



Child's Day

Preschool · Kindergarten · Child Development Center

2525 Wallingwood Drive # 100 • Austin, Texas 78746

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Parent Handbook

We are excited about having your child in our Center, and will do everything we can to provide a safe, rich and fulfilling experience. Thank you for placing your trust in Child's Day.

THE VERY BEST

Our objective is to provide your child with the very best care and enrichment environment possible. Our program is designed to foster social, emotional, intellectual, and physical growth; helping children acquire an understanding of self and others in an atmosphere of warmth, personal respect, individuality, and positive support. We also seek to:

- Help each child develop a positive self-image
- Help children learn to be responsible for their own actions.
- Provide an early childhood resource to parents.

CURRICULUM

Age appropriate skills and concepts form the core of our curriculum. Lead Teachers plan opportunities for practice of these skills and understanding of these concepts within themes based on interest of the children. Hands-on activities enhance growth and development in social, emotional, physical, and cognitive areas.

PARENT COMMUNICATION / INVOLVEMENT

Child's Day strives to assist parents in understanding the developmental stages their children experience, enabling them to contribute most effectively to the child's growth and enrichment.

Parents are encouraged to visit the Center and observe how their child interacts with the staff and other children. Brief conversations with teachers are always welcome, while longer discussions should be arranged by appointment. If you call in advance, you will be assured of having adequate time for discussion with individual teachers or the Director.

Child's Day maintains a library of books and current periodicals dealing with all aspects of early childhood development, education, and health. Please ask a Director for assistance to draw on this resource.

All parents of children enrolled at the Center are automatically members of the Child's Day **Parents Advisory Committee (PAC)** which was formed to promote and facilitate communication and fellowship among parents, management, teachers, and staff to provide a strong and stable environment and community for the children. Notices of PAC meetings are posted in advance.

The "Parent Volunteer Opportunities Program" provides an opportunity for parents to be actively involved in the Center environment and a way to become more familiar with procedures and activities while enhancing and enjoying the fellowship of children and staff. Sign-up forms are available from the office.

The Center and individual classrooms use a variety of methods for communicating with parents. In recent years, email has proved to be quite effective for disseminating information to families and is now used quite extensively. The Center website, www.childsday.com, provides easy access to the Parent Handbook, Illness Exclusion Policy, Holiday/Closing Calendar, enrollment information, child development & parenting information, classroom Welcome Booklets, and a full library of forms and documents routinely used by the Center. There are several general Parent Communication bulletin boards in the hallways and each classroom has its own bulletin boards as well as notice holders on and beside each room's entrance door. Parents of infants and toddlers can expect to receive a written "Daily Report," detailing certain of their child's experiences throughout the day. Monthly invoices, payment receipts, and other documents are customarily distributed to individual children's "cubbies" either in the classroom or adjacent hallway. Phone calls to parents are made in some instances, such as when children become ill while at the Center and must be picked up. On occasion, the Center also uses USPS "snail" mail for special notices.

VISITING

Child's Day has an "Open Door" policy on parents' visits. We recognize and support parents' desires to see and spend time with their children whenever they can. Unfortunately, there are unintended negative consequences of such visits, when they disrupt resting children or naptime routines. The following guidelines ensure open access for parents while respecting children's requirements for uninterrupted rest:

- Unless prearranged with the Lead teacher in advance, children may not be dropped off during naptime. Exceptions: Teachers can be expected to be supportive and flexible when circumstances occasionally necessitate a naptime drop off (such as, when a child is picked up for a 10:30 am Dr. appointment). When a situation like this arises, parents should be reminded when time nap begins. Parents can also be asked to feed the child lunch before returning, if that would reduce

disruption. Another example would be, the family has been sitting on MoPac for two hours waiting for a tow truck.

