



OCEAN STATE KIDS

sustainability assessment

The OSK* sustainability assessment will assist Group Leaders in reflecting on, planning for, and strengthening sustainability practices within their groups—environmentally, socially, and programmatically. Sustainability at Ocean State Kids (OSK*) is rooted in intention, care, and community.



SUSTAINABLE USE OF MATERIALS & RESOURCES

How we show care through what we bring, use, and leave behind.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does our group minimize waste during programming?
- Do we prioritize reusable, natural, recycled, and non-toxic materials?
- How do we transport and store materials sustainably across sites?

OSK* groups rely primarily on loose parts, found nature materials, reusable tools that travel easily between locations, and thoughtfully sourced purchased materials to create extra-special experiences.

We avoid single-use items whenever possible, allowing purchased materials to circulate across groups for stronger budgeting and reduced waste.

Activities frequently incorporate recycled and found materials, and Group Leaders model “pack-in, pack-out” habits at every site. Materials are intentionally minimal—easy to transport, manageable to store, and designed to encourage creativity through open-ended outdoor play.

OSK is also a member of the **Creative Reuse Center of Rhode Island** and regularly visits local **Savers stores** to source materials, books, and appropriate play items.



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP THROUGH PRACTICE & AWARENESS

How children learn sustainability by living it and honoring the places we visit.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How are children invited to care for the land during each residency?
- Are stewardship behaviors naturally embedded into daily routines?
- Do activities encourage respect for living systems and sustainability concepts?
- How does programming adapt to the specific land we are visiting?
- Do leaders acknowledge land use, history, or conservation context?

Children participate in simple, meaningful stewardship practices such as trail walks, gentle habitat observation, and respectful foraging. Sustainability is taught experientially—by slowing down, noticing impact, and developing reciprocal relationships with the land. Stewardship is modeled daily by adults, especially when using our *Literacy in Nature Trail Map and Wildlife Field Guide*.

Each residency is treated as a unique ecosystem with its own needs and rhythms. Programming shifts with seasons, weather, and site guidelines rather than following a fixed plan. Leaders introduce age-appropriate seasonal activities that intentionally reflect the land or property being visited.



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS & SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Sustainability through community.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How does our group respect and collaborate with host sites?
- Do we reflect shared values with our community partners?
- Are community members or experts invited to engage with the group?
- How do families support sustainability while together?

OSK* operates through strong partnerships with land trusts, farms, and conservation spaces. Group Leaders maintain clear communication, follow site-specific expectations, and reinforce shared stewardship values with families. OSK* typically holds residencies with partners who are genuinely excited to welcome our community.

Sustainability is upheld through trust, gratitude, and mutual respect rather than physical ownership. When appropriate (and always optional), land partners are invited to participate in programming. OSK* also creates custom site maps to help families understand land boundaries, restricted areas, and navigation.

Families support sustainability through shared responsibility. **Snack rotation sign-ups** allow one family to bring snacks for the entire group—reducing waste while fostering connection through nourishment. Families also work together to **support site clean-up at the end of each morning**.

GROUP LEADER PRACTICES & LONGEVITY

Supporting sustainable leadership, not burnout.

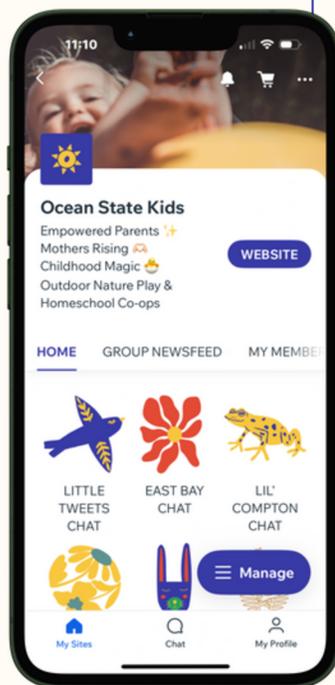
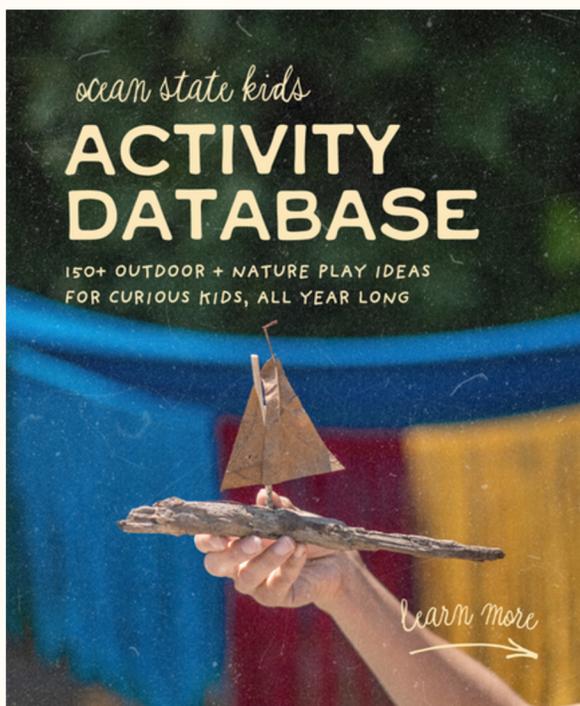
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are group expectations realistic and sustainable for leaders?
- Do leaders have systems that support consistency and flexibility?
- Are there protocols for replacing materials and equipment?
- Is there a designated person responsible for maintaining activities and materials?

