

Kindergarten Parent Handbook

*"Receive the child in reverence,
Educate the child in love,
Let the child go forth in freedom."
~ Rudolf Steiner*



Winterberry Charter School
4802 Bryn Mawr Ct.
Anchorage Ak. 99508
742-0139

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Welcome

Greetings and welcome,

Each year there is an air of excitement surrounding the Kindergarten. The doors of that wonderful kingdom are soon to open; the little children have waited a long while and now it is time to begin. Then the day comes. Both parents and children arrive equally excited. Parents depart with one last good-bye kiss, entrusting their dear little ones to our care. The child's day begins full of creative play, perhaps painting or baking, circle time, lots of singing and stories. Our curriculum is designed to enhance the young child's physical development, motor skills, language development, and sensory development. The harmonious daily rhythms strengthen the child's sense of security, self-confidence, imagination, and creativity. Nature activities, festivals and seasonal rhythms connect the child to the world and foster a sense of caring for the environment and for others. This prepares the child for a more structured academic curriculum in the primary grades and beyond.

When parents arrive to collect their children, eagerly questioning the day's events they are most often answered by dreamy gazes and "nothing" seems to be the statement most given to the question, "What did you do today in the Kindergarten?" Because of the child's ability to live in the present moment, he is unable to recount the day's events intellectually. We soon learn to interpret their way of retelling the days' events. Perhaps you'll hear a little fragment of a song or a line of a verse, or the name of a new friend. And now comes the question: How can we create a bridge between the Kindergarten and home - to bring together a harmonious meeting of the two? With this in mind I give to you this booklet, with the hope that it sheds some light on the Waldorf-inspired Kindergarten and how we look at our work with the children. Families are encouraged to share in the journey of kindergarten through this handbook, parent evenings, school-wide events, home/school volunteer opportunities, as well as exploring a deeper understanding of Waldorf education through literature, study groups, and parent education classes.

I want you to know and feel that I am always open to your questions or concerns, and that through the school we may grow as parents, teachers, and children together in a true community.

The years of early childhood are the most formative times in an individual's life. We are blessed that you have chosen our school for your child's first steps of the journey in public education.

Warmly,

Ms. Lisa Stratford

stratford_lisa@asdk12.org



*May my soul bloom in
love for all
existence.*

~Rudolf Steiner

Philosophy

Infants and young children are entirely given over to their physical surroundings; they absorb the world primarily through their senses and respond in the most active mode of knowing: *imitation*.

Imitation is the power to identify oneself with one's immediate environment through one's active will. Children are deeply connected to life and absorb everything deeply into their beings. Their lives are so interconnected to their world that it becomes part of them in every way and they cannot filter things out as we adults do.

As your child's teacher, I feel the responsibility to create an environment that is worthy of the child's unquestioning imitation. I strive to offer the children plenty of opportunities for meaningful imitation and for creative play. This supports the child in the central activity of the early years: the development of the physical organism. I understand that to draw the child's energies away from this fundamental task to meet premature intellectual demands, robs the child of the health and vitality she will need for later life and weakens the very powers of judgment and practical intelligence the teacher wants to encourage.

In our kindergarten children dress up and become mothers and fathers, kings and gnomes; they sing, paint, and color. Through songs and poems they learn to enjoy language; they learn to play together; hear stories, which they reenact in drama, see puppet shows, bake bread, make soup, model beeswax, build houses out of play stands, silks and boards. It is our belief that to become fully engaged in such work is the child's best preparation for life. It builds powers of concentration, interest, and a life-long love of learning. This teaching is oral, dramatic, and creative. It challenges the children to develop gradually their awakening capacities to think clearly, to feel fully, and to act freely.

Preparing for the First Day

If your child is having anxiety about going to school, a suggestion would be that three nights before school begins, tell your child a simple story at bedtime. The story could be created about a little animal in the forest and how he is getting ready to go to school. Make the story appropriate to your child; for example, choose the animal your child is most like. Is he slow and steady like a turtle or more like a rabbit who hops from place to place, or like a horse that flies with the wind, etc.? Integrate your own personal life into the story - i.e. if you have a younger baby at home, tell how the little rabbit will hop out of his den and leave the baby rabbit at home safe in his nest and how the rabbit will hop off to school to meet all his new friends. Tell about all the things the little rabbit will do at school - play with friends, paint, color, sew, cook, bake, go for walks, hear stories and have birthday celebrations. Please tell this story each night for three nights as preparation.

