The Waldorf School of Garden City
Early Childhood Handbook
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Welcome

We welcome your family to the Early Childhood classes at the Waldorf School of Garden City and look forward to a strong partnership with you. This handbook will be your guide to the policies and educational philosophy of our Early Childhood Program. It contains our suggestions for making your family’s experience here a warm and successful one. We encourage you to read it thoroughly as it will answer many of your questions. We hope that this marks the beginning of a rich and rewarding relationship with Waldorf Education for your family.

Our Early Childhood Programs include three class groupings: Parent and Child classes which meet once or twice a week for two hours; Nursery classes for children who are 3 - 4 years old, which meet five days a week from 9:00 am – 12:00 pm and three Mixed-Age Kindergarten classes for children who are 4 - 6 years old, which meet five days a week from 8:10 am – 12:00 pm. While the Parent and Child classes offer insight into the challenges and wonders of parenting young children, the Nursery and Kindergarten classes are an intermediary step for the child between the home and formal schooling.

The Curriculum

The 3 R’s of the Waldorf School’s Early Childhood program are Reverence, Repetition and Rhythm. Through the practice of these three concepts we aim to provide an environment in which the children become at home within themselves and in the world. Since the primary means of learning for the young child is by imitation, the teachers, through engagement in meaningful activity and directing healthy social interaction, strive daily to serve as role models worthy of the children’s imitation. The classrooms provide a beautiful, home-like setting with natural materials which are carefully chosen for the children’s work and play. Quality natural materials nourish the children’s senses and supports healthy sensory integration.

The Waldorf Kindergarten is truly a children’s garden – a protected childhood space where the imagination and creativity of the child will
flourish. Here, surrounded by a warm and caring atmosphere, children can develop through the creative play and experiences in the social group of the class. Like a plant, each child can grow at their own pace and mature in a strong, balanced and healthy way. Mother Nature, herself, is one of our oldest and most valuable colleagues. The rich rhythms and strong sensory impressions of the seasons make the play yards that adjoin our classrooms, the playing fields alongside them and the Nature Trail at the perimeter of the school, a vital part of our teaching environment. Here the children experience the wonderful differences in weather – rain, snow, ice, wind and sun. They plant bulbs, rake and jump into leaves in fall, sled and build snowmen in winter and welcome the return of flowers, leaves and the curious activity of insects and worms in spring. The time to engage daily with the natural environment provides the framework for observation and gaining tacit knowledge that will underlie future scientific pursuits.

A love of learning is instilled through the many activities of the Early Childhood curriculum. The children’s imagination is enlivened by artistic activity, songs and gesture, storytelling and verses in circle time. The rich language content and repetitive element in these experiences help develop the listening and attention skills that are so important in the development of literacy. Numeracy skills also unfold naturally through activities such as finger plays, sorting of play objects, setting the table and counting the chairs for story time.

Play is children’s work and each day the children enjoy adequate time for imaginative play both indoors and out. Children naturally want to share in the practical work of the world around them. Whether becoming independent in dressing themselves, helping to prepare snack or crafting something useful, each situation helps the children develop capacities and skills as growing human beings. This in-turn allows them to develop confidence in themselves.

The Nursery and Mixed-Age Kindergarten Programs both follow a daily rhythm which includes preparation time and snack, circle and story time, as well as both indoor and outdoor play. Handwork, gardening, cleaning and caring for the classroom and its contents are ongoing activities during the free play periods. The weekly rhythm of the classes in the Mixed-Age Kindergarten includes one circle time a week with the
French teacher, one with the Eurythmy teacher, bread baking, beeswax modeling, watercolor painting, and a walk on the nature trail. For the children in the Nursery the Eurythmy teacher joins one circle time of the week and the children begin their nature walks in the spring. The cosmic rhythms, unfolding through the seasons of the year, provide the underlying themes of our circle work, craft activities and festival celebrations.

Like the seasons, the daily and weekly rhythms of the classroom soon create a reliable, familiar and safe atmosphere. Here a natural flow between lively social and quiet individual activities is established. This rhythmic aspect is the best way possible for the young child to establish individual, healthy bodily rhythms of breathing and circulation, which are still developing.