OSK* encourages leaders to program within their capacity, using repeatable rhythms rather than over-planning. Group Leaders have access to an **Online Activity Database** with over 150 activities that have been successfully implemented in the past.

Consistency and flexibility are further supported through an **additional Group Leader**, often established once the group is underway or when a willing family member offers support. Sustainability includes protecting leader energy, creativity, and joy. Leaders are supported through shared resources, templates, and peer knowledge exchange, with full access to group programming through Google Drive.

Materials and equipment requests are submitted every three months, allowing the OSK* administrator to source from existing storage first or purchase materials that are shipped directly to Group Leaders' homes.



TRAINING & GROWTH

Learning systems that evolve with the community.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do leaders grow their understanding of sustainability?
- Are resources and learnings shared across groups?
- Are ongoing professional development opportunities provided?
- Do Group Leaders share knowledge with one another?

Group Leaders' understanding of sustainability tends to grow naturally through reflective practice, peer discussion, and immersive outdoor education experience. All Group Leaders are volunteers who knowingly spend the majority of their time outdoors—sustainability is often deeply rooted in the people drawn to this work.

Resources and shared knowledge live within the **OSK* Mobile App**, which includes a Group Leader chat and a growing library of documents, templates, and community conversations. Growth is collaborative and ongoing.

Beginning January 2026, OSK* will offer **CPR training** hosted by OSK parent Elizabeth Fenton, a career nurse in Rhode Island, providing American Red Cross CPR/AED/First Aid certification for adults, children, and infants.

We also offer **Outdoor Teaching Certification** through Victoria Hackett's Outdoor Classrooms online certification program.

REFLECTION & ADAPTATION

Listening, adjusting, and responding.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How do we reflect on what is working and what is not?
- Are children's and families' experiences considered?
- Are documented reflections used to improve systems and practices?

OSK* hosts four seasonal meetings each year called Nature Guardians meetings. Nature Guardians include Board Members, Program Directors, Group Leaders, and a select group of invested families whose passion, dedication, and leadership have significantly shaped OSK. Their insight and voices are essential to our growth.

Together, this group collaboratively guides the direction of the organization. Meetings reflect on the previous season while setting goals and visions for the next, introducing new tools, resources, and expectations. Sustainability is always treated as a living practice—evolving with experience, seasons, and community needs.



Prior to each meeting, Nature Guardians complete a questionnaire addressing successes, challenges, improvements, and celebrations. Each participant also contributes a testimonial, collectively compiled into what we lovingly call the Tiny Testament of Truth.



FINANCIAL & PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

Doing more with intention.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Are program costs aligned with OSK values?
- Are funding and resource needs reviewed regularly?
- Is there a sustainable budget plan for each group?
- Are grant and fundraising opportunities explored?

OSK* prioritizes low-cost, high-value programming rooted in creativity and community. We work hard to keep costs accessible, currently averaging approximately \$12 per day per child (meeting once per week).

Financial sustainability is supported through QuickBooks, professional accounting review, and slow, intentional growth guided by long-term vision. Decisions are always made with the health of the community in mind. We are currently developing a system that will allow Group Leaders to view their individual group budgets directly within QuickBooks, supporting more informed and efficient programming decisions.

Grant opportunities and fundraising efforts are consistently explored, though they remain one of OSK's greatest challenges as a family-operated organization with limited administrative resources.