



# Early Childhood Parent Handbook

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## Early Childhood Program Overview

The Early Years at Aurora Waldorf School nurture and protect the wonder of childhood.

The Aurora Waldorf School Early Childhood Programs enhance the potential of each child through wholesome activities, rich language and artistic expression within a warm, homelike atmosphere. Children are guided through activities that enliven the imagination and strengthen their bodies. With a simple daily rhythm and the use of natural materials, children gain a sense of security in an environment that is beautiful, true and good.

Gross and fine motor skills, self-confidence and trust in the world are developed through purposeful activities and the work of adult role models. The daily activities in our Waldorf Early Childhood programs are rich with:

- Storytelling, puppetry, singing, finger plays, poetry and games
- Watercolor painting, crayoning, beeswax modeling, wool and wood crafts
- Imaginative play and dramatization
- Domestic arts (cooking, baking, sewing, washing and cleaning)
- Nature walks and developmental movement

Based on the Waldorf philosophy of child development, which has withstood the test of time, our program is designed to bring forth children's reverence and joy for living as well as a willingness to work. Children see their work in school as play, fostering wonder and possibility, thus strengthening them from within in a lasting way and building the foundation for academic success.

“In the heart, the loom of feeling,  
In the head, the light of thinking,  
In the limbs, the strength of will.”

Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf Education

## **Parent-Toddler Program**

Our Parent-Toddler Program offers parents and children the opportunity to come together in a supportive and nurturing atmosphere to explore the wonders of the first years of life, and gives parents a living picture of Rudolf Steiner's early childhood philosophy in action. The class is filled with meaningful work, as wholesome snacks are prepared. The children enjoy open-ended play and join together for snack and circle time. This class gives parents an opportunity to discuss child development, parenting issues and Waldorf education with an experienced Waldorf teacher and is designed to nurture and inspire parents in the beginning of their journey to raise healthy, strong, vibrant children. Serving parents and children, infancy to age 3, the class meets one day per week for 2 hours.

## **Kindergarten Program**

Waldorf is a successful holistic education model designed to provide the right activity at the right time, allowing each child's abilities to unfold. In the first seven years, the child seeks to experience the world as a place of goodness and will learn primarily through imitation and activity. Great care is taken in planning a curriculum that fosters wonder, joy, and possibility; the early foundations for creative thinking.

In a rhythmic way, the child's day flows between individual and social activities, reflecting the need for both quiet and active play. In a warm, homelike setting, the child experiences joyful and exuberant activity, imitating everything he/she sees. The teacher seeks to bring forth the activities in a kind, loving and noble manner worthy of imitation.

In Kindergarten the students are introduced to both German and Eurythmy during circle time through games, poetry and song. Eurythmy, unique to Waldorf education, is an art of movement to music and word.

## **Class Placement**

Careful consideration is taken when assigning new students to their Kindergarten class. Great effort is made to create balanced classes in the following areas: number of students, gender, age, energy level, and individual needs.

## **Lunch Bunch Program**

Our afternoon Lunch Bunch Program runs from 12:15pm to 2:50pm and is available to children in the Nursery and Kindergarten classes. This program offers a family-style lunch time, story and lullabies, quiet rest/nap, and extended outdoor play. During this time the children learn grace and courtesy through social etiquette and also practice independent self-care skills. Parents may send their child with a nutritious lunch from home or purchase a healthy meal through our school lunch menu. Advanced registration for the Lunch Bunch Program is required.

## **Before School Care:**

Monday – Friday, 7:00am-8:00am

Before School care is available by appointment only, we appreciate 24 hours advanced notice.

## **Foundations for Literacy & Numeracy in Early Childhood**

Nurturing and protecting the wonder of childhood is a key element in the Waldorf Early Childhood Programs. Our programs lay the foundation for future academic success by providing a variety of opportunities for children to learn.

