

Waldorf School of Cape Cod Early Childhood Handbook 2010-2011



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Welcome!

The Early Childhood faculty wishes to extend warm greetings to all parents and children and welcome new families to our school community. This handbook has been designed especially for parents with children in our Early Childhood program. It contains important information about our programs, so please familiarize yourself with its contents. In addition, please refer to the Waldorf School of Cape Cod Parent Handbook as a companion guide.

The Waldorf School of Cape Cod is one of over 1,000 Waldorf schools worldwide. The Waldorf movement was founded in 1919 following the pedagogical insights of Rudolf Steiner. Rudolf Steiner -- artist, scientist, philosopher -- had a deep understanding of the processes of human development and put this knowledge into practice to establish the first Waldorf school in Germany in 1919. Steiner realized the importance of providing an environment and curriculum appropriate for each stage of the developing child. Our school is affiliated with the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) and the Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN).

The Journey Begins

During the first seven years of childhood, the child is hard at work building up his/her physical body through movement – running, skipping, rolling, whirling, swinging, etc. In addition these years are devoted to getting to know the world. How does it taste? How does it feel? What is the color? With each new impression the child takes in through the senses, there is a greater experience of and connection with the earth. This exploration begins in the home and continues when the child enters school.

Parent-Child Program

Our Parent-Child program provides a supportive environment for parents to explore the joys and challenges of raising young children. The warm and structured format provides a nurturing environment for both parent and child. Classes may be attended by mothers, fathers, grandparents, or caregivers and their young child.

Child observation and parent-child interaction are emphasized. Parents share support and learn about the Waldorf approach to Early Childhood, while children engage in creative experiences with the teacher, parents, and each other. We provide a warm, calm, and aesthetic environment to nourish the children's imagination and creativity.

Encouraging a reverence for nature, a joy for living and sense of gratitude and wonder about life begins in Parent and Child and continues into the Early Childhood classes and then the grades.

Our Early Childhood Program

In our Early Childhood program, special care is given to create a play environment that is beautiful, unhurried, and secure. We offer Early Childhood classes for children 3-6 years old. The Waldorf program is modeled after a good home environment. The Waldorf School of Cape Cod strives to provide the qualities of warmth, discovery, and activity, experiencing nature in a pre-school setting --- a place where children can find wonder and joy in each new day and at the same time one that prepares the children for the tasks they will face during their lives.

With mixed-age groups, the class has the advantage of being like a large family; the older children provide a model for the younger ones and help them, while the little ones bring a softer element to the five- and six-year olds.

The Nursery - A Time for Nurturing

In the Early Childhood setting, we create a space where children can be free to develop their imagination through play and where there is meaningful human activity for them to imitate. In this nurturing environment where there is understanding, love, warmth, and joy, each child has the possibility to grow and develop in a healthy, harmonious way. Then the uniqueness of each child can unfold and blossom like the flower.

The Kindergarten - A Place for Joy and Discovery

Each child entering Kindergarten embarks on the next adventure in the journey through childhood. The Kindergarten is a bridge to be crossed on that journey. It will take the child from life with the family at home into the more independent life of a first grader. For some children this bridge is a swinging bridge high above a raging river; for others, it is a few stepping stones over a babbling brook. However your child views this adventure, the way will be sheltered and protected, yet full of challenges and tasks to help him/her stretch and grow. On this journey there are many things that parents and teachers can do to support the children. Together we will bring them to the threshold of first grade.

Literally, kindergarten means children's garden. It is a place where there is a space for children to run, skip, jump, roll, and climb - to feel and delight in the growing strength and power of their limbs.

The child is busily imitating all that is around - the way the teacher stirs the soup, the way she tenderly rocks a little one in her arms, for example. Gradually the imaginative faculties begin to evolve. The child with a few objects from nature - three rocks, a feather, and a pine cone can create a whole world in which he/she can live deeply and intensely for hours. Later the child becomes a king, queen, pirate, knight, shoemaker, carpenter, farmer, or musician. Branches, stones, acorns, colored cloth, and fleece as toys provide the opportunity for a child's imagination to be free and active.

In this homelike environment the individuality of each child is nurtured and can flourish.

Rhythm of the Early Childhood Program

“Rhythm is the bearer of life, and therewith the bearer of health.” – Rudolf Steiner

Rhythm is one of the keys to a smooth and happy childhood, both at home and at school. As children settle into a rhythm, they are not constantly being asked to rise to each moment out of their own resources; they relax into the regular round of activities and can then use their forces for playing, making new friends, growing, developing their imaginations, and learning.

