

Early Childhood Parent Handbook

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the Susquehanna Waldorf School. We hope this handbook will serve as an introduction to our Early Childhood Programs and acquaint you with information and ideas that we feel are important for your child's environment and well being. We also encourage you to reference the *All School Handbook* for more information on school policies. Feel free to ask your child's teacher any questions you may have. In the meantime, please keep this handbook as a reference throughout the year. Thank you!

The Early Childhood Teachers



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Early Childhood Programs

In the Early Childhood programs at the Susquehanna Waldorf School, the seeds for love of work and learning are sown and grow with the child. The young child's school day contains a familiar rhythm that repeats each week as the seasons pass. Nature's cycles define the work, as seasonal songs, verses, stories, and crafts fill the mornings.

In the pre-school years, children learn primarily through their own need to be active and their uncanny ability to imitate all that surrounds them. Teachers bring activities and rhythm in an atmosphere of beauty, warmth, and harmony to nourish their blossoming creative thinking upon which all future abstract thought will be built. Simple material from nature provides the stimulus for creative play, which develops imagination, concentration, coordination, language, and number skills that will be gently called forth in the elementary years.

Parent and Child Programs

The Parent and Child programs offer an opportunity for parents with toddlers, or young children to discover the world in a special setting with other families.

This program provides a supportive environment for parents to explore the joys and challenges of raising young children, and to learn simple crafts, stories, and songs. A snack is prepared and enjoyed by all. Through play and work, the children will have their first taste of being with others in a group. Parents are encouraged to attend any scheduled adult meetings for discussion about the children and the class; the parent and child attend the rest of the classes in the session together.

Please refer to the brochure for specific dates and times of classes. To enroll, please contact the Admissions Coordinator.

Kindergarten

The kindergarten program provides a Waldorf education in a mixed-age group setting for children 3 to 6 years of age. You may choose 3, 4 or 5 day kindergarten classes. Both half-day (8:15 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.) and full-day (8:15 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.) kindergarten programs are available.

The Susquehanna Waldorf School strongly recommends that 5 and 6 year old children who will go to first grade the following school year attend 5 day kindergarten (at the latest by January of the preceding September first grade enrollment) to ensure stamina, strength, and social maturity. Your child's individual needs will be accessed by his or her teacher. Please refer to the *All School Handbook* for more information about first grade readiness.

Afternoon Garden

Afternoon Garden is the afternoon portion of our full-day and kindergarten programs. Here all the full-day children come together for rest and play in support of the morning activities. Each child is provided with a mat, pillow, and blanket and is expected to rest quietly, listening to a story. This is followed by a time of outdoor play (weather permitting) providing the balance needed after a busy morning.

Please note that the Afternoon Garden is not available as a separate program. Speak to your teacher or to Admissions for more details. Advance registration is required as Afternoon Garden is not a drop-in program.

Changing Early Childhood Programs during the School Year

As your child grows and matures during the year, you may wish to increase your child's hours in school. Space permitting and with the approval of your child's teacher, you may upgrade to an increased program length (for example, 4 day to 5 day or half day to full day).

Unless advised by the teacher to reduce your child's program length, you may not downgrade your early childhood program and your financial responsibility remains at the contracted level for the school year.

After School (Sunset) Program

Childcare for your kindergarten child is available after school as part of our Sunset program. The Sunset program provides care from 3:15 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. Registration is required for regular attendance in these programs. For drop-in policies please refer to the *All School Handbook*.

School Life

Forming the Classes

In mid August, the Early Childhood teachers finalize the rosters for the new kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classes. Many factors are considered when the teachers decide which children will be in which class, such as: balance of boys and girls, balance of personalities, a teacher's prior connections with a child/family, and whether or not the child is enrolled for a half-day or full-day program. Please trust that we are working to provide the best class for your child with all the above considerations in mind.

You will receive a letter from your child's teacher welcoming you to her class in mid August. Your teacher will be contacting you to set up a home visit, as well.

Arrival and Dismissal

It is best for your child to arrive on time in the morning. It can be overwhelming to a young child to come into a busy room, full of activity and play. Where does one begin? How does one enter into the play that is already in progress? Dismissal time is 12 noon for half-day children and 3:15 p.m. for full-day students. Please be prompt, as it can be frightening or saddening to a child to feel forgotten, even for just 10 minutes. Call the school office if you think you will be late (426-4506).