First Day of School:

Wednesday, August 28th, 2013

Bring:

- a complete change of clothes in gallon size cloth bag marked with your child's name,
- slippers or other indoor shoes,
- outdoor gear appropriate for the daily weather (please be sure to air and dry outdoor gear daily)

Daily Schedule

Kindergarten: 8:30 am - 12:30 pm

Drop Off: 8:20 - 8:30 am Pickup: 12:30 pm

Morning Arrival

Morning time is when we are our most sensitive. Being not long out of sleep and dreamland makes us very open to influences around us. Little children especially need to wake slowly and gently. I recommend a calm morning without rushing and I expect that your child's morning be free from television and other electronic media. I wish to begin our morning together in an atmosphere of peace. Please bring your child quietly to the Kindergarten cubbies, unpack and hang all gear and then bring your child out to the Kindergarten play yard. At all times please discourage loud behavior and running.

If your child has had a hard morning, didn't eat her breakfast, or some family crisis has occurred, please let me know A.S.A.P. It is very important for me to be kept updated on events that may have an impact on your child.

I will be ready to receive your children at 8:15 a.m. and am not responsible for, or ready to receive the children prior to that time. If you happen to arrive early, please wait with your little one until I am ready to receive them. For your child's sake and that of the class, please be on time. Rhythm strengthens the will and supports your child and the whole class.

Tardies

Role is taken first thing in the morning. If you should arrive late for school, you must check in at the office and accompany your child to class. This ensures your child's safety and that he will not be marked absent.

Please note: it is disruptive to the child's schedule, class, and teacher when children are habitually late to school. If you find timeliness a challenge, please feel free to speak with me for assistance coming up with strategies to support being on time. I appreciate your striving.

Absences

Daily attendance is important for the young child as it helps to build a strong rhythm and community and also demonstrates the importance of school. Please keep in mind each day your child misses, our school misses out on funding that we receive from the school district. ASD has recently adopted a new policy that lists only 5 categories for excused absences. You may reference this policy at www.ASDK12.org. We ask that all appointments and vacations occur outside of school hours or during one of the school breaks. If your family takes a vacation, please use Winter or Spring Break. If you do have to schedule a doctor or dentist appointment, it is better to leave early as opposed to coming late to school.

Separation Anxiety

As the children begin the school year, and possibly the new experience of school, some may experience difficulty with separating from parents at arrival time.

Here are some suggestions:

- 1.) **Demonstrate trust in the teacher and in the decision you have made on your child's behalf.** You can this when you...
- 2.) **Make partings brief.** Each child will approach goodbyes in a different way. Some seem to handle the situation fairly well, some show signs of distress and settle down shortly, and others are extremely upset with parting. It can vary with the child's age, her ability to deal with change in general, and with stresses in her life outside of school. It is important for the teacher and parent to remain positive about the situation. Show an understanding of and support for the child's feelings, assure her that you will return, and leave her with a hug and a confident smile. Prolonging the parting prolongs the adjustment and the accompanying crying or tantrums.

Dismissal

The Kindergarten Day ends at 12:30 pm.

Please pick up your child promptly, as he is ready to see you when his day is done. It gives your child a wonderful secure feeling when you are on time at the end of the school day. If your child is not attending KinderCare and has not been picked up by 12:45 pm he will be taken to the school office where someone will try to reach you by telephone. I have other duties that begin at this time and cannot be with your child

If someone other than the parent is to pick up your child, please make certain they are on the release form in the office and communicate with the teacher.

If there is a day when you need to pick your child up before the class release time, please let me know in advance.