- Watercolor painting, modeling with beeswax, coloring and finger knitting help children develop fine motor skills, coordination, and the ability to concentrate.
- Counting games and rhythmic activities build a solid foundation for arithmetic and number skills taught later in the grades program.
- Songs, nursery rhymes, poems, circle games, stories, puppetry and plays cultivate familiarity with language and strengthen memory, imagination and comprehensive listening skills.
- Imaginative play with open-ended objects provides a concrete basis for abstract manipulation of symbols in school.
- Circle time, snack time and story time teach the children to cooperate with a group and follow the leadership of the teacher.

## **First Grade Readiness**

Children must be six years of age by May 31st, and developmentally ready, in order to attend First Grade. In the spring, our Extra Lesson teacher will assess six year old students and those whose sixth birthdays fall very close to the May 31st cut-off date. AWS will make the final decision on a student's advancement to First Grade.

## **Classroom Guidelines**

The success of a child's experience in school is greatly enhanced by the collaboration of both the parents and the teachers. We depend on you to help us in our endeavor to provide your child with the optimum play and learning environment. Please read through the following sections carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

### **Hellos, Good-byes, and Separation**

Your child's teacher will greet your child each morning as they arrive. If you accompany your child to the classroom, you can take a moment to greet your child's teacher, providing a model for your child and helping to create a positive transition.

It is important to be punctual for the start of each school day; this allows the child to enter into the group's activity with the greatest ease. Please arrive at the classroom no later than 8:25am.

Saying good-bye, especially at the start of the school year, can be challenging for both parents and children. Preparations at home can help you and your child have the most successful separation. Having your child's clothes and school bag ready the night before, getting up early enough for grooming and a nourishing breakfast will allow you the opportunity to spend time with your child saying good-bye in a calm, unrushed manner.

**To ensure that your child has a good start to each school day it is helpful to consider the following:**

- Have they had enough sleep? (ideally 7:00pm to 7:00am)
- Have they had a good, warm breakfast including some protein food(s)?
- Are they dressed warmly (layers are the best!) and appropriately for outdoor play in all weather?

**The first separation** can be a big step. It is helpful for the child to sense the parent's confidence that this is indeed something positive and joyous, and that you will soon be reunited. Be sure that you are ready to say good-bye, because your child will follow your lead. Experience has shown that a short goodbye, with a quick hug and kiss, is best in helping children transition into the classroom to begin their day with the other children.

Half-day dismissal is at 12:15pm, while full-day dismissal is at 2:50pm. For your child's sake, please be punctual when picking up. Also, as dismissal is a very busy time, **please make sure your child's teacher has seen and acknowledged you before you take your child home.**

For children staying on in our Aftercare program (2:50pm – 6:00pm) you are asked to pick your child up in the Aftercare room anytime before 6:00pm. Please let the office know before the start of the school year if you are planning for your child to use either the Lunch Bunch (full-day) or the Aftercare programs.

## **Food: Snacks and Lunches**

Healthy snacks are provided as part of the morning programs. These generally include: oatmeal for Parent and Toddler classes and brown rice, oatmeal, millet, homemade wholegrain bread, cornbread, and apples for the Kindergarten classes. We strive to use organic and local ingredients as much as possible. While our snack menu does include foods containing gluten and dairy, we have a nut free menu and we are able to adjust for students with other food allergies.

Students staying for the full-day will need a healthy, hearty lunch. Parents may choose to purchase lunches prepared by our school chef. We strive to expand children's palates, while offering kid-friendly meals. You may contact the office for more details about our school lunch program. If you choose to send a lunch for your child from home, please pack unprocessed, wholesome foods (generally speaking: non-prepackaged). We strongly encourage unsweetened foods as well. Cool filtered water is always available.

## Clothing

Clothing worn to school needs to be simple and comfortable, allowing the child to play freely and to participate without concern in their many daily activities. Clothing can be the cause of distraction, and images on clothes can serve as impetus for play. Please, **no media-inspired clothing**. Dress your child in **layers**. Bare legs and short dresses or shorts can cause children to get cold. In cooler weather, undershirts, tights and leggings are ideal underclothing, as warmth safeguards health on many levels.