**Arrivals and Departures**

It is important for the children to arrive at school on time each day as it is often difficult for children to enter into activity that is already underway. Many important activities take place early in the preschool morning. If you bring your child to school by car, you may park along the north side of Cambridge Avenue or in the parking spots in the oval in front of the school. Be aware that you may not park in the designated bus lane during drop-off and pick-up times. For the safety of the children, this area must be kept clear at all times to allow emergency vehicles access, should the need arise.

Children in the Mixed-Age Kindergarten are dismissed from school at the lower school entrance doors at noon. The teachers bring the children to the doors and the parents are asked to wait just outside (you are welcome to wait indoors if the weather is inclement). When you see your child at the door with the teacher, please come up to greet and receive your child. Please be prompt as your child will be eager to see you. If, for any reason (such as a sleeping baby) you cannot leave your car, you may pull in after the buses depart and drive up to the cross-walk to have your child brought to you.
The Nursery classes are also dismissed at door, the downstairs class at the side door on Cambridge Avenue and the upstairs class in the hallway outside the classroom.

Only people, who you have previously authorized in writing, will be permitted to pick up your child. If your child is going home with a friend for a play-date, or if you need to make other arrangements for any reason, a written note, from a parent or guardian, must be given to your teacher.

For dismissal from Afternoon Care please wait outside the designated Afternoon Care classroom at 3:00 pm. For dismissal from the Extended Day program please go to the designated classroom and sign your child out each day. Once again, we remind you to be prompt. Those children who go home by bus are escorted to the waiting area by one of the Early Childhood teachers who will place each child on their bus.

For children who will be five years old at the beginning of the school year, busing is provided by your local school district if you live in Nassau County within a 15-mile radius of the school. If you want your child to ride the bus you must contact your district by April 1st to arrange for bus transportation for the following school year. This arrangement is between you and your local school district. Details of bus arrangements must be given to the Waldorf School prior to the beginning of the school year.

**Absences and Illness**

We have a fulltime nurse at our school. The nurse’s office is on the hallway around the corner from the business office. Annual medical forms must be filled out, signed by your doctor and returned to the nurse before your child will be allowed to attend school each year. All medications that the children might need to take, or have access to during the school day, must be kept in the nurse’s office. It is very important that you inform your child’s teacher of any medical conditions that your child has, including allergies and asthma, even if the medication is taken at home. Many medications affect how the children feel and act during the day and it is important for the teachers always to be aware of this.
Please call the school if your child is going to be absent for any reason. You may call before school hours and leave a message on the school answering machine. Of course, if you know ahead of time that your child will be away from school, you may tell your child’s teacher.

When children are recovering from an illness, they should be kept at home until they have completely recovered their health. When they return to school too quickly they have not regained all of their strength sufficiently and often relapse, becoming more ill than they were originally. Children should remain at home fever free (without medication) for at least 24 hours.

Children should not be brought to school with the following symptoms, and parents will be called if they develop while at school:

- **Fever**: the child should be kept at home 24 hours after the temperature has normalized. During the flu season an additional 24 hours is advised.
- **Diarrhea**: the child should be kept at home 24 hours after the diarrhea stops.
- **Vomiting**: the child should be kept home 24 hours after the vomiting stops.
- A deep chesty or croupy cough.
- Any undiagnosed rash.
- Draining ears or sores.
- Irritability or inability to cope with a group situation because of not feeling well.
- Severe cold symptoms such as a runny nose with yellow colored mucus or watery eyes.
- Any infectious disease or contagious condition. It is important for us to let other families know of signs and symptoms to look out for if their child appears to be sick. Let us know immediately if your child has been exposed to: Chicken Pox, Conjunctivitis, Roseola, Coxsackie, Impetigo, Measles, Scarlet fever, Strep Throat, Fifth’s Disease, and Lice.

In some cases it will be necessary for you to present a doctor’s note, before your child can return to school, to indicate that an illness has been treated and is no longer infectious.
Communication between Home and School

Communication between home and school is an essential ingredient in the success of your child’s experience at school. Your child's teacher will keep you informed of both general class activities and anything of a special nature that may concern your child. If you have any concerns or questions of any kind, or if anything changes in your home life or routine, please share this with your child’s teacher. Time for annual parent-teacher conference is set aside on the calendar for early February, but conferences may be scheduled at any time at the request of the parent of the teacher.

