

PARENT HANDBOOK

APPENDIX 1: EARLY CHILDHOOD

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Introduction

We are very pleased to host our programs for young children in our Early Childhood Centre, built in 2004 to serve the growing number of families interested in Waldorf Education. Our building was designed with young children in mind and was conceived to enhance their experience away from home. The centre was designed and built utilizing healthy and sustainable living principles, and the heart shaped building houses all of the young children until they are ready for Grade School. The outdoor play areas are uniquely designed for each age group, with scented flowerbeds, gardens for planting and digging, and running and climbing space for the children. Indoor and outdoor spaces that allow children to explore with all of their senses are key to our programs.

The Vancouver Waldorf School Early Childhood Centre is a licensed childcare facility and our staff meets all licensing requirements of the Ministry of Child and Family Development. The Preschool and Kindergarten teachers are experienced child-care providers with Waldorf teacher training.

Waldorf Pedagogy for the Young Child

Rudolf Steiner's worldview, based on his insights into human nature and destiny is called Anthroposophy. The Waldorf curriculum is developed from these insights, as are initiatives in economics, medicine, agriculture, architecture, sciences and the arts. Waldorf pedagogy has been experienced by tens of thousands of students worldwide in the past ninety years, and continues to inspire and guide the development of new initiatives in education.

Young children are open to every impression that lives in their environment. Their capacity to live deeply into all that surrounds them is at the root of their learning. We call that capacity *imitation*. We strive to provide an environment worthy of imitation, where children can play imaginatively and creatively in ways that nurture their senses and awaken their fantasy, which in later years translates into capacities for creativity, imagination and free thinking, the foundation of a lively intellectual life.

Just as the child lives in a rhythmical life of waking and sleeping, we also work with a very regular rhythm for our daily and weekly activities. Music and verses accompanied by movement, stories, practical activities of cooking, gardening, sewing, and artistic activities of painting, modeling and drawing all contribute to allowing the child to expand into the world. Rhythm and regular routine bring children a sense of joyful security that we consider essential to their healthy development. Regular meal times, rest times, bed times, and play give the children security and help avoid discipline problems.

Our Early Childhood Center offers programs to young children from one to six and a half years of age. All our programs are designed with the balanced and healthy development of the child in mind. In some ways, you may find us unconventional in our educational approach, and we deeply care about the relationship that families develop with us as they progress through Waldorf Education. We ask parents for their support in fostering the wonderful fantasy and creativity of young children, and strongly recommend the elimination of regular exposure to and use of television, movies, videos, and computers, that we regard as intrusions of the modern world in the realm of early childhood.

If you choose to enter into Waldorf Education and its many wonders, we are happy to support your continued discovery by providing you with books and publications, study groups, lectures and workshops. By engaging actively in the cultural life of our school, you and your family will participate in the continued creation of a

strong and inspiring community dedicated to the preservation of childhood and the wholesome development of children.

Parents of children in the Waldorf School find themselves supported by a community of families who share and explore the challenges and experiences of bringing up children today. We encourage you to find out what Waldorf ideas have meant to other families.

PROGRAMS

Parent & Tot

Our Parent & Tot program provides an opportunity for parents to accompany their children to a morning filled with simple activities of creative play, songs, verses, movement games, stories and puppet plays, baking, painting, and snack. Activities are presented in a rhythmical way to ensure that children feel comfortable and secure. While the children play, parents are encouraged to engage in their own projects. This is an opportunity to be supported in parenting, meet other families, learn and share from personal stories, and experience Waldorf Education for the young child.

One Day Program

for children 1½ to 3½ years

Thursday 9:00 - 11:00 am

Friday 9:00 - 11:00 am

Saturday 9:30 - 11:30 am

Preschool & Kindergarten

Following a rhythmic routine conducive to a sense of joyful security, the children are engaged in artistic and practical activities, singing, and movement, structured in such a way as to support their balanced development and their growth in social interactions. Grade One readiness is taken very seriously, and until children show a strong pattern of readiness for formal classroom work, generally between the ages of six and seven, we consider it beneficial that the children remain in kindergarten where learning takes place through play, activity and imitation.

Young children are open to every impression in their environment. Imitation is the term that we use to describe a young children's capacity to live deeply into all that surrounds them. We give children simple natural materials so that their imaginations are awakened in using them. This exercising of healthy fantasy in the early years is important for enabling creativity and imagination in the intellectual life in later years.