**Hats** are recommended for the children year-round. The children go outside every day, so sun hats in warm weather and warm hats and mittens in cold weather are important to protect your child, allowing him/her to play comfortably outdoors.

Please bring a bag containing extra clothes to hang in your child's cubby. In cold weather include extra hats and mittens. Don't forget plenty of socks and underwear. All clothing must be labeled with your child's name.

Toys, jewelry, blinking shoes, umbrellas, collections, or anything of the latest media fads, are all too distracting and interfere with the children engaging actively and creatively during school time. Please leave these items at home, it can be a traumatic experience when they get lost or broken at school.

## Media & Modern Technology

We recognize that television, videos, movie going, computer use, handheld screens, and recorded music are in the domain of the family, and each family must decide what role these technological devices will play in their lives. Many families at our school choose not to expose their children to these influences, and work hard to keep any exposure to a minimum. This is an important discussion to have with other parents when arranging play-dates for your child.

Due to the developmental needs of the young child, we encourage you to find alternative ways for your child to spend time. Since young children learn through imitation, we encourage parents to include children in the real domestic work of the family, such as gardening, cooking, carpentry, cleaning, washing, and helping parents or siblings.

Providing the children with an environment that will stimulate their imagination will offer them hours of play and the opportunity to practice autonomy. The children of today could greatly benefit from learning how to entertain themselves. Access to open-ended play items, such as bed sheets or yards of fabric, movable furniture, kitchen cookware, dress-up clothes or play silks, a basket of musical instruments, all provide hours of activity and creative fun. An art corner filled with paper, paint, crayons, glue, string, sticks, etc. can be the answer to that age old question, "What can I do?" or statements like, "I'm bored, there is nothing to do."

In our recommended reading list, at the back of this handbook, you will find sources that can provide you with scientifically based information to support your own common sense reasons for toning down and possibly even tuning out modern technology and media in the daily life of your young child.

**Please note that drastically limiting or, ideally, eliminating exposure to electronic screens will enable your child to get the most out of this school experience.** We know how difficult this can be, but also how rewarding! All the teachers at AWS are here to support you in this endeavor and are happy to answer questions or offer advice.

## **Illness**

The best place for your child to be properly nursed through an illness is at home. School is a busy place and not the right environment for a sick child. Please do not send your child to school with colored discharges, a fever, deep cough, rash, diarrhea, or any infectious condition. Children can be adamant about wanting to come to school, but it is far better for them to remain at home until they are truly well. All working parents know the desperate feeling of needing to go to work when a little one is not feeling well. The teachers are very sympathetic to this situation, but we urge parents to arrange back-up childcare. After an illness, children often appear healthy in the morning, but are still not up to the vigorous activity of school. Please allow your child at least one full day of rest after an illness before returning to class.

## **Attendance Policy**

In the event of an absence, either planned or unplanned, please notify the office that your child will be out of school via note or phone call (655-2029). Since rhythm and routine are very important to the young child, Aurora Waldorf School does not offer make-up classes in any of our morning or afternoon programs.

## **Festivals**

We mark the rhythms of the year through the changing seasons and the coming and going of festivals. As the year weaves from one festival to another, we are provided with a true reason for preparation and celebration. For the young child, the preparation is half the joy. They love decorating the room, creating handcrafts, baking special treats, and learning songs and verses chosen just for that particular festival. The stories that are told give the children a pictorial understanding of the festivals, and speak deeply to them, so that we do not need to make explanations.

Each room has a nature table which changes with the seasons, bringing into the room a way for the children to celebrate these changes. You might like to let your child have a small table, shelf, or windowsill to create his or her own nature table at home with treasures from walks and outings.

Your child's teacher will bring a better understanding of the festivals to you at parent mornings or in newsletters, for the celebration of festivals in our community is one of the most deeply fulfilling experiences for both young and old.

