

SACRED FIRE

*Flying Deer Nature Center's
Rite-of-Passage Program
For Coming-of-Age Boys*

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Program Description

The Sacred Fire Journey

Sacred Fire is a 3-year wilderness rites of passage program for boys who wish to undertake a conscious journey into adolescence with the heartfelt support of family and community. The essence of this process is to create a world of deeper connection with Nature, Self, Community and Spirit. If you have already created a coming of age rite of passage for your son, consider yourself commended! Some such families have enrolled in Sacred Fire and found it complementary to their prior coming of age experiences.

A rite of passage can be broken down into three stages:

- Severance (departing the familiar/comfortable)
- Trial (encountering a new/challenging situation)
- Return (being welcomed home with a fresh perspective)

In the Sacred Fire program, the second (trial) stage is called the “initiation”. During initiation your son will encounter something new and grow through that encounter. This process will be repeated over a period of three years, but in a different way each time...

In the first initiation, your son will undergo a wilderness solo. He will carry a live coal from the community fire to his own campsite, where he will tend his Sacred Fire through the night in solitude, fasting from food (not water). During this time he will discover something about who he is in the world and what it means to walk into a healthy adolescence. He will also learn about what it means to tend to something as sacred.

In the second initiation, your son will tend the central fire—the community fire that burns for four days and four nights. It is from this central fire that the next “generation” of boys will carry their coals and tend their own fire just as your son did the year before! Unlike his first initiation, however, he will tend this community fire alongside his peers, encountering the satisfaction and challenge of selfless service through working closely with his team, while deepening the lessons he learned the year before.

In the third initiation, your son will dive deeper into his Sacred Fire lessons through responsibility and brotherhood. He will help to manage logistics and hold space for the initiation, discovering that having responsibilities can be joyful. Upon graduation he will become a Fireboy: the honored name we give to a man who holds a conscious and sacred relationship with fire (as well as with nature, self, community and spirit). A Fireboy holds a deep awareness of his own being and holds a commitment to serving his family and community.

Origins

The tradition of rites of passage led by extended family and mentors is a very old one. In 2004, Paul Raphael guided wilderness school leaders to create the Boys Sacred Fire Initiation (BSFI), a coming-of-age wilderness rites of passage program for boys. Paul is an Odawa Peacemaker from Peshawbestown, Michigan. He shared the tradition of

tending a Sacred Fire, handed down to him from the Great Lake Elders of the Grand Council of Waganakising.

Wilderness school leaders Mark Morey (Vermont Wilderness School, VT), Dan Hansche (White Pine Programs, ME), Devin Franklin (Flying Deer Nature Center, NY) and Michael Trotta (Four Feathers Wilderness School, NY) together manage BSFI, which trains wilderness school leaders from across the country to initiate boys in the Sacred Fire tradition. These leaders then create a local Sacred Fire rite-of-passage program for boys in their community. Flying Deer Nature Center is the first school to create such a program.

Preparation

Preparation for the first initiation consists mainly of “Adventure Days” which are held one Saturday a month throughout the school year (October—April). Three family meetings are sprinkled throughout the school year; these connect families with each other and help them to better understand and support the boys on their Sacred Fire journey. Initiation is held the final week of June. A week or two after the initiation, all the families together will host a Giveaway. This is a celebration feast offered as a gesture of thanks to the boys’ family, friends, teachers and other community members.

In his coming of age, it is important that your son feels and is supported by older male role models in his life, including father. If your son has no father in his life he can still participate in Sacred Fire. If there is a suitable male figure that can participate fully in the journey as a father figure, you are strongly encouraged (but not required) to invite him to do so. If there is a split in the family please consider this an opportunity to include everyone, but if that is not an option you of course may still enroll.

Another important role model for your son will be his “Sacred Fire Uncle”—a man that your son will choose. This will be someone with whom your son can ask questions about adolescence, talk about his Sacred Fire experiences, and go on fun adventures.

Readiness

Is your son ready for a coming-of-age rite of passage? Below is a list of some “readiness indicators.” Generally speaking, 13 to 14-year olds are ready for this kind of experience. If your teenage son is *not* yet experiencing “adolescence tailspin”, he should probably wait until next year to enroll. If your son is experiencing a lot of adolescence pressure these days, then this could be great timing for him to enter a coming-of-age rite of passage! Here are some specific signs and symptoms to look for:

- *His body is starting to grow fast, his voice is dropping...*
- *His relationships are changing, he is feeling the awkwardness of social scenes...*
- *There is tension developing in his relationships (especially at home)...*
- *You are hearing him say things that make you say, "Did he just say that?!"*
- *He is hungry for more freedom, feeling confined...*
- *His is beginning to look for real challenges...*
- *He is interested in participating in a coming-of-age rite of passage...*
- *His family supports him to do so!*

Calendar & Events, 2016 – 2017

Sacred Fire is a three-year commitment. Each year, the Sacred Fire program begins in October and culminates in June with an initiation. Calendar dates are subject to change.

Crayfish = 1st year boys
Buckskins = 2nd year boys
Dogwoods = 3rd year boys
Fireboys = Graduates

(All Fireboys invited to all events! ☺)

August

Sun 8/28 (3-5pm): Sacred Fire Open House for *prospective families*. Also, *Buckskin, Dogwood & Fireboy families* invited to attend and contribute.

September

Tues 9/15: Sacred Fire Enrollment due for new and returning families.

October

Sat 10/1 (12pm) – Sun 10/2 (12pm): Sacred Fire Campout for *Crayfish, Buckskins & Dogwoods*.