Just as the child lives in a rhythmical life of waking and sleeping, we also work with a regular rhythm for our daily and weekly activities: music and verse accompanied by movement and gesture, stories, practical activities of gardening, cooking and sewing, and artistic activities of drawing and watercolour painting that are developmentally appropriate. This daily and weekly rhythm allows the children to expand out into the world through play and then to come together in a more focused activity such as the morning circle or story time. Rhythm brings a feeling of well-being and joy and a balance between playing from their own initiative and working together in other activities. The daily and weekly rhythm fits into the wider rhythm of the year with its changing seasons and the corresponding festivals.

The children feel secure when their daily rhythm follows a regular routine. Regular bed times, meal times, rest times and play times give them a sense of security and help to avoid discipline problems. This rhythm and routine is a secret key to working with our very active small children who live in such a different stage of consciousness from adults. They are not yet ready for reasoning, choices, questions and decision-making, all of which will come later. Rhythm and repetition are keys to working with this age. The children love, for example, to hear the same songs and story over and over again.

Preschool

Three Day Program Monday - Wednesday

Two Day Program Thursday - Friday

for children 3½ to 4½ years

8:30 am to 12:00 pm

Kindergarten

Monday - Friday

for children 4½ to 6½ year

8:15 am to 12:20 pm

Preschool & Kindergarten Aftercare

The Aftercare provides afternoon care on an ongoing or occasional basis for preschool and kindergarten children who demonstrate readiness. Our afternoon program is designed to provide young children with a safe and nurturing afternoon in harmony with their morning activities in their familiar Waldorf environment. As part of a health-giving rhythm of the day, a cooked organic lunch is provided and there is a quiet rest time after lunch. Please ask our Admissions Coordinator for details.

Monday - Friday

12:00 to 3:00 pm

For Preschool & Kindergarten children

PRACTICAL DETAILS

Clothing

Warmth is of greatest importance to the healthy development of the young child. The children need warm clothing with waterproof boots, coats and pants. Unless the weather is extremely wet, the children will play outside. They love splashing through puddles and digging in the ground. Their legs should be covered and extra pants should be kept at school. They need warm hats and gloves for the winter. Indoor slippers or shoes that they can manage themselves can be left at school. A change of clothes is needed and can be kept in a cloth bag at school. All clothes and shoes should be marked clearly with the child's name.

As we present real and healthy life examples and imaginations for the children's play to imitate, we ask that clothes do not have cartoons, logos or images on them.

Nutrition

In accordance with Section 48 of the Ministry of Children and Family Development licensing regulations, we aim to promote healthy eating and nutritional habits. We work with the children to prepare healthy vegetarian meals together, usually a cooked cereal or bread or organic grains with fruit or vegetables and a warm drink.

Filtered water is always available. Play is hard work, and a loaf of bread or bowl of cereal disappears quickly. While we do not coerce the children to eat, usually everyone has at least a little bit. Snack time is a social time and, just as if at home, we prepare the table together and wait until we have finished before we move on to the next activity.

While some children wish to eat a little upon arrival, our hearty morning snack is formally served at approximately 10:00a. For children who stay for the afternoon, lunch is at 12.30p and consists of vegetarian choices of dairy, vegetables, fruit, ground seeds and nuts and a variety of cooked grains. We are committed to serving organic or bio-dynamic produce. Much attention is given to a nutritional balance with pleasing variety. Afternoon snack at 2:45p consists of fruit and light grains or dairy.

Teachers need to be informed of any dietary restrictions in a letter from the parent/guardian.

Birthdays: A child's birthday is a very special day. We invite parents to celebrate it with us. Please discuss this with the teacher of your child.

Toys

Toys, books, and treasures from home sometimes find their way to school. These are better kept at home since they may become lost or damaged. However, please talk to the teacher about the possibility of your child sharing a special treasure with us.

Extra Activities

Engaging in play, by themselves or with friends, is a fundamental need of the young child. We recognize this need for daily play, and see the stress that can be created in children's lives by over-scheduling. Therefore, because we offer a broad range of activities in art, movement and music, we advise that additional extra-curricular activities and classes are not scheduled until the child is older. Please speak with your child's teacher if you have any questions about this request.

Illness

A child who has not slept well or who is not feeling well needs to be at home. Please call your teacher as soon as you are able to report an absence. Guidelines for when to keep a child at home for rest and also to control the spread of illness to others:

- 24 hours after a fever (110* F or 38.3* C, unless it is a low fever related to teething, then when they are feeling better)
- Pain - any complaints of unexplained or undiagnosed pain.
- A common cold with listlessness, runny nose and eyes, coughing and sore throat. Generally speaking, a person who catches a cold can spread it to others for one day before symptoms appear, and about five days after the cold symptoms begin. Once the child's temperature, well-being and energy have returned to normal, the child is likely no longer contagious, and may be able to return to school or care even though coughing and runny nose may persist.
- If the symptoms are caused by allergies the child is not contagious.
- Difficulty in breathing-wheezing or persistent cough.