Rhythms

Children are carried along by the rhythms of the world in which they live, from the cadence of breathing in their bodies to the daily patterns of sleeping and waking. The yearly cycle of the seasons and the rhythmic procession of stars 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 Kindergarten activities flow with a sense of breathing in and breathing out from the quiet moments of a fairy tale to the active moments of vigorous work and play. 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 meal times and bedtimes, I strongly encourage you to do so. It is very important for young children to go to bed at the same time every night and I recommend that this be no later than 8:00 p.m. Please feel free to contact me if you would like some ideas for making this transition a successful one for parent and child.

Example of Kindergarten Rhythm:

8:20 am - Greet children, Candle circle (outdoors)
 9:00 am - Story, Indoor play/Activity
 10:45 am - Snack
 11:00 am - Ring time
 11:15 am - Outside Play
 12:30 am - Closing Circle and Dismissal

Example of Kindergarten Snack and Activity:

Monday - Rice/Painting
 Tuesday - Oatmeal /Baking or Craft
 Wednesday - Millet/Nature Walk
 Thursday - Bread/Bakers and Chefs
 Friday - Soup/ Drawing

Media Guidelines

We appreciate your choice in selecting Winterberry for your child. Many parents are drawn to Winterberry because of our unique pedagogy, philosophy and shared values. One aspect of our philosophy includes our outlook on the use of media. For our purposes, media are considered to include: television, radio, portable listening devices, movies, video and electronic games, and computers.

We feel a responsibility to raise potential issues that stem from a variety of media exposures and provide these insights in the spirit of creating a school environment that is holistic, rich, and creative for your child and all other students attending our school.

External, artificial images inhibit the viewer's inner picture making ability, which limits the developing capacity for our thoughts and imagination. Developing this capacity is the cornerstone of Waldorf education. The nature of electronic light, swiftness of images, and the quality of sound of television, computers and videos can adversely affect the healthy development of the child. The stimulating influence it has upon young children is visible in the Kindergarten in many ways.

The child may speak in the tone of a certain character or machine where speech can be reduced to the sound of robots or mechanical noises. The child may seem "stuck" in creative play, unable to play anything but a super hero, transformer, or "emergency". Other children seem to lose their imagination and can't "think" of anything to play (not even house). 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.

The Waldorf approach to the care and education of the child recognizes the first seven years to be the principal formative phase of life. The development of bodily organs, the foundations of speech

and thought are affected by what the child absorbs from the surrounding environment. Children learn through their natural openness and through their gift for imitation. We are committed to nurture, protect and provide young children with a learning environment that enables them to be creative and productive individuals. Children in this age group do best playing, running, jumping, daydreaming, problem solving, getting lots of fresh air rather than sitting in front of a machine that over stimulates and provides no benefits to the physical body.

I **strongly** urge you to eliminate your kindergartner's exposure to all electronic media in its various forms. If this proves too challenging, please consider limiting media exposure to Friday evenings and Saturdays only. While I recognize how difficult it is to avoid media while living in a technology-driven society and I can offer resources to assist you and your family in this transition. I respect your efforts and applaud your sincere desire to provide the very best environment for your child. Please speak with me about your questions and concerns.

Parent Volunteers

Parent participation in the life of the school takes many different forms and is essential to the school's success. Whether working in the classroom, the office, a committee, or taking work home, parent volunteers provide a much needed and valued assistance. If you are interested in volunteering in the classroom, play yard or on walk day, please make certain you communicate with me. The following offers a few guidelines for your visit to insure the optimum environment is created for the children. The goal is to be present for the children and to create a space for them to fully live into their imaginations.

Adult Etiquette in the classroom,

1. **Movement (before speech)** ~ The young child is looking for movements to imitate, be it sewing, cutting vegetables or setting the table. Let us pay attention to our posture and demonstrate gestures that are meaningful and beautiful. To accomplish this, usually means we only need to *Slow Down*. Even our breathing will become deeper.
2. **Speech** ~ Statements are preferred over questions. Words are spoken simply and with care. It is pleasant to work quietly, perhaps humming softly.
3. **Dress Code** ~ Soft shoes and an apron are appropriate both for comfort and to show we are there to work. (We do have extra aprons to share). Because they can be distracting for the young child, please minimize perfumes, make-up and jewelry.
4. **Siblings** ~ I kindly request that younger siblings **NOT** come with you when you volunteer in the classroom.