November

Sat 11/5 (10am-4pm): Adventure Day for *Crayfish, Buckskins & Dogwoods*. The day is followed by a *Crayfish Family Potluck Meeting* (4pm-7:30pm). *Buckskin & Dogwood families* encouraged to attend.

December

Sat 12/3 (10am-4pm): Adventure Day for *Crayfish, Buckskins & Dogwoods*.

Sat 12/17 (3pm-9:30pm): *Dogwoods help organize the* Flying Deer Solstice Party.

January & February

There are no scheduled Sacred Fire events during these months, but families are encouraged to schedule get-togethers.

March

Sat 3/4 (10am-4pm): Adventure Day for *Crayfish, Buckskins & Dogwoods*. The day is followed by a *Crayfish Family Potluck Meeting* (4-7:30pm). *Buckskin & Dogwood families* encouraged to attend.

April

Sat 4/1 (9am-5pm): Adventure Day for *Crayfish (and their Sacred Fire Uncles), Buckskins, Dogwoods & Fireboys*. After drop off, Giveaway Planning Meeting for *Crayfish Parents*, 9:15 – 11:15am.

May

Sat 5/6 (10am-4pm): Adventure Day for *Crayfish, Buckskins & Dogwoods*. After 10am drop off, Giveaway Planning Meeting for *Crayfish Parents*, 10:00am – 12:00pm.

June

Sat 6/3 (11:00am – 5:00pm): Mothers' Ritual for *Crayfish, Buckskin, Dogwood & Fireboy Mothers*.

(Date/times TBA): *Crayfish, Buckskins, Dogwoods* help organize Flying Deer Day.

(Dates TBA): Initiation Week

Dogwoods arrive Mon (9am), depart Fri (2:30pm).

Buckskins arrive Tues (9am), depart Fri (2:30pm).

Crayfish arrive Tues (5pm), depart Fri (2:30pm).

(Date TBA, 6pm-8:30pm): Crayfish Reintegration Dinner

(Date/times TBA): Crayfish Community Giveaway

August

Sun 8/27 (3-5pm): Sacred Fire Open House.

Event Descriptions

Open House: This is an excellent opportunity for prospective families to learn about Sacred Fire as you experience the dynamic, layered nature of the program. It is important that any families considering enrolling in Sacred Fire do their best to attend this event, as it will answer crucial questions about the journey ahead.

Sacred Fire Campout: A fun, 24-hour overnight gathering for *Crayfish, Buckskins, Dogwoods & Fireboys* to launch our year!

Adventure Days (“A-Days”): These days help the boys bond with each other prepare for Initiation: building skills of fire-making, communication and self-awareness.

Meetings: The first Family Potluck Meeting is for all members of *Crayfish Families* to orient to the Sacred Fire journey and create a community circle. The second Family Potluck Meeting will focus on basic Giveaway planning. The third Meeting will be for parents only, to plan the finer details of the Giveaway.

Flying Deer Solstice Party: Together with the third year participants of *Moon Tribe* (Flying Deer’s girls rites of passage program), the *Dogwoods* will help to organize a vivacious, meaningful solstice celebration for the Flying Deer community.

Uncle Day: During this day, *Crayfish* and their Sacred Fire Uncles (with the support of the *Dogwoods*) will prepare and undergo a special ceremony to bless the Crayfish on their journey ahead. Please note that this day is longer than the normal Adventure Day.

Flying Deer Day: *Crayfish, Buckskins* and *Dogwoods* will collaborate to support Flying Deer Nature Center’s scholarship-fundraising community picnic day by tending fire, cooking burgers and teaching firemaking!

Mothers’ Ritual: This is a simple, powerful ritual led by local Sacred Fire community mothers whose sons have graduated from the Sacred Fire program. This ritual supports *Crayfish, Buckskin, Dogwood & Fireboy Mothers* in your changing role in your own son’s life. This is a very important gathering for mothers to attend.

Initiation Weekend: *Crayfish* tend fire in solitude for 24 hours and fast for 40 hours in a wilderness setting. *Buckskins* tend the community fire as a team for four days and nights. *Dogwoods* mentor and protect the new Crayfish, and manage logistics with the men.

Giveaway: This is an all-day event, hosted by all the *Crayfish Families* together at a retreat center. It is a way of celebrating your son’s journey and saying “thank you!” to individuals who have played a key role in your son’s life. Families and sons will cook delicious homemade food for the occasion; sons will craft handmade gifts and share the story and lessons of his experience. All will feast together, but only those who are invited by your son will attend your son’s actual moment of storytelling and gift giving.

Registration

Registration for Sacred Fire requires submitting tuition and a completed registration and health forms to Flying Deer Nature Center.

You can do this online at our website: <http://flyingdeernaturecenter.org/sacred-fire-boys>

...or via snail mail: 5 Abode Rd. New Lebanon, NY 12125.

Registration deadline: September 15

Tuition per year is \$900. Please see our website for payment plan agreements, online payment options, and tuition information.

Financial assistance is available. Apply online or download forms at:
<http://flyingdeernaturecenter.org/financial-assistance-application>

Financial aid application deadline: September 1

Contact Information

Sacred Fire Information

Online info: www.flyingdeernaturecenter.org/rites-of-passage

Sacred Fire program calendar: www.flyingdeernaturecenter.org/calendar

Flying Deer Nature Center

Flying Deer office phone: 518-794-6687 (line 3 is Devin's line)

Flying Deer email: info@flyingdeernaturecenter.org

Snail mail: 5 Abode Rd. New Lebanon, NY 12125

Devin Franklin

Cell phone: 518.669-3108

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