- Sore throat or trouble swallowing
- Infected skin or eyes, or an undiagnosed rash.
- Headache and stiff neck (should see physician)
- Unexplained diarrhea
- Nausea

EARLY CHILDHOOD SAFETY

Drop Off

All Early Childhood Centre children are to be taken to their respective classroom. A brief good morning and comment on the child's evening/rising if unusual is appreciated.

Pick Up

It is important that children enrolled in our Early Childhood programs are picked up on time by parents, legal guardians or other authorized persons. Parents must provide in writing to the teacher a list of persons authorized to pick-up their child. No child will be allowed to leave the premises with a person who is not a parent or someone who has been authorized by the parent. If a personal emergency arises, the designated pick-up person must notify the school as soon as possible and make alternate arrangements. It is the staff's legal responsibility not to release a child to anyone who is judged unable to adequately care for the child. If the teacher believes that the child will be at risk, they will call others on the authorized pick-up list or contact the appropriate administrator who will inform the Ministry for Children and Families. In the Aftercare Programs we require all children to be signed in and out in the attendance book by an authorized person.

Late Pick-Up

In the event that a child is not picked up by the scheduled time and the authorized person has not called, the school staff will attempt to contact the family or someone from the authorized list to arrange to have the child picked up. If no authorized person can be reached we will attempt to arrange for an emergency assistant to be with the child in the Centre, under our supervision. If an assistant cannot be found, we are required by licensing regulations to call the Ministry.

Carpools

Most of the children come to school by vehicle, and many parents make arrangements for carpools. Your teacher may know of families in your neighbourhood who would be able to share driving. It is very important that the teacher knows the travel arrangements for your child. Please ask the driver to bring the child to the appropriate room. All travel arrangements must be made in advance. **Report all unexpected changes to your teacher before 11am** so that your children and their teachers can be informed.

If a car seat must be left for the afternoon pick-up person, please leave it against the outside wall.

Behaviour Guidance Policy including Anti-Bullying

Our program is a safe place for all children, where the child is respected as a unique individual and where each child must feel secure.

We work with a rhythm for the day to create security for the children. Knowing what is coming next enables children to feel comfortable and capable of moving through transitions from one activity to the next. This is essential to a young child's growth and development.

This rhythm provides the framework for activity. Within that framework, we use an approach of loving firmness when dealing with inappropriate behavior; a quiet firm tone of voice is used when the behavior is such that it would hurt the child or someone else. When a child is three or older, they are encouraged to share, take turns, and to develop self-discipline. Limits are set and quietly enforced, e.g.: "wild animals belong outside" and so forth. The child is redirected in a positive way.

It may be necessary to remove a child from a situation, usually with encouragement to work alongside an adult in such activities as washing, sewing, preparing snack, etc. With the younger child this is usually sufficient to deal with the situation. At no time is a child isolated or confined. We ensure that no child in care is ever subjected to physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect. This is in accordance with our school values and philosophy as well as Ministry of Child and Family Development licensing regulations, Schedule H, Sections 51 & 52.

Anyone who has reason to believe that a child needs protection must promptly report the matter to the Ministry of Child and Family Development.

In some situations it may be necessary to bring observations of the child's behaviour to the attention of the parents. If a child is not adjusting well to the program, this will be discussed with the parent/guardian and at the early childhood faculty meeting. Ideas and suggestions will be shared, implemented and further observations made and reviewed. On occasion, consultation with a professional may be necessary. At other times it may be necessary to have the child come for a shorter, more structured part of the day. We may recognize that we are not able to work with a child within the framework of our program. The parents would be informed of the process and all recommendations will be put in writing.

Missing Child Policy

The safety of children is of utmost importance. If a child is missing while in the care of the centre, staff will immediately search for the child while ensuring the safety of the other children. If the child cannot be found within 10 minutes of searching, then the RCMP will be notified and a missing child report will be filed. Staff will inform the school administration and seek immediate support in continuing the search. The child's family will be contacted and updated if the search needs to continue.

Custody and Related Court Orders

If a custody or court order exists which denies someone access to the child, a copy of the order must be placed in the child's file and the instructions followed at all times. In this case families need to inform staff of all custody and court orders.