~ Thank you for your support.

Festivals and Birthdays

Over the course of the year, Kindergarten will participate in a variety of festivals. Our planned celebrations are: The Lantern Walk in early November, the Winter Spiral in December, Valentine's Tea in February and the Maypole Celebration in May. Festivals are a wonderful opportunity for us all to gather in a spirit of celebration. We sing and move together and the children are honored as special participants. I will definitely need help from families in preparing for and bringing these celebrations into being.

Birthdays are very special in the Early Childhood. Parents are invited to join the class for a birthday story and snack. More specific details will be forthcoming. For birthday parties outside of school, please mail invitations to individual children to avoid hurt feelings. Children are very sensitive about being included in birthday parties.

Clothing/Dress Code

The Kindergarten is a place of active work and play. Our indoor space is kept at ~70° F, but we spend over an hour outdoors every day so please plan your child's layers accordingly. For your child's comfort and enjoyment I recommend the following:

YES:

- Sturdy clothes for active play
- Layers for comfort inside and outside
- Natural fibers for comfort and breath ability
- Sturdy shoes that fit securely
- Slippers for wear inside the classroom (please have these be snug and practical, no stuffed animal slippers, or slippers with no backs).
- Socks
- Warm winter hat your child will wear
- Warm, water proof mittens
- Extreme temperature Snowsuit
- Extreme temperature Snowboots
- Rain boots, rain coat, rain pants
- Leggings under skirts to allow for full range of movement and provide warmth

Please, NO:

- Spaghetti straps on tank-tops or on dresses
- Open toe shoes
- Shoes with heels
- Slip-on party shoes
- Shoes with lights
- Clothing with writing
- Clothing with a single image
- Tattoos
- Pendants on chains
- Earrings with images
- Camouflage
- Media characters or messages on any clothing or accessories
- Children should not wear watches, or jewelry to school

Please label all clothing and gear

We have a small supply of extra clothing for the children to borrow as the need arises. Because we try to provide as beautiful and as tranquil an environment as possible, please refrain from sending your child to school wearing clothing with images and words on them. Please check the lost and found periodically for lost clothes. Periodically articles left in the lost and found are donated to charity.

Toys and other Personal Belongings

Please have your child keep his or her own toys and other personal belongings at home.

This will avoid heartbreak over lost or damaged toys. Use of the classroom toys reflects the philosophy of using simple, natural materials to encourage and stimulate imaginative play. Sometimes toys, books, jewelry, stickers, make-up, or small items like to hide in pockets. These personal items are grieved if lost, are given and wanted back again, and detract from the kindergarten day. Please work with your child to make sure that these items stay safely at home or in the car. The school toys, likewise, should remain at school.

Warmth

You may hear Waldorf kindergarten teachers talk about keeping children warm enough. This comes from an understanding that the young child is just developing the ability to balance the opposing forces of heat and cold. With this balance comes our most harmonious mental and physical activity. Well-known kindergarten teacher, Margret Meyerkort, points out “the human being is born without physical protection, so he begins his earthly path in a most vulnerable position, dependent on the caring concern of others.” Meyerkort suggests that erring on the side of overdressing is better than allowing the warmth to stream out through the sensitive points of the head, hands, and feet. Our indoor space is kept at ~70° F, but we spend over an hour outdoors every day so please plan your child's layers accordingly.

Positive Discipline in the Kindergarten

Positivity and encouragement is always the best path in response to behavior challenges of young children. In general the Waldorf Early Childhood teacher strives to provide guidance by modeling appropriate behavior with the children and with other adults. Positive redirection often works in areas where modeling does not. Much of the communication between teacher and student happens publicly, in front of the other children, so they all receive the same message. In cases of bullying, I will work with all the students involved. I may also work with parents to create consistency between home and school. Time-outs are generally not given, but sometimes children just need to be held in the rocking chair for a bit or rest until they feel “like they are not so tired and can find their warm and gentle hands.” Children are rarely sent to the office or home unless there is a situation that poses a threat to the safety of the child or to other children.