- Parents may visit anytime, including during naptime. Parents who pick up during nap should be respectful of other sleeping children. (Please note: Child's Day believes it is developmentally inappropriate to wake children from sleep, unless they are being picked up to leave.)
- Parent visits at naptime must meet the developmental needs of the child. If a child is at a stage where separations are causing stress, teachers may request an interlude of time where the parents stop, and then try again in a few weeks when the child has progressed. It is appropriate for teachers to establish a minimum time interval for naptime visits, to prevent disruptions associated with quick "in and outs."
- If a child awakens during naptime with their parent present, the parent should help them resettle or should take them from the room until it is possible to reenter without disrupting others. This may mean waiting until nap time ends.

PRE-REGISTRATION / WAITING LIST

Pre-registration for Fall can be arranged several months in advance by completing the Enrollment Record / Application and submitting the required non-refundable fees.

Children can be "wait listed" at any time. Due to space limitations, infants should be wait listed at the earliest possible time. There is a non-refundable administrative fee for Wait Listing. Children currently enrolled and their siblings receive priority.

ENROLLMENT

Children may be enrolled for existing openings by completing the Enrollment Package and submitting the required fees. Components of the Enrollment Package include:

ENROLLMENT RECORD / APPLICATION	CHILD RELEASE AND EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST	CARE INSTRUCTIONS & BACKGROUND INFORMATION
HEALTH RECORD (BY PARENTS)	PHYSICIAN'S MEDICAL REPORT	ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT

GROUP ASSIGNMENTS

Children are initially assigned to a group based on their age, skills, and overall level of development as evaluated by the Director and Lead Teachers involved. Normally, all children enrolled are advanced to a new class at the beginning of each "school" year in the Fall. Interim class re-assignments may occur at other times when recommended by the Director, based on reassessment of developmental progress and availability of space, following a consultation among Lead Teachers, parents, and the Director.

PARENT / TEACHER PROGRESS CONFERENCES

Participation in parent/teacher conferences is an important activity. This is a time of sharing, which benefits the child, the parent, and the teacher. Child's Day believes in a strong partnership between the home and the Center to assure the best experience for the children.

Lead Teachers will invite you to participate in a parent conference twice a year to discuss your child's developmental progress. Guidelines to help you prepare for the conference are available from the office.

A parent or teacher may request a conference any time a need arises.

FEES & PAYMENT PROVISIONS

Tuition is due **and payable on the first of each month**, in advance. A late charge of two percent (2%) is due if payment is received after the fifth of the month. Enrollment terminates if payment is not received by the 10th.

Payment for Late Pick-up service and optional enrichment classes, such as music, gymnastics, or computer is also due on the first of each month, in advance.

The initial Monthly Tuition, is shown on the **ENROLLMENT RECORD / APPLICATION**. Tuition rates may be changed by the Center upon thirty (30) days written notice or if the Child changes to a different class. When tuition increases, the Parents will increase the amount on Deposit to equal one-half of the new tuition rate.

A Supplies Fee will be billed each August and will be due September 1st. A pro-rated Supplies Fee is due if registration occurs after September.

Each year, from September through March, following the first month of attendance, the Deposit may be refunded following withdrawal, provided the Center has received one full month advance written notice of withdrawal **effective the last day of the month**. Each year, from April through August, the Deposit becomes a **non-refundable** "reservation fee" to hold the Child's place for September (Children must remain continuously enrolled to retain their place). **All other payments are entirely non-refundable, including all payments made at the time of registration, in the event enrollment is canceled.**

If a child leaves the Center after 6:00 pm for any reason (6:30 pm if enrolled for **Late Pick-up Service**), a Late Pick-up Charge of **\$1.00 PER MINUTE** will be due and payable. Late Pick-Up charges are calculated to the time the Child physically leaves the Center.

There are NO REFUNDS OR CREDITS allowed for time missed from school for any reason.

TERMINATION OF ENROLLMENT

Enrollment will be considered terminated if:

- The Center receives one full month advance written notice of withdrawal, effective the last day of the month;
- Payment is delinquent beyond the 10th day of the month;
- The Parents fail to comply with this Agreement, the Parent Handbook, or any other rules of the Center;
- The Center, in its sole discretion, determines it is unable to meet the needs of the Child, or that it is not in the best interest of the Center or other children enrolled to have the Child continue in attendance;
- There is serious illness or death of the Child.

