

## Camp Family Handbook

**Mission:** At the Randall Davey Audubon Center we strive to build thoughtful and caring stewards who are connected to birds and the natural world through hands-on science learning and creative exploration.

### Values

**Equity-** Our center and programming is welcoming and accessible to everyone. Visitation to the center itself is free and our camp program offers scholarships. In keeping with this value, we cultivate a camp environment that is inclusive and understanding.

**Learning-** By providing age-appropriate educational opportunities for children through a variety of activities that emphasize a hands-on approach, curious investigation, and play, we create an environment of both engagement and fun.

**Respect-** We believe in creating a camp culture that is based on mutual respect and kindness. We extend this principle to each other, staff, and to all the plants and animals across the center.

In order to cultivate a camp environment that is fun, safe, and remains true to our values, each camp week begins with an opportunity for all campers to work together to create their own Camp Contract, community guidelines that all campers, educators, and volunteers agree to follow. Campers play an active role in shaping the dynamic of each camp group, working with educators and volunteers to create a safe and fun experience for everyone.



*Campers flying kites. Photo: Meghan Baker/Audubon Southwest*

## Sick Policy

Campers who are sick should not attend camp and will be sent home if feeling unwell. In the event of fever symptoms, campers should refrain from coming to camp until after they have been fever-free for 24 hours.

We reserve the right to alter and update our policies depending on changes to federal, state, or local guidelines.

## Is My Child Ready for Camp?

At RDAC, we strive to provide a fun and safe experience for all our campers each day. We cultivate a camp culture of respect for each other and for the nature around us. Campers, educators, and teen volunteers will work together at the beginning of each camp week to come up with a list of expectations we all want to follow.

We ask that you review the following guidelines to determine if your child is ready for our fast-paced and exciting camp environment. We recognize that our campers come with a variety of backgrounds, personalities, and experiences, and will work together with campers and families to create an inclusive and positive experience. Camp is a time for kids to learn new skills and have new experiences, so here are some key aspects that support a successful time at camp.



Camp art activities. Photo: Meghan Baker/Audubon Southwest

### A prepared camper:

- Can spend several hours outside and hike at least .5 miles a day at a slow to medium pace.
- Understands and demonstrates respect for each other, and can keep hands to themselves at camp.
- Is able to follow instructions from camp educators, and ask for help when needed.
- Is equipped to express emotion in an age-appropriate and safe way.
- Has independence in routine tasks, such as going to the bathroom, eating snack, and drinking water.
- Will practice "Leave only footprints, take only memories" while exploring outdoor spaces.
- Can stay with their camp group throughout the day during a variety of activities.
- Is ready to have fun, meet new people, and try new things!



Butterfly. Photo: Meghan Baker/Audubon Southwest

## Behavior Expectations

We aim to create an inclusive, supportive, and fun camp space in which campers can learn and play. If any of these expectations are difficult to follow for campers, we are understanding and willing to work with families to problem-solve and address their needs to the best of our abilities.

### **Stay with the group and follow directions:**

We understand that participation can be challenging and that campers need breaks.

Opting out and taking space is always an option, however, campers must stay with their camp group. This is incredibly important for our educators to lead and facilitate our camp groups while outside hiking and adventuring. Campers are expected to stay within eyesight of designated camp groups at all times, whether inside the classroom or outside on the grounds or trails.



*Free play outside the Davey House. Photo: Katie Weeks/  
Audubon Southwest*

Campers who opt out of an activity are expected to do so without disrupting the rest of the group's learning. This can include quiet time or reading in the cozy corner, drawing, or other non-disruptive activities. Outside, campers are welcome to rest in the shade or walk with a staff member or volunteer if they need a break.

If a camper struggles with running away from camp staff, we will offer one warning and speak with their family during pick-up. If the camper attempts to leave the group without permission a second time, we will call home and they will be asked to leave camp. Depending on the circumstances, they may be asked not to come back.