Currently, Winterberry is working with the Virtues Project, Positive Discipline and Non-Violent Communication, all of which attempt to address all manner of disrespect--verbal, physical, etc.--clearly and without judgment.

I strive to guide behavior in a gentle, non-threatening, yet effective manner and carefully structure the environment and daily rhythm. When disruptions or conflicts occur, I'll use creative images, characters, stories, and humor to re-direct play, regroup children in their play, and give them a special role involving their cooperation. Children will be sent home for biting, pinching, kicking, tantrums or other physically or verbally unsafe behavior. If your child is having difficulty with aggressive behaviors, please confer with me before an incident occurs to establish consistent methods of discipline both at home and at school.

"The young child instinctively expects guidance. Without the certainty of his parents and teachers he loses his security...Constantly being asked what he wants creates bewilderment in his mind...Instead we must develop consciousness and consciously meet the child's paramount needs.

They are easily stated: security and an awareness of growth, love and a certain amount of protection...The conscientious and conscious parent will have to play an active and positive role in the education, the leading forth of his child...Lead the child by conveying firmness permeated with love."

~ Margret Meyerkort, internationally respected kindergarten educator

Communication:

The school newsletter is published regularly. Please read each edition of the newsletter. It contains vital information about school events, schedule changes, volunteer opportunities and general school news.

Throughout the year you may find yourself with a question, comment or concern. Please know I appreciate when this occurs, that you bring your questions, comments, or concerns directly to me. There are many different ways to voice yourself: e-mail, a written note, a quick "I have a little question, when can we chat?" at pick up or drop off time, or request a scheduled time. If after speaking with me you do not feel your question has been met, I would either continue to search for the answer for you, or would bring your question to our Pedagogical Leader. The next person to bring the question to would be the administration, Pam Goodwin or Shanna Mall.

Please know I believe communication between parent and teacher is important. I strive for us to be a team...it's important to me that I know what your questions and concerns are and am always happy to explain why we do something, or look at things from a different perspective. Also keep in mind that for a healthy social environment it is always important as well as helpful, to direct your comments and questions directly to the person it involves.

Parent/Teacher Communication:

- 1. Home Visits:** It is my hope to begin the communication process during the summer with a visit to your home. The goal of this visit is simply to help build a bridge between home and school. Children love to show their teachers where they eat, sleep and play—and introduce them to any pets they may have!
- 2. Parent/Teacher Conferences:** In October, you will have an opportunity to meet with me and to see your child's class work and share observations, impressions, questions and goals in order to deepen our shared understanding of your child as well as strengthen our work together. I am always grateful for communication from you about significant changes or circumstances in your child's life. You do not need to wait until conferences to discuss your child. Please make an appointment any time it is needed.
- 3. Kindergarten Parent Evenings:** Throughout the school year I will schedule parent evenings. These meetings are essential for understanding and supporting the work of the teacher with the child, as well as supporting the home life. There is both a social and pedagogical aspect to the parent evenings, which brings a wonderful opportunity for community building. **Participation by one parent or family representative is essential.**

Afternoon Care ~ KinderCare

Winterberry offers families the option of enrolling their child in a paid extended day program. KinderCare provides care for Kindergarten children from 12:30-3:30. AfterCare provides care for Kindergarten - 4th grade children from 3:30-6:00. Please connect with Winterberry Enrichment Program personnel for more information and details: winterberryenrichmentprogram@gmail.com
The Kindergarten and KinderCare teachers will facilitate transitions from the morning program to the afternoon program.

While the afternoon program is structured more loosely than the morning program, we strive to be in alignment as much as possible to provide for continuity of care. Typically, the children gather for lunch, followed by rest time, free play or crafts, circle and outdoor play. For your child's lunch, please include whole grains, adequate protein, fresh fruit and vegetables. Water or milk is preferable to juice drinks. Candy, soda/pop and gum are not allowed at school. Please remember to send lunch boxes without media themes.

