

Early Childhood Handbook 2011 - 2012

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Welcome

We welcome you and your family to the Whidbey Island Waldorf School. Inside the early childhood department you will find the Dewdrop and Rosebud parent child classes, the Butterfly nursery class, and the Sunflower and Golden Forest Nursery/Kindergarten classes. We look forward to a fulfilling, nurturing and enjoyable year together.

We have created and updated this Early Childhood handbook to foster a healthy connection between home and school. It is our hope that we can all grow and learn together in the true spirit of community.

- Rhythm

Children are carried along by the rhythms of the world in which they live – from the rhythms of breathing in their bodies to the daily rhythms of sleeping and waking. The yearly cycle of the seasons and the rhythmic procession of the stars across the sky are part of life's experience for adults and children. Children flourish when their daily activities are arranged rhythmically to reflect the natural order of life.

Thus the classroom activities flow with a sense of breathing in and breathing out, from the quiet moments of a story to the active moments of vigorous work and play. Children experience various activities throughout the day such as creative indoor and outdoor play, nature walks in the woods, circle activities, story time, crafts, and domestic arts. The day will also include the preparation and sharing together of a hearty snack. Teachers often use songs and gestures to transition between activities in a manner that helps young children remain in a flow of imagination and imitation. All of these activities are carefully woven together by the teachers to create a healthy rhythm for the young child.

Young children live in the present moment and will likely be unable to recount a day's events for you. Although their day at school is full of activities (such as imaginative play, outdoor adventures, painting or baking, lots of singing, circle, and story), parents' eager questions about the day are most often answered by dreamy gazes. "Nothing" seems to be the usual answer to the question "What did you do in school today?" As parents we can soon learn to interpret their way of sharing their day – perhaps we hear a fragment of a song or verse, a blessing, or the name of a new friend.

Just as children are carried along by the regular rhythms of the school day, so too are they nourished by the regular rhythms at home. As difficult as it is in these modern times to establish set family meal times and bedtimes, we strongly encourage you to do so. It is very important for the young child to go to bed at the same time every night, and we recommend that this be no later than 7:30pm.

Please feel free to contact your teacher if you would like some ideas for making this transition a successful one for you and your child.

Each early childhood teacher will create her or his own rhythm that responds to the needs of the children in her or his care. Please see the class bulletin board for a detailed schedule of weekly and daily activities; this

will also be handed out at your first parent meeting. Expect that a teacher will alter the rhythm of the day from year to year to best serve the new constellation of children.

- **Hours**

Butterfly Nursery

4 Day Program:

*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
8:30am - 12:30pm.*

Golden Forest and Sunflower Nursery/Kindergartens

4 Day Program:

*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
8:30am - 12:30pm*

5 Day Program:

*Monday through Friday
8:30am - 12:30pm*

Robin Song Extended Care

7:30am - 8:30am Morning Care

12:30pm - 3:00pm Nap Care and Outside Play time

3:00pm - 5:30pm Extended Day Program

- **Morning Arrival**

It is very important that your child arrives on time whenever possible. Beginning the day together with all the other children establishes a good rhythm for your child. Lateness makes it more difficult for your child to integrate into play and can interfere with social bonding. If you have extenuating circumstances which would cause your child to be late on a regular basis please speak to your child's teacher.

It is not uncommon for children to experience difficulty during the transition from home to school. If your child is experiencing difficulty in saying goodbye, please check in with your individual teacher as how you should both handle these situations. For the most part, a clear, timely transition is helpful. If your child needs to be held on a lap, parents should give their child to the teacher (rather than expecting a teacher to reach for and pull a child away from a parent). Teachers are not available to chat at this time; if you need to inform the teacher, however, of something concerning your child, give the teacher a note containing the pertinent information. Teachers also have scheduled meeting times available for more lengthy discussions.

- **Pick Up**

Please be prompt when picking up your child. Try to arrive early at 12:25pm so we can help the extended care children transition to the bathroom and lunch. Please arrive no later than 12:30pm. The hallway is very busy at this time of the day. Please collect your child's belongings from their cubby before picking up your child. A parent's lateness can cause unnecessary stress and worry for the child. The fenced, early childhood playground is available until 1:30pm for families to gather and children to play. All children must be supervised at all

times and children should not play on the grades playground (outside the fence) because the grades children will be on recess. If your child is to be picked up by someone other than yourself or someone listed on your child's emergency contact form, please let your teacher know by sending a note.