The Center and its staff retain the sole right and responsibility to determine any disputed factual matters regarding termination of enrollment.

SCHEDULE / HOURS OF OPERATION

Child's Day is open year-round from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday (A "Late Pick-up" option to 6:30 pm, is available at additional cost for non-infants).

Nap or rest time (for all children) lasts approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours in the early afternoon.

Outdoor play is scheduled twice a day. Parents should dress children with the weather in mind. Outside time is only cancelled in the event of rain.

Children regularly participate in planned group activities as well as individual play. They experience daily exposure to music, art, language, and creative movement activities.

HOLIDAYS AND CLOSINGS

Child's Day will be closed for the following holidays and special days:

New Year's Day	MLK Day (Jan.)
Presidents' Day (Feb.)	Memorial Day (May)
Fourth of July	Staff Work Day (Aug.)
Labor Day (Sept.)	Columbus Day (Oct.)
Thanksgiving (2 days)	Christmas (2 days)

The Center will have abbreviated operating hours (see Holiday Calendar) on certain days:

THE WEDNESDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING
SPECIFIED DAYS BEFORE/AFTER CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S DAY

The Holiday Calendar is on the Center's web site at: www.childsdays.com/ClosingCalendar.pdf .

Additional closings may be necessary due to weather conditions. The Center will close whenever City of Austin / Travis County offices close due to weather conditions. In the event of bad weather during the day, please monitor broadcast TV stations or call us, as ***Child's Day will close if City of Austin / Travis County closes*** and children must be picked up immediately. The Center will re-open when City / County offices re-open.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Children may not enter or leave the Center unless accompanied by an adult. Upon arrival, please be sure a staff member completes a health inspection before leaving.

Departing children will normally be released only to parents or other persons shown on the "Child Release Authorization List" form. Any person not known to the staff must give a special "Code Word," designated by parents at the time of enrollment. Please call the Center (and identify yourself by using the Code Word) or complete a "Special Release" form in advance if someone different (not regular) will be coming for your child. We will ask for the Code Word and positive identification when they arrive.

Child's Day is required to maintain daily attendance records. Please be sure to sign your child "IN" and "OUT" each day on the "SIGN-IN & SIGN-OUT LIST" for the class. The attendance sheet is also used during evacuation drills to ensure all present are safe and accounted for.

SAYING "GOODBYE" (SEPARATION)

To help achieve the goal of allowing your child to become independent, emotionally healthy, and well adjusted, we recommend the following practices with children age two and older:

- If possible, children should be walked in, not carried.
- Present your child to the teacher on arrival. The greeting between teacher and child is invaluable. Many things about the child's health and state of mind can be determined in that brief time, and nothing should interfere with it. The teacher will then help the child join into classroom activities.
- Good-byes at school should be part of a normal, everyday routine every child goes through. Separation should be sweet and brief, with reassurance about the planned pick-up time.
- Parents should encourage children to make friends with the teachers and look forward to being at school without feeling guilt or disloyalty to a parent.

Please refer to the section entitled "ARRIVAL TIME" for further information.

FIELD TRIPS

Field trips encourage broad awareness of the environment and develop self-assurance in children. They also provide opportunities to improve social skills and discover exciting new worlds. Children three and older will periodically travel on field trips. Notice will be posted at least forty-eight hours in advance. Parent participation in these excursions is encouraged and appreciated. **When a class goes on a field trip, all children present that day must participate.** For safety and identification, each child must wear a yellow Child's Day shirt. A First Aid kit is always taken and attendance is checked often. Typical field trips include:

Airport	Nature Center	Pumpkin-Patch	Horseback Riding	Library
State Capitol	Kidde Acres	Public Gardens	Children's Museum	Fishing
Fire Station	Miniature Golf	City Parks	Discovery Zone	Austin Zoo

Transportation will be provided in vehicles equipped with seat belts and driven by Center staff, a licensed commercial driver, or a parent. An adult will supervise each group. All riders will use seat belts at all times.