**Emotional Regulation:** Campers are expected to express their feelings and emotions in a safe, respectful manner. Emotional regulation is something many of our campers are working on and practicing. We understand that this can be more difficult for some than others and endeavor to make a space that is accommodating. We do not have the staffing capacity to offer constant, one-on-one care. If a camper demonstrates needs that require that level of support, we will work together with families to identify and try various solutions and strategies. If, after employing strategies and trying different methods, the behavior continues, worsens, or endangers the group environment, we may ask the camper to leave camp for either the day, or remainder of the week.

**Hurtful Language:** Camp is space where we're not only learning about science and conservation, but also about ourselves through social and emotional learning. Campers are in groups different from school or day-care, making friends, and navigating new dynamics. We believe that this is an opportunity to learn and grow. We also have a zero-tolerance policy for racist, sexist, or other targeted language.

If a camper says something hurtful, we will address it with the involved camper(s) and their family. If it continues, that may be grounds for immediate dismissal.

**Physical Behavior:** Campers are expected to keep their bodies to themselves and respect other people's bodies and physical space. This includes both positive and negative emotional expression. Campers are not permitted to hit, punch, kick, or any other actions that may harm another child or adult at camp. Campers are also expected to be gentle and respectful while using Audubon materials or while outside in the wildlife sanctuary. Physical behavior incidents will result in immediate dismissal from the camp program.

Below are the guidelines we offer our educators and tools we employ when managing behavior:

### **Examples of some of our Behavior Management techniques:**

- Praise positive behavior examples
  - "I see that these campers are ready to go because they're in line with a quiet coyote."
  - "Thank you for being considerate to each other by listening during everyone's turn."
- Be explicit and tangible about the behavior you expect
  - Avoid "you're being good," Try "I love the way you are sitting with your hands in your lap"
  - Instead of "be respectful," try "Keep hands to ourselves, quiet voices, and gentle words."
- Empower students by giving them choices (ex: "Today we can play tag or relay race?" or "Which book would you like me to read after play time?")
  - Giving students a lot of choices will allow you to establish boundaries and management when it's time to do so (Ex: "You have been making a lot of decisions today but right now it is my decision that we do this.")
  - Never give choices with a preference for one - always give choices that you like too.
- "If you can hear my voice clap once...clap twice..."
- "Put your finger on your nose if you can hear me."
- "Show me [a two-handed number]" if both hands need to be removed from the activity
- Ask good questions that have multiple answers (not yes-or-no) to encourage inquiry and curiosity



*Santa Fe River exploration. Photo: Meghan Baker/ Audubon Southwest*

### **Navigating Tricky Situations**

- Offer a choice to the camper, both of which are good options:
  - "You can join us for this activity or choose a book to read"
  - "You can work on your project or help me get ready for our next activity"
  - NEVER make punishment a choice.
- Ask them why
  - Sometimes it is an easy and reasonable solution.

- Use words to talk about feelings (“you must be feeling frustrated/ angry/excited, etc.”)
- Hearing the camper’s perspective gives you an opportunity to explain your side and come to an agreement.
- Check yourself
  - Are your instructions and expectations reasonable?
  - If you are pushing back against the child, that can only lead to more anger for both of you. Even when you are frustrated, always try to work cooperatively with the child.
  - Be empathetic. Bad choices have natural consequences. Children learn best from their mistakes when adults empathize. If adults reprimand them, children may transform sorrow over their choice into anger and the lesson is lost. If adults express sorrow, children have a learning opportunity.

Camp educators are always able to contact the Camp Director for additional support. If the above strategies do not work, we may ask campers to take a break from the activity they are doing. We may take a camper aside to have conversation outside of the group, remind them of their camper contract, and try to figure out any underlying reasoning. If the behavior continues, we will ask families for support and suggestions.

### Comments and Concerns

Respectful suggestions and comments are always welcome as we endeavor to provide the best quality camp program possible! Please share concerns with our camp staff. If you feel unsatisfied or want more information, reach out to our Camp Director, Meghan Baker, [meghan.baker@audubon.org](mailto:meghan.baker@audubon.org) or 505-308-7410. Complaints will be taken seriously and investigated immediately and thoroughly.



*Garden exploring. Photo: Meghan Baker/ Audubon Southwest*