In the Early Childhood classroom at the Waldorf School of Cape Cod the children and teachers “breathe” with the rhythms of the day, week, and year. Just as even, rhythmic breathing carries a person through the day and night, so the rhythms of the day help to move the children smoothly along.

The morning program runs from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. This duration allows for a full round of activities without rushing the children. The rhythm varies in each Early Childhood classroom, based on what the teacher feels works best according to the needs of the children in the class. Here is an example of a daily rhythm:

Sample Daily Rhythm

8:15 – 8:30 Drop off

8:30 – 9:00 Main Activity:

Monday – painting	Tuesday – beeswax modeling	Wednesday – drawing	Thursday – preparing baked goods	Friday – handworks
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9:00 – 9:30 Creative Playtime

9:30 – 9:40 Clean-up

9:40 – 9:50 Bathroom

9:50 – 10:15 Snack

10:15 – 10:40 Circle

10:40 – 11:10 Story Time

11:10 – 12:00 Bathroom / Lunch time

12:00 – 12:30 Rest time, Goodbye Song & Dismissal

The weekly rhythm includes painting, drawing, preparing baked goods, and crafts.

Each day, the teachers prepare a nutritious snack, with the children often helping with its preparation. According to the weekly rhythm of each class, one day may be porridge day, another day, time to prepare soup or knead bread together.

Story times are filled with fairy tales and nature stories told by the teachers. These stories provide a richness for the children’s developing imaginations. They also bring to the children images of courage, truth, and honesty of right overcoming wrong--images that can be a source of strength for a whole lifetime.

In keeping with the rhythm of the day, please be prompt at drop-off and pick-up time.

Morning Arrival – We encourage you to develop a rhythm so that your child can have sufficient sleep to wake up by himself/herself in the morning. Please take care to make your child’s waking, readying, and travel to school as pleasant, consistent, and rhythmical as possible.

School starts at 8:30 a.m. However, the children may join their teacher at 8:15 a.m. If they must be dropped off before 8:15 a.m., they may be brought to the teacher at the outside playground in good weather or to the gym in inclement weather between 8:00 and 8:15; an Early Childhood faculty member will be on “Early Care” duty during this time to watch the children until they can join their teacher at 8:15. After 8:15, if your child’s class begins the day outside, please bring him/her to the teacher at the garden gate. Otherwise, bring your child to the teacher at the classroom doorway. We wish to begin our morning together in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Please help your child to remember to walk – not run -- inside the school and to enter the classroom calmly.

At the start of the school year, we have two Early Childhood visiting/work days. This is a time when you can visit the classroom with your child, help the teacher in various projects, and meet other parents. On the first day of school, your child may want or need you to see their cubby and may want your assistance. You can help your child with hanging up coats, placing shoes neatly in their place, and putting on inside shoes. Very quickly the children will develop these skills for themselves, and we will ask the parents to say good-bye at the classroom door or garden gate. If your child has any difficulty making the transition from parent to teacher, please speak with your child’s teacher so we can help make this transition smooth for all – child, parent, and teacher.

Dismissal Time - Dismissal is at 12:30. Please be prompt as your child is eager to reconnect with you and does not want to wait. Even if you are prompt, your child may occasionally be cranky or irritable at pick-up time. For some children, after holding themselves together all morning and doing a fine job with peers and teacher, they will begin relaxing and letting go when parents arrive. Be prepared! In some instances, your gentle, quiet child may be a bear when you pick him/her up.

Extended Day Program - Siesta

Parents with children enrolled in our morning Early Childhood classes are offered the option of continuing their children’s day at school from 12:30 to 3:00 p.m. in our Extended Day program - Siesta. This program follows a home-like rhythm, beginning with a rest time, which is important for the children after just having finished lunch. To begin their rest time, the teacher tells stories and sings lullabies while the children rest or fall asleep. After this quiet time, the children are involved in indoor or outdoor creative play. The program ends with clean up and circle time.

Packing a Lunch

Parents are asked to pack a nutritious lunch for their children each day. Children’s bodies expend much energy in order to grow, learn, and play. The young child needs wholesome, nutritious foods to sustain them throughout the busy school day. We request that parents choose healthful, nutrient-rich foods for their children’s snack and lunch.