LIVE PETS AND ANIMALS

Because they play a valuable role in children's development, from time to time, classrooms will have safe, live "pets" such as gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs, mice, rats, tropical/gold fish, snails, frogs, tadpoles, spiders. In accordance with common sense and licensing regulations, children and staff will practice good hygiene and hand washing when pets or their "accessories" are handled. Children in the Center may not have direct contact with chickens, ducks, reptiles (turtles, lizards, snakes), or amphibians (frogs, toads). Children may not bring their live pets from home into the Center.

MEALS AND SNACKS

Infants' parents supply formula and all baby foods. Toddlers and older children must bring lunch from home in a small, labeled lunch box or bag. All containers and lids must be labeled with the child's name. Nutritious morning and afternoon snacks, milk, and juice are provided by the Center. Posted weekly, snack menus are varied, with fresh fruits and vegetables included whenever possible. Meals are served family style, allowing children to participate in setting and clearing tables. Notify the Director of any special dietary restrictions. The Center must receive the written statement of a physician or a licensed dietician for special therapeutic diets.

PARTIES

Birthdays and holidays are an especially exciting time for young children and the Center will be pleased to help your child celebrate with classmates and staff **if arrangements are made in advance**. Parent participation is welcome, but not required. Party planning should attempt to minimize disruption of routine and prevent unwarranted anxiety for the children. Balloons are a choking hazard for young children and should not be brought into the Center (if you absolutely cannot do without balloons, Mylar balloons are acceptable). Since licensing regulations prohibit *any type* of open flame in the Center, birthday candles are not permitted.

If birthday invitations are distributed at the Center, **all children in the class should be invited**.

DISCIPLINE

Child's Day has a philosophy of *positive guidance*, incorporating creative teaching and involvement to help children develop self-discipline and inner control over their actions. It is based on mutual respect and an understanding of children's needs and development. Positive guidance uses redirection, verbalization of misunderstandings, consistency, acceptance of feelings, firmness, and fairness. Children are encouraged to express their feelings verbally as well as to discuss and resolve conflicts rather than "act out" their feelings. In certain situations, a brief "quiet time" is used to allow a child to calm down and recover self-control before resuming group activities.

HEALTH

The Center is required to have on file a physician's report verifying overall good health and required immunizations. Current information on immunization status must be maintained while the child is enrolled. Children four and older are required to have vision and hearing screening.

Children are to be checked upon arrival each day for any visible indications of illness. If a child appears ill while at the Center, parents will be contacted and asked to pick up the child immediately. The main reasons for excluding children from the Center are:

- an illness prevents the child from participating in routine activities;
- an illness requires more care than the staff can provide without compromising the needs of the other children in the group;
- a child's presence poses an increased risk to others with whom the child may come in contact.

The Center cannot admit any child appearing to be sick, without a written statement from a doctor or registered nurse certifying no contagious disease is present.

Children should be kept at home when they meet the following exclusion criteria:

- Rectal temperature of 101.4 or higher, ear/oral temperature of 100.4 or higher, or underarm temperature of 99.4 or higher, in the past 24 hours.
- Conjunctivitis ("pink eye"), redness of the eye and/or lids, usually with yellow discharge and crusting.
- Bronchitis, which begins with hoarseness, cough, and a slight elevation in temperature. The cough may be dry and painful but gradually becomes productive.
- A rash you cannot identify which has not been diagnosed.
- Impetigo: red pimples, which become small vesicles surrounded by a reddened area. When blisters break, the surface is raw and weeping. Look for signs in neck creases, groin, underarms, face, hands, or edge of diaper.
- Diarrhea three or more times within 24 hours (watery or greenish BM's that look different and are more frequent than usual).
- Vomiting within 24 hours (more than usual "spitting up").
- Head Lice; live contagious insects or their nits (egg sacs) that infest hair. Children will not be readmitted without being free of live lice and nits, or must have a written note from a physician, local health authority, advance practice nurse, or physician's assistant stating that they are no longer contagious and may return to school.
- A severe cold with fever, sneezing, and nose drainage.
- An unknown illness without obvious symptoms other than unusual paleness, irritability, tiredness, or lack of interest.
- A contagious disease, including measles, chicken pox, mumps, roseola, strep throat, etc.