## **School-Related Customs**

Some of the families from our school community have welcomed the following visitors into their homes:

*Candy Fairy* – After trick-or-treating, the Candy Fairy visits some homes to change a bag of candy into a small gift.

*St. Nicholas* – While all children are visited by St. Nick at school, sometimes he will also visit a child's home if a shoe is left out.

*Tooth Fairy* – The loss of a tooth is an exciting event, which may be recognized by a small gift (jewel, shell, trinket, coin etc.) from the Tooth Fairy.

## Parent Participation and Responsibilities

*The healthy social life is found when,  
In the mirror of each human soul,  
The whole community finds its reflection  
And when, in the community,  
The strength of each individual is living.*

~Rudolf Steiner

## Parent Evenings and All-School Meetings

Early Childhood mornings are scheduled three times a year. The dates for these meetings can be found on the on-line school calendar. **Please mark these dates on your home calendar, as each child must be represented at every meeting by one or both parents.** At these meetings, we discuss the children's experiences and activities in the classroom, educational philosophy and ideals, child development and child rearing. In addition, parents will have the opportunity to experience some of the early childhood artistic activities, e.g. watercolor painting and handwork, while forging relationships with both the teachers and fellow class parents.

All-School meetings are scheduled once or twice a year, providing an opportunity for parents to learn about the operation of our school and to give their input. Please save these important dates on your calendar and plan to attend! Parent participation is vital to the health of our school!

## Parent and Teacher Conferences

Individual conferences are scheduled twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring, providing an opportunity for parents and teachers to share their impressions and concerns. Though these two times are formally scheduled, teachers are grateful to hear immediately of any significant changes or circumstances in the child's life. Additional

conferences can be arranged at any time if parents have a special concern about their child or the class.

## **Room Parents**

Every class has a "Room Parent" (or two) who volunteers his or her time to foster good communication between the teacher and the community of parents within a class. The Room Parent communicates regularly with teachers, helps to organize parent mornings, sends class e-mails, and also serves on the parent council, which meets regularly throughout the school year. The Room Parent helps to welcome new families to the school and coordinates parent help with tasks related to both the classroom and school-wide events. Please let your child's teacher know if you are interested in this volunteer opportunity.

## **Volunteer Opportunities and Community Contributions**

A successful Waldorf school is dependent upon, and truly grateful for, the contributions of energy, talent, support and commitment from the parents, families and the surrounding community. Your profession, talents, hobbies, and the activities that bring you joy, can all help support our school as well as give you the opportunity to become an integral part of our community.

We have found, in our experience, that the parents and families, who have been the most involved in the workings of our school, have also been the most fulfilled and satisfied with their experience here. This is the best way to involve yourself actively in your child's education at Aurora Waldorf School.

To find out details about how you can best get involved, you can contact your child's teacher, the front office, or refer to the school newsletter.

## **Honoring the Individual Child**

Our class communities are built upon and fortified by the daily activities we enjoy together. We also recognize the joy that can arise when we notice the gifts each child brings to the group.

## **Home Visits**

Having a teacher visit your home can be a wonderful way to bridge the two worlds of home and school for the child. Home visits help the teacher and child connect outside the classroom, as the teacher becomes acquainted with the student's brothers and sisters, family pets, favorite toys, etc. These can be enriching experiences for the teacher, child and parent.

## **Birthday Celebrations at School**

Birthday celebrations in the Waldorf school are important moments for the birthday child and the entire class. For the teacher, the birthday provides an opportunity to come to know the child more deeply, observing his or her special gifts, strengths and challenges, while considering the child's growth from birth to the present.

The outer preparation for the birthday varies slightly from class to class, and involves parents, teachers and other children. Parents, siblings and close relatives are invited to the classroom celebration. It is a wonderful opportunity for the birthday child to share his or her family with the whole class.

## Suggestions for Home Birthday Celebrations

A child's birthday is a special time to honor and celebrate the unique individual that he/she is. At home these celebrations can be as simple as a favorite meal with a special dessert, candles, song and a wish. They can also be quite elaborate with many family members and friends, games and activities, festive food, gifts and prizes.