Foods such as vegetable sticks, fresh fruits, and wholesome yogurts make wonderful lunch-time meals. Healthful sandwiches, warm whole grain pasta or rice,

legume dishes, or any wholesome, healthful carbohydrate and protein-rich fare are a boon for your child's developing body at lunchtime. The young child, especially, benefits greatly from a lunch kept warm in a Thermos.

It is good to note that a steady blood sugar level is desirable to support the children's activities of the day. Therefore, please do not send your child to school with snacks or meals that are high in processed sugar, which will not sustain them through the day. Candy and soft drinks are not allowed at school. In general, it is asked that parents choose foods that are beneficial for a child's growing body.

Clothing

Because the rhythm of the seasons is such an integral part of the curriculum, we go outside almost every day. We also are very active, both indoors and outside. Therefore, clothing needs to be comfortable, appropriate for activity and work, and WARM. The best way to keep your child comfortable is to have clothes of natural materials that "breathe" and to layer them appropriately for indoor/outdoor play. Children who are tactile-sensitive find natural fibers less irritating than synthetic fibers.

New England weather is so variable in fall and spring and we love to play outside; please send a hat and sweater even on warm mornings. In the fall and winter wool is an excellent choice so children do not get chilly. Please mark/label all clothing with your child's name. You'd be astonished at how much goes into our lost and found every week because it has not been marked or labeled.

Please do not have your child wear clothing with media-inspired images (i.e., television or movie characters). We have observed the undesirable effects these have on children's attitude and creative playtime. Even a shirt beautifully illustrated with a picture of an animal can be a distraction to the children's play.

Your child will need:

For outdoor use, a pair of sturdy and comfortable shoes that work well for running and jumping. Sandals must be the type that stay on the feet. For children who are five or six years old, please choose shoes with laces so they will learn how to tie their shoes. No "light-up" shoes or sneakers (the lights are distracting), dress-up shoes, or flip-flops, please.

For indoor use, a pair of slippers with non-skid bottoms or sneakers. These "inside shoes" will remain in their cubby at school.

Change of clothes to remain at school -- shirt, pants, underwear, socks, mittens, sweatshirt, or sweater

For rainy days: waterproof puddle boots - (we love to play in puddles) a waterproof raincoat and rainpants are necessary.

In fall and springtime: a sunhat to protect the children from the strong rays of the sun. An old beach hat or baseball cap which could be left at school would work well for this purpose.

For winter play: snow pants, warm boots, a warm hat, and mittens. Please have an extra hat and pair of mittens your child can leave at school.

Media and Children

The presence of television, video games, and movies in a child's life can often be clearly experienced in the classroom. Their influence may be quite visible when children seem "stuck" in their creative play, unable to play anything but television or cartoon characters. In other cases, the influence is more subtly perceivable. Some children may be unable to quietly listen to a fairy tale and actively create their own inner images; instead they fidget and jump up and want to see pictures. For such children the story time can be distressing rather than a time of wonder and delight. The noticeable effects are many - difficulty with attention, perseverance, initiative, imagination, even rhythmical activity. Perhaps the greatest harm seems to be its inhibiting effect on the child's ability to develop his/her own inner imagination. Remember that it is the child's imagination which is the vehicle for his/her learning and growth.

We ask that parents find alternatives to television, video, and other mass media - perhaps helping with the real domestic work of the family, such as gardening, cooking, carpentry, cleaning, washing dishes, and helping parents and brothers and sisters. The nursery and kindergarten teachers - and other parents - would be happy to share ideas for alternatives with you.

For more information on the effects of television watching, these books may be helpful:

Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, by Jerry Mander

The Plug-In Drug, by Marie Winn

Unplugging the Plug-In Drug, by Marie Winn

What to Do After You Turn off the TV, by Frances Moore Lappe & Family

"Cyclop's Child: The Neurophysiology of Television Viewing," an article by Keith Buzzell

Illness and Staying at Home

When should I keep my child at home? Your child is going to be part of a large social group and will meet many new situations. The school environment and new activity level may also mean that your child gets more colds and illnesses. If your child seems overtired or is not feeling well, please keep him/her home for a day of rest and special care. IF YOUR CHILD WILL BE ABSENT, PLEASE LEAVE A VOICE MAIL MESSAGE FOR YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER BY 7:55 AM at 508 420-1005.