It is our hope and expectation that you will participate in the life of the school in as many ways as you can. You will receive email communications throughout the school year about events and activities for the whole school community and about meetings and activities specifically for your child’s class. All parents have access to My Backpack, an online resource through which you can view class rosters and Family Directory information.

There is an active Parent Association in our school, which supports several community activities. Each class has two or three representatives at least one of whom must attend monthly Parent Association meeting and who will report back to the class and keep you informed of ways that you can participate in school activities. All parents are invited to attend the monthly Parent Association meetings.

When your child’s teacher sends a letter or an article home, please take the time to read it carefully. Several times during the year class meetings will be scheduled. It is expected that at least one member of each child’s family attend these meetings. They are planned thoughtfully to support you and your child’s experience in our school. The first of these meetings is the Parent Orientation Meeting, which is held in September at the beginning of each school year.
**Home Visits**

For families with children in the Mixed-Age Kindergarten, your child’s teacher will want to schedule a home visit before the school year begins. These visits enable the children to experience their new teacher where they are most comfortable – in their own home – and help to make the first days of school much easier. Home visits last about an hour. Often the children like to show their teacher their bedroom, favorite toys or play places. Please do not feel that you have to spend time cleaning or otherwise preparing your home for this visit! It is really meant as a simple, but very helpful, bridge between home and school. Your child’s teacher will contact you about making arrangements for a time that is convenient for your child and the family’s schedule.

**The Importance of Warmth**

We all know that if children are to grow into happy, healthy individuals, it is essential to wrap them in the warmth of our love. For the young child physical warmth is just as important. Children’s bodies are still developing during the first seven years of their lives. They may not yet have developed a sense of warmth and may not realize when they are cold. When this happens, energy that should be going to build healthy organs and support healthy metabolism is expended in heating the body. Being cold can also decrease their immunity and makes them more susceptible to bacteria and viruses. By dressing our children in layers of natural fabrics such as cotton, wool and silk, we help them develop their sense of warmth, so strengthening their immunity and laying the foundation for healthy bodies in their adult life.

**Clothing**

Dress your child in clothing that is comfortable, uncomplicated and easy for them to manage at bathroom time – a great confidence booster. Clothing and shoes should be able to stand up to rugged outdoor play. Expect mud, so it is advisable to keep special occasion clothing at home. Please avoid all media inspired clothing or items with distracting images. The children are easily caught up by popular media imagery which distracts them from their natural tendency to healthy imaginative play.
Please do not send your child to school with play tattoos, watches and jewelry, light up shoes or nail polish.

It is important that the children have the opportunity to experience nature and discover the play possibilities of all weather conditions. We go outside in all but the most inclement weather. The children need to be dressed accordingly. For rainy days, they will need raincoats with hoods or hats, rubber boots, and rain pants. On cold days please dress your child for a stretch of outdoor play. Layering is suggested and warm hats, scarves, mittens, boots, snow pants, and undershirts are essential. For hot sunny days, a hat is strongly recommended for sun protection. Your child’s class teacher may have specific clothing requirements.

**What to Keep in School**

Your child’s cubby should always contain a complete change of clothing, including socks, underwear, a shirt, pants, and a sweater. Each cubby has a basket in which to store these items. Please check often for the completeness and update seasonally. In the winter months be sure to send your child with snow pants, warm, waterproof, well-fitting mittens or gloves, hats and insulated winter boots. For children who wear dresses, it is important to include a pair of warm leggings or pull on pants for outdoor play in cold weather. Your child will also need a pair of indoor shoes or slippers. Your teacher may have a specific request. Rubber boots, hooded raincoats and rain pants are also strongly recommended, as it is often muddy.

**Remember to label all clothing and other belongings with your child’s name.**

**What not to Bring to School**

We ask that you not allow your child to bring toys, books or other playthings from home. Children love to exchange treasures with one another but it is better if this activity takes place in your home with your approval. Please be sure that children do not bring cough drops, candy, gum or play things of any kind to school as this can create an unhappy situation among the children. Children may bring little gifts from nature for our nature table.
Food and Nutrition

Preparing and enjoying morning snack are essential activities in your child’s school day. In addition to providing nourishment for the body, food also nourished the senses as well as the soul. As a young child’s senses are still developing, we hope to stimulate the senses without overwhelming them. Wholesome foods provide a myriad of flavors, colors, textures and aromas, unlike processed and artificially flavored foods. The senses are further nourished with a beautifully set table, a verse of thanks, quiet conversation and a peaceful mood. In this warm space a child can assimilate the social and nutritional value of snack time.