If you have an emergency and are unable to pick up your child at 3:15 p.m. or to make other arrangements for pick up, the afternoon teachers will take your child to the Sunset Program classroom. A fee will apply.

Carpools

Please give your child's teacher a written schedule of your carpool arrangements and keep her updated, in writing, of any changes.

Also, we need to have a note or phone call to the teacher or office if someone else will be picking up your child.

Lunch

Although all children in our Early Childhood programs are offered a hearty snack as part of their morning, parents are responsible for sending a home lunch for their full-day kindergarten children. Please send a healthy lunch in a basket or plain lunchbox (no media pictures). Do not send candy, desserts, or sugary snacks. Water is provided as the beverage, so please do not send drinks. Your teacher will be happy to offer some menu suggestions. Contact us if you have any questions. A hot lunch or snack is offered by the grades classes on most days. Please see our website for forms if you wish to sign your child up for one or more of these offerings.

Allergies and Dietary Concerns

Our Early Childhood teachers strive to provide healthy and varied snacks for the children in our care. If your child has food allergies or specific dietary guidelines that you would like us to follow, please speak with your child's teacher. We will work with you to provide an appropriate snack, keeping in mind your child's needs and the needs of the group.

Clothing

You may have noticed that we carefully choose the items and colors in the classroom to create a pleasing and beautiful environment. Young children are inspired in their play by their surroundings, and the children's clothing is part of that environment. Please do not dress your child in clothes that have cartoon and media images on them or in sports uniform.

The best clothing for school is sturdy play clothing in simple design and natural colors. As cooler weather comes on, warm clothing is a necessity, including hats, mittens, and snow or rain pants. We will be going outside every day unless there is pouring rain or extreme temperatures.

We ask that your child's hair is well kept and if long, pulled back into a ponytail or braids so as to allow the child to play unrestricted. And no make-up, jewelry, or watches for kindergarten children please!

We hope that your child will have a full and active experience, so please be kind and forgiving if once in a while you find a smudgy or muddy child at the end of the morning.

Inside Shoes

Inside shoes help mark the outside/inside transition, keep mud out, keep toes safe, and also make for a comfortable play and circle experience. These can be any simple, soft-soled, close-fitting shoes (no media images or flashing lights, please). Make sure they are not slippery on the bottom and are easy for your child to change into.

Birthdays

Your child's birthday is a special festival in the classroom. There will be a simple celebration, to which the birthday child's parents and siblings are invited. Your child's teacher will contact you before the birthday celebration to make further arrangements.

Conduct and Discipline

Generally, politeness and good habits are expected. A child who is disruptive not only affects his or her own school experience, but that of classmates as well. Children are expected to respect their teachers, classmates, and all property.

Waldorf education uses the principle of imitation as one method of directing the behavior of children. If the children see teachers treating each other, the students, and all property with care and respect, then they are likely to follow suit. Future social behavior is founded on the experience of goodness in the child's first seven years.

We will do our best to guide children toward cooperative behaviors, and your support might be requested to help your child through this experience.

Parent Participation

It is our hope that parents will want to participate actively in the life of the Susquehanna Waldorf School, through learning more about their children's activities, in parent study groups, in education and discussion evenings, as well as helping with school activities. Our Parent Guild will provide you with information on its activities, and your child's teacher, or class parent will get in touch with you about class-related activities through class letters or the phone tree.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Twice a year, individual Parent-Teacher conferences will be held, the first one in the fall and the second one in the spring. These are opportunities for the teacher and parents to share openly in their experiences of the child. A sign up sheet will be posted before the conferences.

Parent Meetings

Your child's teacher will host several parent meetings each year. It is our hope and expectation that every child is represented (by a parent or grandparent) at these meetings, as these meetings are ultimately for the welfare of the child. Class meetings offer an opportunity to learn more about your child's class, share thoughts on early childhood issues, and build relationships with other parents. An artistic activity is sometimes offered as well.

The teacher will let you know when these meetings are scheduled. Let your child's teacher know if there are any specific topics you would like to discuss or would like to learn more about.

Class Parent

Each class has a class parent who assists the teacher with the organization of festivals and class events. The class parent may also ask you, as a parent in the class, for your assistance with certain school events; we hope you will take these opportunities to get involved in our school.