As we attempt to build a strong sense of community at AWS and specifically in each class it is helpful to consider the following recommendations when planning your child's home birthday celebration:

- Either choose to invite the whole class/ all boys or girls/ or just one best friend. (When some children in a group are invited and others are left out, it undermines the group consciousness we strive to promote.)
- There are many creative alternatives to gift giving, for those trying to simplify and de-clutter their lives. You are encouraged to talk with the other parents in your child's class and collectively consider what everyone is comfortable with.
- Celebrate outdoors. Children are often very excited at birthday parties and a large space allows for lots of movement. There are many different activities possible during each season (see examples below). Also, being outdoors for a birthday celebration helps children connect to the season in which they were born.

### Sample Seasonal Outdoor Activities:

Summer: Swimming/water play, penny carnival

Autumn: Scavenger hunt, raked leaf maze (children can create and run through)

Winter: Sledding/ice skating, snow sculpturing

Spring: Hiking (discovering signs of spring), kite flying

*Use your imagination and creativity! Remember less is more, especially for children – they could entertain themselves for hours with an empty box!*

## **Early Childhood Developmental Discipline Philosophy**

Aurora Waldorf School's Early Childhood teachers strive to understand the true nature of the young child. Because the child at this age is still learning to have an inner rhythm regarding appropriate behavior, we work strongly with creating a healthy outer rhythm for the child that allows an appropriate balance between "breathing in" and "breathing out" activities. In the Nursery as well as the Kindergartens, there are long periods each day of open-ended and free play both inside the classroom and out on the playground. As well, on any given day there are certain activities that are the same each day of the week. For instance, Monday may be painting day. Therefore, the child knows that every Monday, we will paint.

Young children often struggle with transition times throughout their day, resulting in acting out because they are feeling insecure about what may be happening next. The same daily rhythm in the classroom (and at home) helps reassure the child and helps eliminate some difficulties that can be found in early childhood settings.

Teachers strive to be worthy of the young child's imitative nature. Therefore, we work with modeling appropriate behavior for the child. When handling an incident, the teacher intervenes in a pedagogically appropriate way that promotes learning about desired behavior. The discipline relies on redirection and leading the child to "do" the desired behavior, since children at this age are highly imitative and learn by doing.

When a situation occurs which requires disciplinary action, the first step is to "right the wrong." For instance, if someone has been hurt, the child responsible for the action will be asked to tend to the hurt child and give aid. Perhaps he or she will need to say, "My hands are used for good work and play," or "I will use kind and gentle words." At times, however, the teacher may have the child work with one of the teachers doing a meaningful task, such as setting the table or sweeping until the teacher feels the child is ready to re-join their classmates. As well, the teacher may have the child who is struggling sit beside her and come to stillness, or the teacher may speak with the child one on one.

However, when a teacher perceives that a child has reached his or her limit and is no longer able to engage constructively at school, the parent will be called by a member of the Administrative staff to come and pick up their child. The teacher will contact the parent to discuss the matter later that same day.

If challenges are ongoing, the teacher will request a conference with the parents. The adults in the child's life can assess the situation and work together to find ways to help the child express him or herself in a healthy way, both physically and socially, and to gain impulse control. As well, parents can assist the work that the teacher does in the classroom by sharing with the teacher any changes in the child's home life that could result in unusual behavior.

## **Early Childhood Discipline Policy**

There are certain serious behaviors that compromise the health and safety of all the children in the class.

These include:

- Aggressive behavior that may result in injury of a child and/or intentionally injuring a child
- Running away
- Repeated bullying or teasing
- Repeated refusal of teacher's guidance
- Uncontrollable disruptive behavior
- Aggressiveness and/or repeated misuse of toys and/or classroom materials

Any of these behaviors may result in a child being sent home from school. Again, the parent will be called by a member of the Administrative staff to come and pick up their child. The teacher will contact the parent to discuss the matter later that same day.

