

WILDFLOWERS NATURE SCHOOL

PARENT HANDBOOK
For preschool program

2011 - 2012

PHILOSOPHY

PHILOSOPHY

Education has come so far from the original, innate way that humans learned for millennium. With extended family always around in natural settings, kids used to observe, explore, imitate, question, and watch their mentors in a natural setting. They learned by discovery, experimentation and very keen awareness. At Wildflowers Nature School, we try to allow the space for that unfolding of inquisitiveness and exploration, for experiencing the wonder and the spirit in special moments in nature. For in those moments lies the heart of education that will last a lifetime.

VISION STATEMENT

Running with the natural exuberant wonder of a child, we nurture academic inquisitiveness, confidence, imagination, creativity, and a connection to, gratitude for and understanding of the world around them. This will become a solid place within each child that they can continually return to for growth, values, compassion, wisdom and joy in their lives. By fostering a love of nature, these children will naturally develop practices of stewardship, sustainability and respect for the beauty and fragility of the planet.

CATERING TO THE INDIVIDUAL

We have a tremendous respect for the essence of many styles of education, including Waldorf and Montessori and Reggio, and incorporate apparatus from many disciplines into our classroom and style. Each child is accommodated according to the child's nature, the parents' philosophy, and where the child will be going to school when they leave here. Some kids are driven to read at barely 4 without prompting and others are not very interested until age 6. We honor the interests of each child and what is important to each family. By using Maria Montessori's concept of a "prepared environment", children can choose work here according to their interests and developmental readiness.

CLASS SIZE

Our small class size is an expression of our belief in "mentoring. Children this age are very prone to imitation and most people learn best by relationship. It is unnatural for a child to be in a group of over 14 kids. Large groups tend to create chaotic moments and bad habits to generate attention, differentiation and belonging. Instead, we nurture listening, caring for each other, and noticing the special gifts of each child. Generally, we have 12 kids and 2 teachers. One day a week this year, we'll have 6 preschoolers with one teacher, and 6-8 homeschoolers with one teacher, though we make it a point to occasionally join groups for a sense of community.

PROGRAM & CALENDAR

PROGRAM

We serve ages 3 to 6 in our preschool program. We spend most of our days outdoors, where we have circle and snack time, explore the natural world, care for animals or plants, find critters and tracks, do native or nature arts and crafts, perform science experiments, immerse in imaginative play, and develop a keen use of our senses. Once a week during harvest season, we gather foods grown on the land here and set up a farm stand for parents. On Tuesdays, 3-5 kids per week prepare food using as much from our gardens or wildlands here as possible. Math and Spanish are integrated into our snack time and often in circle time. Music is integrated throughout the daily activities and further explored in circle time, learning rhythm, occasionally dance, performing individually if desired, sharing music from visiting musicians, etc. We may have specialists come on a particular day for part or all of the year. Last year we had an art teacher every Wednesday. The year before we had a music teacher once a week for a few months. We may hold a regular "Sound Circle" for our 4 and 5 year olds to help prepare them for kindergarten (depending on wishes of parents & readiness of children). We honor the natural tendency of this age to spend a lot of time immersed with friends in imaginary play. The most important things to learn in any preschool environment are graces and courtesies, cooperation and social skills. We have an active peace curriculum which addresses many of those issues plus enhances self-concept and the most important value for lifelong happiness: gratitude.

CALENDAR

School is open 139 days. Conference times and teacher workdays are taken without any reduction in school schedule. We take a week off in fall, 3 weeks near New Year's, 1 week in February, 1 week in April, and 3 Monday holidays. It's best for kids to have a deep experience of all seasons. We strongly encourage family camping in each season, as that probably provides more opportunities for children to connect with nature than any other activity. We call our February break "Snow Week" because there are few Sonoma County residents who could not at least take a day to drive to the snow for a child to play. Every child deserves snow. We humbly acknowledge that not all families have very much time off, but hopefully at least a long weekend in each season can be arranged to get out and experience the outdoors as a family.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

We hold family celebrations and special events, such as campouts, field trips, cookouts, harvest festival, community work days, solstice / equinox / seasonal celebrations. There will also be occasional workshops, parent nights, and events. Grandparents are always invited to our events. Please write the dates from our calendar onto yours, as it is important in building community that the most people attend as possible. More events will be added during the year.

SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS and RATIO

3 days a week we have 12 preschoolers and 2 teachers. One day a week, we have 6 preschoolers with one teacher and up to 8 elementary aged kids doing homeschool enrichment with the other teacher. Anytime we have 6 kids or less (most afternoons), we may have only one teacher on duty with the children. We have 3 teachers who rotate the 3 slots. Director Bev Buswell will teach a minimum of 80% of the time. If one of the 3 is not available, we have a list of qualified substitutes that have the qualifications, background check and experience to provide your child with good care.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

CLOTHING

This is an outdoor-based program. It is absolutely imperative that you provide the proper clothing, as we will be sure your child is protected from the elements. We spend time outside every day, rain or shine, freezing or blazing. Usually we're outside 3-4 of our 4 hours. Please either send your child with or leave with us: 1) a real winter jacket, hat & gloves in the winter, 2) waterproof raincoat and rainpants if there's fog or chance of rain, 3) rubber boots every day every season, 4) shorts & t-shirt or summer dress, swimsuit & sunhat if it's going to be warm, and 5) one to two full changes of clothes every day. Warning: we send home muddy clothes often. Mud play is core to the natural experience of children exploring nature. Hiking boots or workboots are great when it's not too wet outside, as kids can avoid wet feet in morning dew or when watering the garden, but still have good agility to climb trees and run. A winter jacket is not just a fleece jacket or a lined raincoat. It should have a good deal of padding to insulate the child from cold. Long underwear or tights underneath clothes is a good idea during winter here and is essential in cold snaps. Layering clothing is great, as temperatures can easily be in the 30's at 9am and the 60's at 1pm. We will assume that if you want sunscreen on your child, you will do so before dropping him/her off, as we are not allowed to apply it. please label everything they bring to school. You can either keep a full change of clothes in a daypack you provide that stays here or we can provide a box. Check their box or bag once a week to make sure you didn't forget to replace spares that came home. You know your child – if they love water & mud or tend to potty accidents, please keep 2 changes here (maybe 1 in a daypack & 1 in the box?). Second-hand stores and garage sales should have most everything above except rainpants, which can be found at REI, LLBean, Lands' End, etc. If you're having trouble locating or affording any of these items, do not hesitate to ask for advice. I have a few extra pairs of rainboots I can donate.

WATER

Each child should have a water bottle that will not drip when on its side and have their name on the bottom & top in permanent marker. When arriving, please put water bottle into the basket. If you choose to leave it here, we'll wash and fill as needed. For indoor water, they will need to keep a ceramic mug here to drink out of, which we'll wash as needed.

POTTY TRAINING

By the beginning of school, we ask that children be potty trained and comfortable using the toilet away from home. We will make potty runs (bringing groups inside to use toilet) and assist your child with gentle reminders, routines, & expectations.

HANDWASHING and POTTYING PROCEDURES

Please assist your children with washing their hands upon arrival and departure. This is very effective to limit the transmission of disease at preschools. If we are starting the day outside (most days), please have them use the toilet before handwashing and dropping them off to us.

DROP-OFF & PICK-UP PROCEDURE

Drop-off is at 9am. Pick-up is at 1pm in our outdoor area. Routines are important to kids, so we will be working on a smooth start & end at 9am & 1pm. Please NEVER drop off or pick up a child without signing in or out. Please remind anyone else who is driving to sign in & out. Visual or verbal acknowledgement by a staff member is required upon delivery of children. Process: Please follow handwash/potty routine above, sign child in on the sign-in sheet indoors, read blackboard for important messages for the day, put lunchbox and any extra clothes (if you bring daily backpack, etc.) in cubby, put water in water basket, and deliver children to us or let us know that they're here.

PARKING

Wildflowers is located on a private drive that is shared with 2 other households. PLEASE, for this program to continue, it is imperative that everyone give the neighbors the utmost respect by driving slowly and only parking in the driveway area of the school. Please pull as far in as possible to allow for the other cars to park in our driveway. Please don't park along the shared driveway. Carpooling is strongly encouraged and financially rewarded (see tuition rate chart). Apples, grapes, & raspberries on driveway belong to neighbors. Lastly, but most important, be VERY CAREFUL pulling in & out, as children are hard to see. Keep children close to you when walking so that they are safe at pick-up & drop-off times.

PICK-UP AUTHORIZATION

Children can only go home with people who are listed on the "Identification and Emergency Information" form. In the event of an emergency, people will be contacted in the order in which you list them on the form. If I haven't met one of these authorized people, please present me with a photo of them ahead. If someone's not on this list, we will not be able to release your child to them unless it is amended by you in writing. If child is sick or otherwise needs to be picked up and we can't reach parents, we may call one of these authorized people to come pick your child up. If your child is otherwise being picked up by someone other than parent or carpool parent, please let us know that he/she is to be picked up by one of these authorized people for that specific day. Appropriate car seats are required by everyone driving a child that still legally requires it to or from school or any school event.