When you pick up your children, please help them tidy up their cubby, put away their slippers properly and take home any wet or dirty clothes. Please check their extra clothes bags every week to see if it needs to be replenished. This is a great help to the teachers and encourages the children to form good habits in caring for their things.

Please be prompt when picking up your child. At 12:45pm you will be charged a \$10.00 late charge and your child will be taken to extended care to wait for your arrival.

We strongly recommend that all children have a quiet rest time or nap time in the afternoon after lunch.

- Robin Song Extended Care

Extended care is available for all early childhood children. It is available only on the days your child is enrolled in school. In the program between 12:30pm until 3:00pm children must be signed up for the days they are enrolled in school. For example: If your child attends school four days a week then you would sign up for four days of extended care.

Our extended day program from 7:30am until 8:30am and from 3:00pm until 5:30pm is also available everyday your child is enrolled in school. This program does not require that you sign up everyday but you have the flexibility to choose the schedule that will work best for your family. For example: You may decide that you only need this service on Monday, Tuesday and Fridays, that is fine but you must make a commitment to these days in advance so your place can be saved and a healthy consistent rhythm can be maintained for the children.

Children who stay past 12:30pm should bring a wholesome, nutritious lunch. We ask that foods and drinks containing refined or artificial sugars/sweeteners or colors, chocolate, caffeine or carbonated drinks stay at home. Please label all containers and be sure your child can open them.

Lunches should be brought in a basket, small knapsack or simple cloth carrier. The children will eat their lunch with the extended care teacher. The children will clean up their lunch and settle down to rest. All children will be expected to rest (many sleep). After approximately one hour of rest the children will get dressed and go outside to play with the first grade children. Pick up will be outside in the early childhood playground between 2:45pm - 3:00 pm. You must sign your child out with the outside extended care teacher. Please pick up your extended care child before your grade school child. At 3:15 a late fee will be charged in the amount of \$10.00 and added to your bill.

The extended day between 3:00pm and 5:30pm will offer the children a continued healthy breathing of outside and inside time as well as activity and down time. A snack will be provided and pick up is promptly at 5:30pm. Beyond 5:30pm, the staff will be cleaning up and preparing the rooms for the following day. Please be respectful of their time by picking up your child at or before 5:30pm.

When you pick up your children, please help them tidy up their cubby, put away their slippers properly and take home any wet or dirty clothes. Please check their extra clothes bags every week to see if it needs to be

replenished. This is a great help to the teachers and encourages the children to form good habits in caring for their things.

Please be prompt when picking up your child. At 3:15pm or 5:45pm you will be charged a \$10.00 late charge and your child will be taken up to administration to wait for your arrival.

- **Changes In Schedule**

If your child is going to be absent please call the school and leave a message for your teacher by 8:15am.

If you know in advance that your child will be absent, please inform your teacher.

If you need to pick up your child early or your child will be arriving late, please leave a note for your teacher.

If someone else will be picking up your child, please send a note.

- **Clothing**

School is a place of active work and play where we often spend 1 to 2 hours outside every day. (Rain or shine) To allow the child to experience nature and the elements in an enjoyable, open way, clothing is extremely important. It is no fun climbing mountains if your legs are cold. Clothing should be sturdy, practical and fit properly. It is also important that the older children can dress and undress themselves (5 and 6 yr olds). Please avoid clothing that has difficult zippers, tight buttons or otherwise complicates dressing.

Please look through the WIWS parent handbook to see the guidelines for school attire. Clothes should not include flashing lights, advertising, media images or writing. In addition, make up, face paint, henna, tattoos, hair dye, and nail polish are not permitted at school. If your child's ears are pierced, studs should be worn. No other jewelry should be worn at school.

Please label all clothing. Labels can be purchased from various label companies online or you can use a permanent marker.

~ **Waterproof Coat, Rain Pants and Rain Boots**

The children will be expected to wear rain pants, rain boots and a waterproof coat rain or shine from Michaelmas (September 29th) to May Day (May 1st).