A child who is not feeling well cannot participate in the life of the classroom, feels awkward and uncomfortable in the social setting, and needs the TLC of home. Although it is not always true, usually a child who complains of a tummy ache or headache in the morning really is not well; often these pains mark the beginning of an illness. Please keep your young child at home if she or he:

- complains of a tummy ache or headache
- has vomited within the previous 24 hours
- has a fever, however slight; please keep him/her home for one full day after the temperature returns to normal

We also need to respect the process of healing and convalescence; it takes time for the body to be restored to a state of health. Only after healing is the child's energy store ready and available for meeting and handling social interactions and delving into play and imagination. A highly recommended book discussing how illnesses help strengthen a child is [A Guide to Child Health](#) by Michaela Glöckler.

Should there be any communicable diseases at the school, you will be notified. One very common and contagious illness is conjunctivitis or "pink eye." Because this is so easily passed to other children, if you have any suspicion that your child has contracted it, please see your doctor and keep the child home until it has been effectively treated.

Another situation which can arise in a school setting is head lice. Please be assured that it goes with children and schools and has nothing to do with cleanliness and dress. We hope we do not have an outbreak this year; however, if we do, you will be notified concerning care and preventative measures. Please help by checking your children and, if head lice are found, keeping them home until the treatment has been effective. Your child's teacher can offer alternative treatment approaches that are less toxic and often more effective than commercially available products.

Toys from Home

We have found it best that children do not bring toys and games from home to the classroom. They are easily lost or broken and often lead the children away from the imaginations and games which teachers are trying to create. Please leave toys, dolls, purses, wallets, money, jewelry, watches, games, candy, and gum at home. However, children are always welcome to bring in treasures that they have found in nature - seashells, pine cones, stone, feathers...

A Note About Sleep

Adequate rest is important to a child's happy experience at school. Especially during the first six weeks, the demands of the social interactions and the myriad sense impressions will be great. The children will need extra rest and protection from too much social activity after school. A nap, or at least a quiet time alone with books, and an early bedtime are essential to your child's having a healthy and successful time in school.

A long, peaceful nighttime sleep is also a necessary counterpart to the child's busy day at school. Most young children need 11-12 hours of sleep in order to function at their best. How a child enters the dream state is also important, for whatever mood surrounds the child when he/she is falling asleep is carried into sleep life. The more peaceful and harmonious the mood, the more peaceful, productive, and restorative the sleep. Teachers can offer suggestions for bed-time rituals and a healthy sleep life.

Parent Gatherings

Class meetings are held on a regular basis. These meetings enable parents and teachers to support one another in the education of the children as well as provide opportunities for parents to meet and support one another. Various topics such as child development and discipline will be addressed during the year.

Home Visits

Having the teacher visit at home can be a wonderful way to bring the two worlds of home and school together for the child. Home visits help the teacher to get to know

the child's world at home – to visit the child's room and meet with brothers and sisters can be an enriching experience for teacher, child, and parents. Your teacher will contact you to arrange a visit if your child is new to the school.

Birthdays

Each child's birthday is celebrated at school with a ceremony of candles, story, song, and wishes. Children with summer birthdays will also have a special day of celebration during the year. Parents are invited to be a part of the celebration and are welcome to spend the morning in the classroom.

Festivals

In keeping with the larger rhythms of the seasons, there are several festivals that are an integral part of the school year. They are especially important for the young child who is just beginning to experience the cycle of the changing seasons. Nature stories and special tales help to bring a deeper significance of the season to the children in a pictorial way. These events can also provide meaningful sharing between children and parents and can often lead to an enrichment of family life.

If you are interested in learning more about the celebration of festivals at home and in the school community, please speak with your child's teacher, who can share with you the songs, verses, and stories used in the celebrations.

Recommended Reading List

Festivals, Family, and Food, by D. Carey, J. Large. Hawthorn Press. This is a unique source of stories, recipes, things to make, activities, poems, songs and festivals. Each festival has its own chapter. Also included are sections on birthdays and rainy days.

A Guide to Child's Health, M. Glockler and W. Goebel. A book about childhood illness, foundations for healthy development, education and upbringing.

Magical Child: Rediscovering Nature's Plan for Our Children. Joseph Chilton Pearce, Dutton publishing. A book by a noted author who is supportive of Waldorf education, which highlights the importance of play.

The Recovery of Man in Childhood, by A. C. Harwood. The Myrin Institute. This offers a place to begin for an understanding of Rudolf Steiner's educational principles and practices. This is recommended for parents who want to learn more about Waldorf education.

You are Your Child's First Teacher, by R. Baldwin. Rudolf Steiner Press. A popular "how to" book for parents.