Children may be brought into the Center if they have only a slight fever, a mild cold or allergy, an allergic rash, diaper rash, prickly heat, a loose bowel movement, dietary or medication diarrhea. Children with a diagnosed bacterial infection may return 24 hours after beginning treatment with antibiotic medication if they are able to participate normally in the program.

While we regret the inconvenience caused by strict adherence to these guidelines, our concern for all the children dictates a very conservative approach when dealing with health matters. Because of conflicting medical opinions about the advisability of re-admitting children receiving treatment who still appear ill, the Center will err on the side of safety when making such decisions and ask for your tolerance and understanding.

Should your child contact a contagious illness, please notify the Center immediately so other parents can be alerted to the possibility of exposure. Guidelines issued by the Texas Department of Health dictate re-admission criteria. Contact the office for details.

Parents are encouraged to administer medication outside the Center. At the discretion of the Director, a Center staff member may administer medication, on a "best efforts" basis.

The Center and its staff accept no responsibility or liability for any error or omission regarding administration of medication.

All medication must be furnished in the original prescription container, with an appropriate dispenser, marked with the child's name, date, and directions for use; placed in a labeled plastic ("Zip-Lock") bag, and handed to a staff member with a fully completed MEDICATION AUTHORIZATION FORM.

In the event of an injury or medical emergency, trained staff will immediately administer first aid and notify a Director if further assistance is needed. If we believe the situation may call for parent involvement or professional medical attention, the Center will attempt to contact a parent or other authorized emergency contact. If the condition is serious, the Center will call 911 for an EMT response or will transport the child to a hospital Emergency Room.

SAFETY

The following safety precautions have been established to help ensure the safety of children and staff:

- Emergency evacuation drills are held regularly without notice. Parents present should participate in the drill.
- Emergency exit plans are posted in every classroom.
- The daily record of children's arrivals and departures is used as an attendance checklist during safety drills.
- All classroom staff are trained in First Aid and C/PR.

ARRIVAL TIME

For the convenience of our parents, Child's Day opens daily at 7:00 am. Depending on their age, children may need to be dropped off in rooms other than their assigned class, since teachers have different starting times ranging from 7:00 am to 8:30 am.

We ask parents to bring children to the Center no **later than 9:00 am** each day they attend. There are several important reasons for this, all of which involve the welfare and happiness of all the children.

Many of the most important activities of each day take place during the morning hours starting at 9:00 am. Children who skip some of these activities because of their late arrival often "miss out" on a favorite play period, circle time, story time, or art project.

These morning hours usually include planned group activities, which are important in helping children develop social skills and abilities involving interaction with their peers as well as self-discipline.

Equally important is the opportunity for a personal greeting from their teacher. These personal greetings are crucial elements of the bonding process between children and teachers, where friendship and trust are established and nurtured. Once planned activities are underway, teachers must devote their attention to the other children in the class.

Please make every effort to have your child arrive prior to 9:00 am so he/she can enjoy this vital acclimatization period. These precious early moments allow your child to interact with friends and have an opportunity to explore and adjust to the physical environment, setting the tone for the day.

To avoid disrupting the class, please refrain from bringing your child into the Center during naptime. Please check with your child's teacher to determine this period.

Please pre-arrange with the teacher or call the Center if you expect to bring your child to class late. Each classroom has its own policy concerning late arrival or late-in-the-day drop-off. In general, it is difficult for our teachers to properly plan and conduct their classes if children are allowed to "drop-in" at any time. Please notify us when your child is absent.

HANDLING PARENT CONCERNS

If a problem exists, the Center wants it corrected as quickly as possible. This can only be achieved if it is identified immediately. Parents are asked to refrain from discussing their concerns with other parents, instead following the following below.