Children will need to have rain gear at school all year. We will be wearing rain pants even if it is not raining as children often dig in the mud and play in the water. Please bear in mind that rain coats are often thin and cold and so children will need warm layers underneath. In the winter, waterproof snow pants work well.

Please make sure boots fit well. Ideally they would have a liner so feet stay warm. Walking boots or shoes will also work as long as they are waterproof. Shoes and boots will get dirty and wet every day; it would be ideal to have an extra old pair around in case they get wet.

Rain/snow pants can be bought from REI, Lands End, Hanna Andersen or other outdoor stores. (They are

hard to find on the Island.)

~ Hat

Please bring a warm woolen hat for the fall and winter, and in the spring please bring a sun hat.

~ Many Layers

We have found that children stay warmer with many layers instead of one thick sweater. In the early morning our playground is quite cold, but as the day progresses children may layer down. We suggest long underwear if possible and ideally wool/silk long johns keep children especially warm. These can be purchased at various online companies.

~ Socks

Please dress your child in thick, warm (ideally wool) socks. Socks should be tall enough to stay up in rain boots so the children's feet stay warm. Please have lots of extra labeled pairs at school. (Four pairs would be ideal).

~ Mittens or Gloves

These should ideally be waterproof and allow free movement for the child.

~ Slippers or Inside Shoes

Slippers or inside shoes should support movement and activity, not inhibit it. Please make sure the slippers cover the heel and toes. They should be simple, practical and stay on the feet. They should not have any media advertisements or flashing lights.

~ Extra Clothes Bag (We will provide the bag)

This will need to be checked and filled regularly and should be CLEARLY LABELLED

Underwear (4)

Pants (2)

Shirts (2)

Socks (4)

Sweater (1)

Pair of gloves/mittens (1)

• *Outside Time*

A good part of each day is spent outside on the playground, digging, climbing, hauling, swinging, running, etc. Not only is this a crucial part of a growing child's motor development, but it is also a vital experience in connecting with the rhythms of nature around us. Your child's outdoor experience will be supported by good health and appropriate clothing. Please see the section above for a list of necessary clothing. If you feel your child is not well enough to be outside for 1 to 3 hours, please keep him or her at home. It is not an option to keep a child indoors during outside time.

• *Nature Walks*

Our school is blessed to be situated on 100 acres of trust land with abounding trails. To walk these trails each day becomes a rich sensory experience for the children through the changing of the seasons. We go on nature walks regularly which vary in time and length depending on the context of the rest of the day. Teachers gather the children together in song, make sure each child is accounted for, and journey into the woods.

- **Birthdays**

We will be celebrating every child's birthday during the school year. For those with summer birthdays, celebrations will take place sometime during the school year as arranged with each individual teacher.

Your child's teacher will inform you of any necessary details around this special event. The following descriptions will provide you with an overview of birthday celebrations which may vary with each teacher.

~ For Children Turning 3, 4 or 5 Years Old

We will be honoring their birthdays at school in a very simple, yet beautiful way. For these children, we want to take great care to support them by creating an experience that does not place them as the focus of attention of their classmates for any extended period of time. On these mornings, the children will become aware that their friend is celebrating a birthday through subtle indications in the room or by the teacher. A simple song or story may be told, muffins shared, and/or a birthday book made. If you know your child will not be at school on their scheduled birthday date, please let your child's teacher know.

~ For Children Turning 6 or 7 Years Old

We would like to invite the parents of those children turning 6 or 7 to join us for part of the day to celebrate with your child; this will be individually arranged with your teacher but will require parents to be present for approximately 20 minutes. If you know your child will not be at school on their scheduled birthday date, please let your child's teacher know.

In preparation of the story we ask that parents prepare a sentence or two to speak about each year of their child's life. To be clear, the child's "first year" is her year from birth to one; "when she was one" is her year from one to two etc. These should be simple and short. For example: "When Olivia was four we moved to Whidbey Island, this is the year she began kindergarten and began to ride her bike."