Contacting Teachers

Your child's teacher will be happy to speak to you about school and home-related matters, or to direct you to helpful literature. In general, arrival and dismissal times are not a time for lengthy conversations. However, your child's teacher welcomes your questions, suggestions, and comments and will let you know when it's best to contact her.

School Cancellations

If the school must close due to inclement weather, an announcement will be made on the following radio, Internet, and television stations:

Radio AM: WHP 580, WSBA 910

Radio FM: WITF 89.5, WJTL 90.3, BOB 94.9, WRVV 97.3, KOOL 99.3,
WROZ 101.3, WARM 103

Television: WGAL (8), UPN (15), WHP (21), WHTM (27), WPMT (43)

Internet: WGAL.COM

Please check with one of these sources, as the class phone trees are not used for weather-related school cancellations or delays. Kindergarten, and Parent and Child classes all follow the same schedule of closures and delays as the rest of the school.

Home Life

Rest and Sleep

Being in school will be both exciting and tiring to the children. You can help to ease the transition by providing quiet times after lunch and by using the time after dinner for calming activities leading into a bedtime ritual.

The hours before midnight are when we get the deepest and most restful sleep. A seven o'clock bedtime is certainly not too early for a three to six year old. How nice it is for children to wake up by themselves in the morning, rested and refreshed and ready for an active morning in school. We are happy to share some suggestions on bedtime rituals.

Home Toys

Children thrive in an environment of simplicity and beauty and absorb the impressions around them. A few natural, simple playthings will help enliven the child's creative play. Just inside the classroom is a basket for home toys. As the name implies, we would prefer for these toys to stay at home as we try to provide all the materials needed for creative play in the classroom.

Children are always welcome to bring gifts from nature to school, and they may be placed on the nature table for all to enjoy until the child is ready to take them home again. Please check with your teacher if your child wants to bring in an animal.

Television and Computers

Children who watch a lot of television tend to have difficulty entering into healthy, imaginative play. Their play tends to mimic TV characters, movements, and scenarios instead of arising out of the child's own creative forces. Some aggressive or precocious behavior simply comes from the child's wonderful capacity to imitate what he saw on TV. We prefer that children play either outside or in the home, and participate in meaningful activities such as preparing dinner or chores. We recommend that you consider eliminating TV and computer time as much as possible. We are aware that it can be hard to change TV habits, and we will be happy to assist you with suggestions and moral support. See the "Recommended Reading List" for books on the subject.

Health

The State of Pennsylvania requires that each child have a completed health and immunization form in the school office. Also, an up-to-date emergency form must be on file so that the appropriate persons may be contacted if the parent is unreachable.

The teachers share with you a deep concern for your child's physical and inner health. The best environment for a sick child is at home. If a child is not well enough to participate in all school activities, including going outdoors, then he or she should be kept home. We urge working parents to arrange back-up childcare for these special situations.

If your child has had a fever, please keep him or her home for at least another 24 hours after the fever has subsided so that he or she can fully recuperate. We also ask that children receiving antibiotic medication be kept home for a minimum of three days so that they can recover in a healthy way.

Any child who has an infection or communicable disease must remain at home. Please let us know if your child has contracted a communicable illness, so that we may give necessary information to other parents. Call the office whenever your child will be absent for any reason.

Recommended Reading List

Beyond the Rainbow Bridge ~ Barbara Patterson & Pamela Bradley

Work and Play in Early Childhood ~ Freja Jaffke

Heaven on Earth ~ Sharifa Oppenheimer

Lifeways – Working with Family Questions ~ Gudrun Davy and Bons Voors

The Children's Year ~ Stephanie Cooper, Christine Fynes, Clinton & Marye Rowling

Children at Play ~ Heidi Britz Crecelius

The Plug-In Drug ~ Marie Winn

The Incarnating Child ~ Joan Salter

Toy Making with Children ~ Freja Jaffke

Festivals, Family and Food ~ Diana Carey & Judy Large

In a Nutshell ~ Nancy Foster

Who's Bringing them Up? ~ Martin Large

You Are Your Child's First Teacher ~ Rahima Baldwin

The Hurried Child ~ David Elkind

Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk ~ David Elkind

A Guide to Child Health ~ Michaela Glöckler & Wolfgang Goebel

Endangered Minds – Why Children Can't Think ~ Jane Healy

Earthways ~ Carol Petrash