- Parents with concerns should **first** discuss them with the **Lead Teacher** of their child's class. Other staff are to avoid discussing any concern with a parent that has not been addressed by the classroom Lead Teacher.
- If the classroom Lead Teacher cannot resolve the concern independently and to the satisfaction of the parent, within 24 hours the Lead Teacher should bring the matter to the attention of the Director.

- If a parent brings a concern to the Director without first consulting the Lead Teacher, the Director will ask the parent to confer first with the Lead Teacher.
- If the Lead Teacher and the Director are unable to arrive at a solution, the Lead Teacher should ask the parent to schedule a conference with the Director.
- If the Director is unable to arrive at a solution satisfactory to the parent, within 24 hours the Director should bring the matter to the attention of the owners. For convenience and expediency, the Director may ask the parent or the teacher involved to present the matter to the owners.
- If a parent brings a concern to an owner, the owner will ask the parent to confer first with the classroom Lead Teacher, and then, if needed, arrange a conference with the Director.

CHILD ABUSE

The Center is required by law to report any apparent incidence of child abuse or neglect defined as "non-accidental infliction or threat of infliction of physical, emotional, or mental harm to a child."

"Any person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report to any local or state law enforcement agency, and in addition, reports shall be made to (1) the Texas Department of Protective & Regulatory Services; or (2) the agency designated by the court to be responsible for the protection of children."

All such reports must contain the name and address of the child, the name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child, and any other pertinent information.

CHILD CARE REGULATIONS / NOTICES / CONTACT INFORMATION

The office has posted copies of the Center's license, most recent licensing inspection report, and other required notices including the publication "Parents' Guide to Day Care." A copy of the Texas "Minimum Standard Rules for Licensed Child Care Centers" is available in the office and on the web at: www.tdprs.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Child_Care_Standards_and_Regulations/pdf/final746.pdf. Parents should also be aware of the following important contact information:

Local Child Care Licensing Office	512-908-9650
Texas Child Abuse Hotline	800-252-5400
Child Care Licensing Web Site	www.tdprs.state.tx.us/child_care
Parents' Guide to Day Care	www.childsday.com/parguide.html

CLOTHING / TOYS / PERSONAL ITEMS

Children's clothing should be comfortable, allowing complete freedom of movement, washable, and suitable for daily indoor and outdoor activities. Since children spend time outdoors almost every day, parents should consider weather conditions when planning daily dress. To encourage development of independent bathroom skills, children's clothing should be **easy for them to manipulate with a minimum of assistance**.

Children must wear shoes which are practical as well as comfortable. Sandals and flip-flops are prohibited.

A complete change of clothing (every item labeled) should be kept at the Center. Place the clothes in a marked Zip-Lock plastic bag and give it to the teacher.

Except for special items needed to smooth the transition from home, toys and personal belongings from home should be limited to "show-and-tell" days. This will avoid lost possessions and hurt feelings. Children should not bring in candy, gum, or money.

The Center will make reasonable efforts to safeguard children's personal belongings and clothing, but will not be responsible for lost or damaged items. **Everything your child brings or wears to school should be permanently labeled.**

ASSORTED DON'Ts AND "NO-NO's"

- No bubble- or chewing gum.
- No toy weapons of any kind.
- No glass containers.
- No hard candy, popcorn, or nuts.
- No latex balloons.
- No birthday (or any) candles or matches.
- Don't send money with a child.
- No pet cats, dogs, or other live animals may be brought into the Center.
- Don't allow children to visit other rooms without permission from the Teacher.
- Don't leave medicine in a child's bag.
- Don't remain in the Center after closing.
- Don't fail to supervise children when leaving.

WATER PLAY "SPLASH" DAYS

While the weather is warm, the Center celebrates "Water Play Day" on our playground with water hose, wading pool, buckets, cups, etc. All children (except infants) need a labeled towel, swimsuit, and "water shoes" at the Center during the warm season. ***Please alert the staff if your child has ear tubes or needs ear protection!***

NON-DISCRIMINATION

Child's Day does not discriminate. Children and staff of all races, nationalities, and religions are welcome. The Center respects cultural diversity and incorporates it into the daily curriculum.