- **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 the other, we are provided with a true reason for preparation and celebration. For the young child, the preparation is half the joy. They love learning new songs, hearing stories, and making crafts that celebrate each festival. The stories, verses, and songs that are told give the children a pictorial understanding of the festival and speak resonate with young children (explanations and historical descriptions, by contrast, seem off key). We hope to bring a better understanding of these festivals in our newsletters, adult education events, and parent meetings. It is the celebration of festivals in our community which is one of the most deeply fulfilling experiences for both young and old.

- Snacks

Every day the children will enjoy a wholesome, hearty snack.

Our snacks are arranged in a weekly rhythm, typically feature an organic grain, and augmented with fruits, vegetable and nuts.

Menus vary from class to class and from year to year. Teachers will post the menu for the current school year on the bulletin board.

~ Mug (For kindergarten only)

Please bring a ceramic mug to school; make sure the mug has a handle, is labeled, logo/advertisement free, and as simple as possible. Because mugs break from time to time, bear this in mind when choosing the mug and leave cherished heirlooms at home.

~ Fresh Fruit or Vegetable

Normally we ask families to bring a piece of fresh fruit or vegetable for each day your child is at school. This can be brought each day or at the beginning of each week. We prefer organic produce if possible. We will cut the fruit or vegetables at school.

To meet the needs of a specific class, teachers may vary from this practice and will request specific vegetables or other grocery items. Your teacher will make this clear for this school year.

~ Allergies

Our snack times are a social and sensory experience. We strive to prepare the food with love and intention, set the table with beauty and order, and open our meal with the reverence of a blessing together. All this nourishes the child's experience that the world is good. The teachers will be striving to create a menu that is healthy and inclusive for all the children in the class.

Sometimes we find that children have allergies or sensitivities to certain foods which may limit their diet. If your child has allergic reactions to certain foods, please inform your teacher immediately.

- Parent Meetings

We will be offering parent meetings throughout the year. These will offer social time with one another as well as an opportunity to look deeper into various aspects of child development. There will also be times when your teacher will be sharing aspects of your child's day and Waldorf education. These meetings are an important part of your child's education and we ask that you aapart all parent meetings.

We recognize that there are many variables, such as work schedules, child care, and bedtime routines that can affect your ability to attend evening events. For this reason, we will notify you at our first orientation parent meeting of all parent meeting dates for the year. Please, plan ahead so that you can attend. If you

miss a meeting, it will be your responsibility to speak to a designated parent (to be decided at the beginning of the school year) about the content of the meeting. It is our goal to have 100% attendance (at least 1 parent/family) at all meetings.

On occasion adult education events are also offered during the school year. We encourage you to attend these events as they offer not only another opportunity for community involvement and connection, but also serve to deepen your understanding of your child's experience.

- **Home Visits**

Every child will have a home visit during their time in the school. In the kindergarten these are usually scheduled in late August or during the fall term, and in the nursery in preparation for the birthday celebration. They give the children an opportunity to feel the connection between home and school. For the children, this is usually a thrilling event, not only to see the teachers out in the world, but in their house. We keep the visits brief (usually 15 – 20 minutes). The children have the opportunity to show us their special things and their room. We value these visits with the children immeasurably.

- **Parent Teacher Communication**

~ Conferences/Newsletters and Check-In Times

Honest and ongoing communication between the teacher and parents is a vital part of your child's education at school.

~We will publish periodic newsletters during the course of the school year keeping you updated on happenings in the community, classrooms, festival and events.

~Every month teachers will have office hours available for check – in. Time slots will range from 15 – 30 minutes depending on the conversation needed. This could be a time to briefly check in about your child, bring concerns, ask questions and notify the teacher of changes at home. These times can also be requested by the teacher. Please check your classroom bulletin board for available times, if the times offered does not work for you please speak to the teacher to find a mutually agreeable time.

~Teachers can also be reached by E-mail to answer brief questions or to send out practical information or updates. Please inform your teacher if you do not have E-mail or if you do not check it often enough to make this an effective means of communication.

~You can leave a message at school by phone requesting a meeting, or to pass on information.

~You may give a note to the teacher at drop off or pick up.

~You may speak directly to the teacher before 8:15am or by appointment.