Nutrition ~ Food and Drink

Food is one of the best ways we have to direct the health, behavior and moods of our young children. Accordingly, we serve a healthy snack each day that is often made with the children. It is shared at our table with a blessing and good table manners. Please notify me if your child has any food allergies or restrictions. At home you may wish to consider the following:

1. Breakfast like a King, lunch like a Prince, and dinner like a Pauper
2. Whole food - know the source & ingredients - even "organic"
3. Labels— Read labels and avoid foods that have ingredients that are unfamiliar/hard to pronounce. Ingredient list should read like a recipe, not a science experiment.
4. Nutrition is important but so is the peaceful mood and rhythm surrounding the meals

RECOMMENDED

Whole grains
Proteins
Organic, fresh fruits and vegetables
Essential fatty acids (omega 3, 6, 9)
Cod liver oil—with vitamin D

AVOID

Hydrogenated oils
Preservatives & dyes
White sugar, commercial
Processed or fast food
Soy in excess

10 Needs for a Healthy Childhood and Educational Experience

1. **Proper nutrition.** Growing bodies need a good, hot, nutritious breakfast every day before school. Breakfast, snack and lunch should contain lots of protein, and no sugar or food additives.
2. **Adequate Sleep** - Be in bed no later than 8:00 PM on school nights. Most young children still need 10 - 12 hours of sleep each night.
3. **Eliminate Media** - No computer, TV, video games or other screen time on Sundays through Thursday. No murder, mayhem or adult movies or videos on the weekend, ever.
4. **Quiet Time** - Provide some daily quiet time, without radio, CDs or tapes. Give your child the gift of silence.
5. **Time in Nature** - Spend some time in nature every day. Experience the weather; pay attention to the season, moon, stars and sky.
6. **Chores at Home** - Assign some responsibilities for taking care of the home, pets and yard.
7. **Appropriate Dress** - Pay attention to keeping your child warm and dry while at school, especially their feet. Our indoor space is kept at ~70° F, but we spend over an hour outdoors every day so please plan your child's layers accordingly.
8. **Cultivate Reverence** - All spiritual traditions offer practices that help develop the reverence for life that supports home, school and community relationships. If need be, create your own.
9. **Support your Child's Education** - Help develop healthy rhythms, participate in school activities, and communicate honestly about your concerns with your child's teachers.
10. **Support the Class Community** - Children need shared values and alignment among their adult role models. Get to school on time. Plan vacations during breaks. Support the class code of conduct.

Reading Recommendations

Recommended Parent Reading:

Simplicity Parenting - Kim John Payne
You are Your Child's First Teacher - Rahima Baldwin
Understanding Waldorf Education- Jack Petrash
What is a Waldorf Kindergarten - Sharifa Oppenheimer and Joan Almon
You're Not the Boss of Me - Ruth Ker
Seven Times the Sun - Shea Darian
All the Year Round - Ann Druitt, Christine Fynes-Clinton, Marije Rowling
Earthways - Carol Petrash
A Child's Seasonal Treasury - Betty Jones
Endangered Minds - Jane Healy
Over the Rainbow Bridge - Patterson & Bradley
Your Five Year Old - Louise Bates Ames
Your Six Year Old - Louise Bates Ames
Your Seven Year Old - Louise Bates Ames
Raising Boys - Steve Biddulph and Paul Stanish
Parenting Well in a Media Age - Gloria DeGaetano
Positive Discipline - Jane Nelson
Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids - Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

Recommended Authors for Young Children:

I know there are many fabulous children's books that you are probably already reading with your children. Here is a short list of oldies, but goodies that I'd like to bring to your attention.

Margret Wise Brown

Beatrix Potter

Thornton Burgess

A.A. Milne

Nursery Rhymes, Nursery Rhymes, Nursery Rhymes.

Simple repetitive folk tales from around the world (ex: The Old Woman and her Pig... Tikki, Tikki, Tembo... Ping,... The House that Jack Built)



*A healthy social life is found only when in the mirror of each soul,
the whole community finds its reflection; and when in the whole
community the virtue of each one is living.*

~ Rudolf Steiner