are set up, help them arrange their sleeping places, layout their pad and place, in their sleeping bags, what they will need to prepare them for bedtime – flashlight, toiletries, towel, pajamas etc.
- After the tent/cabin is arranged, sit them down on their sleeping bags and discuss how the tent/cabin is to be kept clean and neat; e.g. where to remove shoes and boots.
- Check to be certain all food is taken out of the tent/cabin and placed in the kitchen area.
- Help students with general hygiene needs as necessary, especially in the morning and evening.
- As the Volunteer, be prepared to remain with the children throughout the night, be ready to share a story with them (no scary ones, please!).
- When all children are settled, assure them that two (2) adults are with them to tend to their needs throughout the night.
- Make sure the students are at their chosen activity on time and with everything they need.
- Check with the Guide at breakfast for changes of activities. Tents/cabins are to be in order before the day's activities.
- Help with cooking and cleaning up during mealtime(s).
- As a Volunteer, you will be responsible for preparation to return home.
- As a Volunteer, you may be responsible for the additional free time supervision.

APPENDIX C: Volunteer Checklist—Upper Elementary



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Volunteer Checklist

Earth Experiences: Upper Elementary

Introduction

This document provides a summary of your key responsibilities and expectations during E2s. Your Guide will share additional details about the schedule, activities, and logistics. Please review the information carefully and don't hesitate to ask questions.

Volunteer Responsibilities & Duties

The Upper Elementary students have gained additional maturity. Such being the case, the Volunteer's responsibility is to assist the Guides as necessary.

- Please be sure students are always safe and under your observation.
- Students are to be responsible for themselves as much as possible.
- Students are to set up their campsites/Volunteer's assist the Guide as requested.
- Oversee tent/cabin inspection.
- Stay with students at base camp.
- Remind students of general hygiene needs as necessary.
- After the students are quiet, meet with the Guide and other Volunteers to discuss the day and plan for the following day.
- Make sure the students are at their chosen activity on time and with everything they need.
- Check with the Guide at breakfast for changes of activities.
- Help with cooking and cleaning up during mealtime, at Guide's request.
- Minimum of two (2) adults are expected to sleep in a cabin with the students. Special accommodations can be made available, if needed, for the Volunteer.