~WIWS sets time aside for parent teacher conferences twice during the school year, (November and April). Early childhood families are asked to sign up for one parent teacher conference a year. Sometimes the best

time for an early childhood conference is a month other than November and April, and teachers can and do set up the year's conference at other times of the year. We recommend that parents of children turning six during the school year conference with the teacher in November.

~ Please check your parent folders in the upstairs lobby daily; this is the main venue for written communications from the teachers and the school.

- **Little Ones in the Kindergarten**

The Sunflower and Golden Forest kindergartens have the privilege of welcoming "Little Ones". These precious beings travel from "Little Land" where they live in community with each other and are guided by "Fairy Mother".

"Little Ones" take the form of a small handmade doll, intentionally created for each child by their teacher. The teachers reflect on each child and imagine what "Little One" needs to come for each child. What aspects in nature do the children carry, where could they be strengthened, where are their strengths? How is this reflected in the plants and animals? The "Little Ones" carry this essence and they work their magic. Each "Little One" arrives at just the right time. Some children have to wait a long time but they are patient and excited to see the "Little Ones" arrive for other children too.

For the children "Little Ones" are very Real. Bringing "Little Ones" to the classroom grew out of an inspiration to support the therapeutic needs of the six year change. It has been our observation that, although all children display a connection with their "Little One", the quality of the connection of the child navigating their six year change is poignant. For this reason we would like to bring "Little Ones" in a different way this year.

This year the children who turn six or seven will be visited by their "Little One". As the year progresses the teachers will be watching and waiting, carefully paying attention to the signs that would indicate a younger child is really ready to receive their "Little One". For some children this may mean they wait a long time, sometimes potentially years! Parents will most likely struggle with this change more than the children but please feel assured that we will create an imagination around "Little Ones" which will support children waiting. It is really good for the children to "look forward" and have to wait!

The children will hopefully form a relationship with their "Little One" and treat them respectfully and magically. There are ground rules, which the children will learn, of how they can treat their or another's "Little One". Sometimes they will be able to take them home on sleepovers but for the most part they will stay at school. They need to make a bed first at home and ask their teacher for this privilege. "Little Ones" should only stay home for one night at a time. "Little Ones" go and visit "Fairy Mother" on all vacations.

The older children returning to school will receive their "Little Ones" back over the course of the school year. "Little Ones" who have already come for a younger child may not return this school year unless the teacher sees that the time is right.

Please do not tell your child about the "Little Ones" as the story of them will unfold organically in the

classroom as they see the returning children re-connect with their “Little Ones” and new ones arrive over the course of the year.

Please do tell them that they come from “Fairy Mother” not the teachers.

- **Health**

A well-rested child who is warmly dressed and fed a wholesome diet is best prepared to withstand the onslaught of winter colds and ailments.

As parents you know better than the teacher how your child appears and acts when he or she is ill. School is not a soothing environment for a child who is not well. Please arrange your lives so that your child can be in a quiet and restful environment when he or she is ill.

All working parents know the desperate feeling of needing to go to work when your child is not feeling well. The teachers are very sympathetic with the situation, but we urge parents to arrange back up child care. 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. If your child is not ready to play outside or to be at school the whole day then that is an indicator that they are not ready to return to school.

Please look through the school parent handbook for more in depth details as to the school health policy.

- **Unscheduled School Closures**

The winter months often bring weather conditions that require school closure or delays. In most cases our school follows the decision of the South Whidbey school district. Three possibilities of school alterations include:

- ~ 9am start time
- ~ 10am start time
- ~ School cancellation

Please check the WIWS parent handbook for further information on protocol.

- **Media**

Please read the school media policy in the parent handbook.

The presence of television, movies and other media in the child’s life can have a strong effect in the early childhood classroom. The strong influence it has upon young children is visible in many ways. The child may speak in the tone of a certain character or machine. The child may seem “stuck” in creative play, unable to play anything but a super hero or princess. Children seem to lose their imagination and cannot “think” of anything to play. More subtle changes may be noted in a child who cannot sit still during a story, making it a distressing time instead of a time of wonderment and delight.

We acknowledge that families make their own decisions in regards to media. Many families choose to remove

media from their homes entirely. Others do not. It is important to practice media mindfulness as mutually respectful adults in the community.