Teachers will use discretion and respond appropriately to the age and temperament of the child. If a child is experiencing ongoing struggles the teacher and faculty may require some steps to support the child, family, and class as a whole.

Here are some possible solutions and plans that the teacher may require for an ongoing situation:

- The teacher may require a conference with the parent before the child is permitted to return to school.
- The early childhood teachers may meet about the child and try to come up with safe and appropriate solutions to the challenges of this particular child and develop a "Behavior Support Plan". This plan will outline the steps which will be taken at home and at school to address the child's behavior and help him or her to move in a more positive direction. The Behavior Support Plan may contain measures such as having the child work beside the teacher during free play, restricted contact with other children, early dismissal, a shortened school week, or other possibilities. A meeting will be arranged with the parents, teacher, and at least one other faculty representative to discuss the Behavior Support Plan. The school will continue to work with the situation as long as the individuals and parents follow the agreements outlined in the Behavior Support Plan, which may be modified over time, and work, in good faith, to resolve the difficulties.
- The teacher may request that the parents seek some kind of outside help. This could be a play therapist, occupational therapist or another kind of expert that is deemed appropriate for the needs of the child.
- If the challenges are not shifting or improving and the child is unsafe either with himself/herself or with others, the teacher may require a time at home (suspension). In the case of suspension the Early Childhood Chair and Administrator will also be consulted and notified.
- If the behavior is sufficiently disruptive or endangers other children's safety it may be necessary for the child to be withdrawn from school.

Sometimes, the teacher and parent may come to the conclusion that the child is either not ready for school yet or that it is simply not a good fit all around. If this is the case, the teacher may reassess the situation the following semester. A lot can happen in the young child's life and within themselves in six months. Our primary goal as early childhood educators is to help the child to reach his or her highest potential. We strive in every way to meet the individual needs of each child and the needs of the class as a whole. Most important is the emphasis on open and direct communication between all of the adults in the child's life, for this is essential for the child's success in these formative years.

### **Expressing a Concern**

If you have any concerns regarding your child's care, we ask that you first take it to the Lead Teacher of your child's classroom. Many problems are easily resolved with clear, direct, and honest communication. If you do not feel the teacher has adequately heard or dealt with your concern, you may then contact our school Administrator.

## Helpful Resources:

<http://www.waldorfearlychildhood.org/>

<http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/>

<http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/>

<http://www.millennialchild.com/Resources/Articles.html>

<http://www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/BANonVerbGlockler.pdf>

<http://www.simplicityparenting.com/>

<http://www.awsna.org/awsna.html>

### **Child Development Book Series - Ames:**

*Your Two Year Old: Terrible or Tender*

*Your Three Year Old: Friend or Enemy*

*Your Four Year Old: Wild and Wonderful*

*Your Five Year Old: Sunny and Serene*

*Your Six Year Old: Loving and Defiant*

### **Other Helpful Books:**

*Simplicity Parenting: Using the Powers of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids* - Payne and Ross

*The Soul of Discipline: The Simplicity Parenting Approach to Warm, Firm, and Calm Guidance* - Payne

*The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children* - Mogel

*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* - Faber and Mazlish

Northwest Earth Institute: *Healthy Children, Healthy Planet Discussion Course*

*Childhood: A Study of the Growing Child* – Von Heydebrand

*Healing Stories for Challenging Behaviour* - Susan Perrow

*Heaven on Earth: A Handbook for Parents of Young Children* - Sharifa Oppenheimer

*The Incarnating Child* - Salter

*Insights into Child Development* - Benians

*Parenting Path Through Childhood* - Coplen

*Parents as People: The Family as a Creative Process* - Kane

*Rhythms and Turning Points* - Schwartz

*Waldorf Parenting Handbook* – Cusick

*Well, I Wonder: Childhood in the Modern World*– Sally Schweizer \_

*You Are Your Child's First Teacher* - Baldwin