Child's Day is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

The Center supports inclusion of all children, regardless of their abilities. To implement inclusive practices, the Center will develop appropriate training programs which will prepare parents and staff to meet the needs of children and their families.

CHANGES TO THE PARENT HANDBOOK / POLICIES

The Center, at its discretion, may change any policy contained in the Parent Handbook. Parents will be notified of any changes by email or written notice distributed to children's cubbies.

RECORDS

The Center is required to maintain the following records up-to-date for each child:

PERSONAL INFORMATION FORM MEDICAL AUTHORIZATION / RELEASE DAILY ATTENDANCE
 INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION HEALTH HISTORY / IMMUNIZATIONS

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Parents often ask, "What is my child actually learning in preschool? And what can I do at home to help?" This handbook explains our philosophy and goals. It describes what children learn from the activities, environment, daily schedule, and from our conversations with them. Last, it tells what you can do to help your child learn.

Our Philosophy

The philosophy behind our curriculum is that young children learn best by doing. Learning isn't just repeating what someone else says; it requires active thinking and experimenting to find out how things work and to learn firsthand about the world we live in.

In their early years, children explore the world around them by using all their senses: touching, tasting, smelling, and looking.

In using real materials such as blocks and trying out their ideas, children learn about sizes, shapes, and colors, and they notice relationships between things.

In time, they learn to use one object to stand for another. This is the beginning of symbolic thinking. For example, they might pretend a stick is an airplane or a block is a hamburger. These early symbols—the stick and the block—are similar in shape to the objects they represent. Gradually children become more able to use abstract symbols like words to describe their thoughts and feelings. They learn to “read” pictures which are symbols of real people, places, and things. This exciting development in symbolic thinking takes place during the preschool years as children play.

Play provides the foundation for academic or “school” learning. It is the preparation children need before they learn highly abstract symbols such as letters (which are symbols for sounds) and numbers (which are symbols for number concepts). Play enables us to achieve the key goals of our early childhood curriculum. Play is the work of young children.

The Goals of Our Curriculum

The most important goal of our early childhood curriculum is to help children become enthusiastic learners. This means encouraging children to be active and creative explorers who are not afraid to try out their ideas and to think their own thoughts. Our goal is to help children become independent, self-confident, inquisitive learners. We’re teaching them how to learn, not just in preschool, but all through their lives. We’re allowing them good habits and attitudes, particularly a positive sense of themselves, which will make a difference throughout their lives.

Our curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development:

- **Social:** to help children feel comfortable in school, trust their new environment , make friends, and feel they are a part of the group.
- **Emotional:** to help children experience pride and self-confidence, develop independence and self-control, and have a positive attitude toward life.
- **Cognitive:** to help children become confident learners by letting them try out their own ideas and experience success, and by helping them acquire learning skills such as the ability to solve problems, ask questions, and use words to describe their ideas, observations, and feelings.
- **Physical:** to help children increase their large and small muscle skills and feel confident about what their bodies can do.

The activities we plan for children, the way we organize the environment, select toys and materials, plan the daily schedule, and talk with children, are all designed to accomplish the goals of our curriculum and give your child a successful start.

What Children Learn at Home

Our curriculum works best when teachers and parents work together. Each of us has something valuable to contribute.

We are trained in child development and early childhood education. We see how your child acts with other children and adults. We can assess what your child is learning and how he or she compares to other children.

But only you have in-depth knowledge of your child. You know best your child's interests, fears, joys, patterns, and past. You are most familiar with the world your child is trying to understand. You know about the relationships between the members of your family, and you have shared many of your child's experiences, from family events to trips to the doctor's office or the zoo.