We ask that there is open communication between the teacher and parents if issues arise in the classroom regarding media. We ask that no television or movies be watched or computers used on school days. We feel that these mediums experienced before bedtime can be disturbing to a child's sleep.

We encourage all parents to research this topic further through the numerous resources available in our school library.

- **Discipline**

In the Waldorf early childhood classroom we strive to understand the nature of the young child and create a rhythm which allows for an appropriate balance of "breathing in" and "breathing out" activities. This can eliminate some of the difficulties which are often found in early childhood settings. Consistency in the rhythm allows the child to know out of their habit life what is expected of them.

Teachers model ways of resolving issues or conflicts among the children. When required, teachers may use "time in" (instead of "time out"), a period of time spent working with or helping one of the adults, until the teacher feels that the child is ready to rejoin his or her classmates.

If difficulties are persistent, a teacher may request a conference with the parents. The adults can then assess the situation and work together to find ways to help the child express him or herself in more socially and age appropriate ways. Sometimes children can also be helped by changes in diet and daily routines. Parents can also be of assistance by informing teachers of changes at home that may result in unusual behavior by their child.

On rare occasions children may need to go home if their behavior shows they are not ready to be at school for any reason.

Most importantly, we want to emphasize that good communication among adults is most helpful for the children during these formative years.

- **Toys**

All personal toys should remain at home. Jewelry, watches, purses, and money should also stay at home. Children who attend nap care can bring a special friend (doll or stuffed animal) to rest with if they so desire. These should be left in the child's cubby during the rest of the school day.

- **Emergency Contact Forms**

Please fill out your emergency contact forms and list everyone who can pick up your child from school. If a person is not listed and we do not receive a note, we are not able to release your child. Please check the guideline in the school parent handbook under "Releasing children".

- **First Grade Readiness**

Children who turn six by May 31st are considered eligible for first grade for the following year. They do not automatically go onto first grade, however. We recognize that children develop and mature at different rates. A child's chronological age or intellectual curiosity is not enough to determine first grade readiness. The teachers look at three major developmental areas: movement skills, cognitive development, and social/emotional behavior. Your child's teacher will contact parents individually if there is a question of first grade readiness. In addition, all potential rising first grade children will participate in a first grade assessment. This assessment is not a test for a child's entry into first grade. Rather, the information gathered in this assessment will help the first grade teacher better meet the needs of the child and the class as a whole. There may be an extra fee involved for this assessment. Information about first grade assessments and readiness will be brought by your teacher after the New Year.

- **Cubby Day**

Cubby day will take place on Tuesday September 6th from 10:00am – 11:30am. We will have a sign up sheet for a 15 minute slot at our first orientation parent meeting. This will be an opportunity for your child to visit the classroom, find their cubby and meet their teacher. Please bring the following items on cubby day.

- ~ Things for the extra clothes bag (see previous list under clothing)
- ~ Slippers
- ~ Mug (For kindergarten)
- ~ Rain Gear

- **First Day of School**

Wednesday September 7th ~ Rising First Grade Children, 8:30am

Monday September 12th ~ Nursery and younger Kindergarten 4 and 5 day children, 8:30am

- **Blessings On Our School**

We look forward with joy to the coming school year. We thank you very much for taking the time to read this handbook. We hope that the material has been helpful and informative. Please do not hesitate to contact your child's teacher with any concerns or questions.

- **Early Childhood and Extended Care Faculty 2011-2012 School Year**

Butterfly Nursery ~ William Dolde

WDolde@gmail.com

Butterfly Assistant ~ Lynne Lesson

Sunflower Nursery Kindergarten ~ Dyanne Harshman

Dyannedea@hotmail.com

Sunflower Assistant ~ Ashley Umlauff

Golden Forest Nursery Kindergarten ~ Kim Dunkley

Goldenforestkim@gmail.com

Golden Forest Assistant – Polly Garret

Robin Song Extended Care ~ Cordula Hetland

Assistants ~

Morning Care ~

- **School Contact Information:**

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- **Acknowledgments:**

This handbook was compiled by then early childhood teachers with the help of Seattle Waldorf School, Bright Water School and the Austin Waldorf School.

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