

Being • Becoming • Belonging

Belonging
we matter.

Becoming
I can.

Being
I am.



The Willow Way

Being, Becoming & Belonging through Nature, Freedom and Responsibility

Why Willow exists

Children are born curious. They long to explore, create, belong and contribute. Yet many children—particularly those who are deeply sensitive or gifted—find little space to slow down and simply be themselves.

We believe childhood is not preparation for life. **It is life.**

Willow offers long afternoons in nature, room to follow questions, and the quiet confidence that grows when children feel trusted. There is space to rest, play, connect and explore. Every afternoon does not need to become a project. Being here and feeling that you belong matter in their own right.

Nature, freedom and responsibility

Nature is an active teacher. Trees invite courage, seasons teach patience, and caring for living things nurtures respect.

Children may climb, build shelters, carve wood, cook outdoors, fish and explore the woodland. Through these experiences, they practise judgement and discover their capabilities.

Freedom grows alongside responsibility, with guidance and boundaries suited to each child's readiness and the situation. Children learn to care for themselves, one another and their surroundings.

Freedom is never the absence of boundaries. It exists because of them.

Meaningful challenge, thoughtful care

Some challenges help children learn to recognise and manage risk: balancing on a log, using tools or helping with a campfire. We support these experiences through preparation, teaching and appropriate supervision.

We also actively identify and manage hazards, such as damaged trees, broken glass or harmful plants. When a hazard cannot be managed safely, we change the activity or location.

Children are encouraged to ask for help, respect boundaries and tell an adult whenever something feels unusual or unsafe. Their growing responsibility sits alongside our continuing responsibility for their care.

Muddy clothes, wet shoes and occasional small scratches or bruises can be part of outdoor play. We remain attentive to children's wellbeing and communicate openly with families.

Curiosity and Becoming Projects

Children discover their interests through encounters with nature, tools, stories, materials and people. Sometimes a curiosity lasts an afternoon. Sometimes it takes root.



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When a child wants to explore something more deeply, a **Becoming Project** offers time and support. This might mean investigating ants, learning to cook, creating something, developing a skill or contributing to Willow.

Inspired by Joseph Renzulli's enrichment approach, these opportunities remain open to every child and teenager. Children move into and out of projects as their interests and readiness change. Participation is voluntary.

Annelies helps children turn ideas into manageable steps, find resources and reflect on their discoveries, while keeping ownership with the child.

Progress may mean greater confidence, perseverance, independence or a stronger sense of belonging. **The project is never the goal. The child's becoming is.**

Reflection and professional support

Ratna—Duco and Silke's mother—is Willow's pedagogical coach and a BIG-registered orthopedagog-generalist. She is available for pedagogical advice when needed.

This year, we are introducing something new: twice a year, Ratna will join Willow as an independent developmental observer. She will observe the children, the group, Becoming Projects, the learning environment and their interactions. These visits are about understanding and supporting development, rather than testing or diagnosing children.

After each visit, Ratna and Annelies will reflect together on emerging strengths, opportunities for growth and whether children are sufficiently supported and challenged. They will also consider whether projects remain led by the children and what might help next. Where useful and appropriate, insights relating to an individual child will be shared with their parents.

The enrolment form asks for permission for this ongoing consultation and observation throughout your child's placement. Permission can be withdrawn at any time. Other specialists may be consulted anonymously. Sharing information that could identify your child with another specialist requires separate permission.

A partnership with families

We ask families to:

- Provide clothing and footwear suitable for outdoor play.
- Check their child for ticks after sessions.
- Share relevant medical information and changes in support needs.
- Talk with us about questions, concerns and discoveries.

Together, we help children grow in confidence, care and responsibility, while leaving room for wonder.



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Shared understanding

By signing below, we confirm that we have read and discussed The Willow Way. We understand that outdoor exploration includes meaningful challenges and occasional minor bumps and scratches, while Willow remains responsible for appropriate supervision and care.

Child/Teen: _____ Date: _____

Parent(s)/Guardian(s): _____

Signature(s): _____

The Willow Way draws on over 20 years of educational experience, ongoing study and daily practice—and continues to grow through the children who teach us every day.