This in-depth knowledge makes you central to your child's learning process and a very valuable resource for us as teachers. If you share with us what is happening at home; arrival of a new baby, the death of a pet, nightmares, temper tantrums, trips, separation or divorce-we can understand your child better. We can deal with both positive and difficult events through reassuring stories, soothing art activities, imaginative dramatic play, and extra love and attention.

We also see you as your child's first and most important teacher. Your home is your child's first and continual learning environment. You decide your family's daily routines-when you get up, eat, play, do chores, visit friends, and go to bed. The way you talk with your children makes a tremendous difference in how they think, how they feel about themselves, and the kind of people they will become.

If we can work together-we can do some of the same things at school and at home-your child will be much better off. The more consistent we adults are, the more secure your child is likely to feel. And when children feel secure, they are more likely to explore, to experiment, and to learn.

Many parents have asked us what they can do to help their children succeed in school. We usually reply, "Just try to encourage your child to explore and learn in your home environment the way we help children at school. Help your child become an independent, enthusiastic, curious learner." You don't need to buy a lot of special toys or equipment to turn your child into a creative thinker. The best thing you can do is to be a good listener and to talk with your child as you go about your normal, everyday household chores. Sometimes, after a long day at work, this may seem difficult. But you'll find that this kind of attention has a wonderful effect on children and makes your job as a parent more fun and interesting-and sometimes easier.

ABC's and 123's *Earlier Is Not Better*

Many parents are concerned when their children aren't learning letters and numbers. They feel that ditto sheets and homework in preschool programs will better prepare their children for elementary school.

We could give your children workbooks. We could make them memorize the alphabet. We could drill them. We could test them. But we know that if we do, your children are going to lose something very important.

Children who are rushed into reading and writing too soon miss important steps in learning and may suffer later on because they lack the foundation they need for using language. Children who are taught to read in preschool may be able to sound out and recognize words, but they may also have little understanding of what they are reading. If they haven't been given time to play, they won't have explored objects enough to know what words (like "hard, harder, hardest") mean. If they aren't allowed to string beads, button, dress up, cut, paste, pour, and draw, they won't develop the small muscle skills they need for writing.

Because math involves more than memorizing facts (like $2+2=4$), because it involves logical thinking, children shouldn't be pushed into paper and pencil arithmetic too soon. To acquire the foundation for logical thinking, children need many opportunities to count objects, sort them into piles, and add some to a pile and take some away. It is by playing games like these that they will come to truly understand addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication. Without these concrete experiences, children may give correct answers but probably won't understand what they are doing and why.

Worst of all, if children are rushed into academic subjects too soon, they may lose their enthusiasm for learning and lose their sense of themselves as learners. If children are told what to learn and memorize by the teacher, they may become more passive and dependent learners, and be less excited about learning something new. Children who are given plenty of time to play, however, learn to ask their own questions and figure out their own answers. They are responsible for their own learning. They see themselves as explorers, discoverers, problem solvers, and inventors.

Parents As Partners*

Parents and teachers may look at young children's learning from different perspectives, but they share a common goal: making sure their children receive the best possible education. Mutual respect and communication between programs and families takes advantage of both perspectives to provide children with the kind of care and education that will help them thrive.

Today's family members and caregivers have many responsibilities and time constraints. It takes extra effort on both sides to build strong partnerships.

Tips for parents:

- Listen carefully to what your child's teacher / caregiver has to say. Remember that they spend a significant amount of time with children and can share expertise about their development.
- Don't jump to conclusions. If you have questions or concerns about your child or the early childhood program, speak directly to your child's teacher / caregiver,. Don't panic or merely commiserate with other parents when questions arise.
- Remember that many teachers or caregivers have families of their own, and may share similar responsibilities and time constraints. Be as respectful of their time as you wish them to be of yours.

Early childhood programs today are working hard to become more "family-friendly," providing newsletters to parents that focus on early childhood issues, scheduling parent/teacher conferences to review developmental progress, and sponsoring parent education workshops.

Programs may demonstrate strengths in different ways, but working together with parents remains crucial. When teachers make the extra effort to include parents in program activities, and parents take time to attend and participate, children benefit from the best possible learning experience.

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