The class teachers make every effort to offer the children nutritiously rich foods prepared with organic ingredients. Our snacks are relatively simple and although they may be unfamiliar in the beginning, they soon become old favorites. In the case of foods that may be unfamiliar a small amount is served to all, and the children are encouraged to try a taste. We recognize that some children may have allergies, special diets, or sensory issues, if so, please speak to your child’s teacher. It is only necessary to send in a supply of special snacks if your child is unable to share in the class snack.

Please be advised that we may have children in our classes who have serious nut allergies. For this reason, we are a nut free program.

Morning snack is often prepared with the children’s help. Each class follows a weekly snack rhythm. For example, Monday may be a rice day and Tuesday may follow with porridge. Children look forward to the daily preparation activities: grinding grain, kneading dough, peeling and chopping vegetables or fruit.

It is essential that children have breakfast before coming to school. Please make sure that your child is up early enough to eat an unhurried, wholesome and nutritious breakfast at home. A warm protein rich and/or whole grain meal without sugars is filling and sustaining.
Festivals

Celebrating the festivals is one way that children can experience and participate in the rhythms of nature and of the changing seasons. It also connects them to the deepest elements of our common humanity. We hope to awaken in the children an overall sense of reverence, joy and wonder through our festival celebrations.

In order to be sensitive to the diversity of cultures and beliefs represented in our community, we like to focus on the common aspects among festivals such as love, light, family, food and simple rituals. By looking at the underlying reasons behind a particular festival we can then translate the celebration into activities that are meaningful and age-appropriate for young children. Typically these include stories, food, games, songs, and simple crafts. We ardently strive to avoid the commercial aspects of holidays in the classroom. Families may volunteer to provide a special snack for those festivals that coincide with our school holidays or for any occasion that is important to their own tradition. A sign-up sheet for that purpose is available at the Parent Orientation Meeting at the beginning of the school year.

Throughout the school year there are a several traditional seasonal activities in which families are invited to participate. Children in the Mixed-Age Kindergarten gather for a Lantern Walk in November. The Nursery and Mixed-Age Kindergarten families are invited to a Winter Spiral in December and all are encouraged to attend the Spring Festival in May and the Midsummer Bonfire in June. Children and parents gather on the last day of school for a year-end and picnic. You will receive information from your teacher as these events draw near.

Birthdays

Each child’s birthday is a special day. When your child has a birthday, there will be a simple celebration at school. Each class has its own birthday traditions, but we all bake a special birthday cake and invite parents to join us for the celebration. Your child’s teacher will contact you regarding birthday plans: what to bring, when to come and whom to invite.
If you are planning a birthday party for your child, please remember that these occasions are very exciting and sometimes overwhelming for young children. Although your child may express the wish to have a large birthday party, young children are best satisfied with a simple family celebration or one with just one of two special friends at home. We feel that this is the best experience for the young child. If you feel you must have a larger party, it is important to plan carefully so that no one feels excluded and feelings are not hurt. Consider inviting the entire class, or in some cases all the boys or all the girls. Please send invitations through the mail. Do not pass them out at school.

**Discipline for the Young Child**

Discipline for the young child can be approached on several levels. In the class setting the teachers strive to create a positive, emotionally calm atmosphere where the adults apply consistent limits. Our teachers have learned through experience, when it is time to redirect a child to prevent a difficult situation before it begins. Children are helped to right a wrong situation and care for a child whom they might have harmed. The children experience being a part of a class family where everyone is respected and expected to be caring and respectful of others. As children learn through imitation the teachers are always mindful to create a social environment where positive peer interactions, worthy of the child’s imitation, are the norm. Warmth, humor, and predictable daily rhythms are just a few tools that help create an atmosphere where children can learn and grow.

Teachers are happy to support parents in creating a home life where discipline and calm prevail by offering helpful suggestions. We know this can be a challenging task. We are happy to share our impressions and experiences to work with individual families. The young child needs a healthy rhythm and a simple, slow pace to develop healthy habits. When the world feels safe and predictable, children feel more secure, less stressed and less likely to act out. We are in a partnership to help your child grow and mature to become a self-disciplined person.

If a child displays ongoing aggressive or negative behavior, the teacher will arrange a meeting with parents to discuss the behavior. Problems are best solved when there is collaboration between school and home.
Parents are asked to share with their child’s teacher any circumstances that might affect the child’s behavior at school, such as family issues, visitors at home, or an illness. Our teachers will work with the family to understand the child’s difficulties and form a consistent plan to address issues at home and in school.

Biting is a fairly common and natural occurrence in the development of young children. A child might bite to communicate frustration or anger before having learned to communicate these feelings with words. In a school setting, however, it is necessary that a child be sent home immediately when biting occurs. This makes a very strong impression on all that biting is not tolerated in school.

If, in the judgment of the faculty, a child is unable to participate harmoniously in group activities, is not ready for separation from their home environment, or the family cannot support the values of the program, it may be necessary to ask that the child be withdrawn.

**Rhythm and Family Life**

A simple, predictable routine works best for the young child. We encourage parents to slow down the pace. Choose simplicity: lessons and early sport activities can wait a few years. Creating healthy rhythms in your home is a gift to the security and healthy development of your child. Predictable bedtimes, mealtimes and daily schedules are difficult to achieve in this very fast paced world. They are essential to providing a harmonious environment in which the young child can flourish. Young children are very active, moving and doing and their bodies are physically growing. An early dinner, quiet evening activities and an early bedtime enable a child to be up and ready for school the next day. When children live with consistent and clear routines they feels secure in knowing what to expect next. When this occurs, transitions to meals, to sleep or other activities become easier and conflict is lessened. We know that creating a healthy family life can be difficult in our complicated world. We are always happy to meet with parents and to offer suggestions and support where needed.

At home parents can help the young child by setting clear limits and expectations. Children love to be involved with real activities. Helping to
prepare meals and to clean up, caring for plants and animals, being out in nature, and having adequate time for imaginative play both indoors and out are the essential elements of a child’s day. Even a three or four year old child can have a chore that they do every day at the same time. Setting the napkins at dinner, giving the dog water every morning, placing the toy trucks into the garage every evening are just a few suggestions that can help develop healthy habits and a strong will.

Parents should be making the decisions for the child. The children look to their parents as models for their own development. When children are given too many choices they can become uncertain and nervous. Children need the model of loving, consistent adults to guide their development.

Bedtime routines can provide a wonderful opportunity to slow down the pace of the day and be together with your child in a quiet, warm setting. Young children should be in bed early (by 7:00 or 7:30pm). This will enable your child to get a good rest and give parents time for themselves as well. Parents can choose a bedtime routine that is repeated the same way every evening. Some families may choose to light a candle. A story can be read or told (one story, not many, works best), a simple lullaby, verse or prayer can be spoken and then the candle is blown out and it is time to sleep. When a routine is established every day at the same time, the child becomes accustomed to the rhythm and feels secure, looking forward to this special time each day. Teachers will be happy to work with families to give suggestions.

*Media*

The Waldorf School of Garden City is dedicated to nurturing the children’s capacities for imagination, healthy emotional development, independent thinking and positive action. In recognizing the harmful effects that media have on the development of these capacities, the Early Childhood and Grade 1-5 teachers request that parents eliminate media from the lives of their children. It is especially important in a world of constant media bombardment that the young child is protected whenever possible and thus a media free home life is essential. As need be, the teachers will assist by providing recommendations about how to carry this out.
Children should be protected from media in all forms.
For our purposes, media is considered to include:
   □ Television
   □ Car radios
   □ Computers
   □ Tablets (this includes educational programs and eBooks)
   □ Smart phones
   □ Movies
   □ Video and electronic games, including hand held devices

Any child who disturbs the healthy classroom atmosphere through a lax media policy at home may be asked to leave the school.

In keeping with the media free environment we create for the younger children we ask that parents refrain from using cell phones or lap-top computers in the Main Lobby. Please avoid taking photographs of your children in their classrooms or while engaged in school activities. We encourage both adults and children simply to enjoy the moment at hand.

Referrals

If a child is having difficulties, the child’s teacher will arrange for a conference to address the concerns. We ask that parents approach us with issues that they might have observed as well. We are working together to help each child’s healthy development: physically, emotionally and socially. At times a teacher may suggest additional services, referrals for testing, or medical attention, to help address and understand a child’s particular needs. Some children may need specific therapies that school districts can provide if parents apply for required testing. We will work with families to find resources and we request that families work with us in a timely, open manner. Our school has a faculty Care Group, a school psychologist, and a therapeutic educator as resources available for children and their families.

First Grade Readiness

In January and February, all kindergarten students whose birthdays fall within the school’s guidelines for First Grade (the child must be 6 years old prior to September 1st) are assessed by their kindergarten teacher
for first grade readiness. Every child’s rate of growth and development is unique, therefore, careful consideration of readiness is necessary. From past experience, the Early Childhood and Lower School Faculty have found that some children with spring or summer birthdays may not have reached the level of maturity necessary to support their success in the Lower school.

When there are questions or concerns regarding a student’s readiness, the kindergarten teacher discusses these with the child’s parents as early in the school year as possible. This process is most effective when parents and teachers work together and communicate openly and honestly. If it is the kindergarten teacher’s determination that a student is not ready for First Grade due to the child’s individual rate of maturation, an additional year of kindergarten may be recommended.

If the child’s parents wish to have further consideration given to this recommendation, and the kindergarten teacher agrees that the child is in a “borderline” situation (i.e. one in which there are both positives and negatives to having the child move on to the First Grade) then the matter is referred to a committee. The committee members include Lower School and Early Childhood teachers as well as the Faculty Chair.

Afternoon Programs

If you are in need of Afternoon Care for your child, we offer a daily program, Monday through Friday, from 12:00 – 3:00 pm. In the interest of establishing a healthy and consistent weekly rhythm, we recommend that children attend for a minimum of three consecutive days. A year’s commitment to the schedule is required. Space is limited and pre-registration is necessary.

The Nursery children have their lunch, rest, and play in their nursery classrooms and playground. The Mixed-Age Kindergarten children have lunch in their kindergarten rooms after which the children rest and then join their friends from the other kindergarten groups in outdoor play.

We are often asked for some suggestions for a healthy lunch. We recommend a main protein dish and fruit or vegetables. Dinner leftovers make terrific lunches. Chicken, hamburger, rice and beans, pasta dishes,
warm soup and stews can be sent in wide mouth thermoses that will keep food hot for at least six hours. (Look for them in camping stores). We provide filtered water. We request simple, media free lunch boxes. Feel free to speak to your child’s afternoon care teacher for further food suggestions.

Please do not send the following items with your child’s lunch: foods high in sugar content (fruit juices, chocolate milk, cookies, candy, cough drops, Jell-O, pudding, Fluff, yogurt with candy sprinkles, chocolate and gum), foods high in trans-fats (such as Doritos, chips, Cheetos, Lunchables) and items with artificial coloring (colored yogurts, gelatin, Gatorade, Hi-C).

After lunch, the children clean up and prepare for a well-needed rest. We strive to provide the children with a calm and quiet atmosphere. Upon awakening from sleep or peaceful rest, the children play outdoors on our playground (weather permitting). Your child's afternoon care teacher will let you know what additional supplies may be needed. You will receive a letter after you sign up for the program.

We also offer an Extended Day program from 3:00 – 6:00 pm for those families who require care later in the day. For the remainder of the afternoon the children enjoy playing indoors and out, as the weather allows, work on an arts or craft activity and share a substantial and nutritious mid-afternoon snack.

**Assemblies**

Before each of the school breaks an all-school assembly takes place in the school auditorium - Thanksgiving, December Holidays, Winter and Spring Recesses and Summer Vacation. Children in the Mixed-Age Kindergarten attend these assemblies with their classes. We ask that the children wear more formal clothing to school on assembly days. Assemblies are an opportunity for students in grades 1 – 12 to offer musical and other artistic presentations they have been working on in the course of their study of various subjects. All Parents are invited to attend. We ask that parents refrain from photographing or video-taping their children during assemblies. Please note that there are no Afternoon Programs following the assemblies. Dismissal is at noon on these days.