COMMUNICATION

Personal info that might be needed on some days, such as whether a child didn't eat breakfast, had a "melt-down", stayed up very late the night before, has a runny nose, etc. is best communicated verbally with us. If anything major occurs (such as divorce, death in the family, etc.), please try to contact us the day before school. It can be hard to pay full attention when parents are coming & going at drop-off time.

CONFERENCES

Parent-teacher conferences are encouraged at least twice a year. September and January are the recommended times, but feel free to schedule a conference at any time during the year. It is recommended that both parents attend and children do not, so please plan ahead for child care. We can help with names and numbers for child care if you need them. Often parents trade off and care for kids in our schoolyard.

CHATTING

Having time for parents and teachers to chat together is important in keeping an ongoing open communication process so that we are a team educating and caring for your child here. Daily check-ins are often important. And having time for parents to chat with each other can be an important part of building community. But please keep 3 things in mind: 1) Never speak about sensitive matters or children in front of children. 2) Unless it's important about that very day, please reserve chatting (unless critical to that day) with teachers for after school and reserve any morning chatting with parents to outside of the area we are settling kids in (outside gate, etc.). At the beginning of school, it is best to help the focus for us to be on helping children to settle in. 3) Please respect that teachers need to get to their afternoon routines, so if you need more than about 10-15 minutes, it's best to schedule some time together or ask if it's an ok time then to speak longer. Thanks!

VOLUNTEERING

The garden and nature space are a very important part of your child's program here. Though preschoolers love to play in the dirt and plant seeds, their contribution to the totality of care needed for a flourishing garden and play areas are limited. Parents are asked to attend most of the community work days, both to help create a flourishing environment for your child and to create a sense of community. By building our space together, we can build a group of families raising kids together. Field trips are also important and we need parents to help with driving. Permission slips for field trips are mandatory & copies should be carried by drivers. Offers to volunteer, whether during school to help with the children, or during non-school hours to assist with projects here, are greatly appreciated.

SAYING GOODBYE

It can be a delicate issue for some children whether their parent stays for a while and how much. If a child does not know when the parent is leaving, there can be constant stress waiting for that moment and he/she may never fully settle. If you have a child who may have concern about your departure, let's make a plan together ahead. The most important thing is to tell your child exactly what will happen and then do exactly that. Let them learn how to let go and find their rhythm here, make friends, and find their favorite things to do at school, while letting them know you have confidence that they will do fine. Weekly conferences in those 1st weeks are fine if you or your child has concerns. Every child is different. Together, we can make a plan that works for your child.

FORMS

The following forms must be kept on file and parent is responsible for updating when necessary: 1. Registration Form, 2. Health & Safety Information, 3. Immunization Record (blue card), 4. Consent for Emergency Medical Treatment, 5. Contract & Waiver (which references Calendar & this document), 6. Identification and Emergency Information, 7. Acknowledgement of receipt of: "Notification of Parents' Rights", "Caregiver Background Check Process," and "Consumer Awareness Information."

TICKS

Of course, a school with a focus on nature is going to spend time in wild natural areas. Please check your child EVERY SINGLE DAY when your child returns home. Long pants with tick repellent on them add protection. Deer ticks are extremely small. Ask us for a "tick card" if you aren't positive how to ID them. If you find a tick, take it to Sonoma County Health Dept for test and let us know results, please. If it bit your child (or you), see a Dr. versed in Lyme Disease.

ILLNESS

If a child has had any of the following symptoms in the last 36 hours before a school morning, please don't bring them to school: fever, vomiting, upset stomach, stomach ache, sore throat, diarrhea, skin problems, body aches, sneezing, coughing, eye or nose drainage or any other symptom you think might indicate they are just coming down with something. Many times, a child comes back to school without that extra day of rest and is so tired they end up in tears to go home. Other times, the illness takes its next turn. For your children & other's, please be ok with them having a full day of wellness before returning. If a child shows signs of illness here, we will call his/her parents to come pick up their child. In cases where the child has a runny nose or a cough for more than 2 days, a doctor's note can admit them back to school (or talk to Bev if that's not reasonable in your case – allergies, etc.). If medication is necessary for your child, there is a state form to fill out before we are allowed to administer it. If there have been contagious illnesses recently in your household, please inform us (flu, etc.).

TOYS FROM HOME

To avoid conflicts, we ask that toys from home stay home. Your child's snack day is your child's "show and tell" day. On that day, the child can bring in items that teach us something (nature items, unique pets, books, small machines, antiques, musical instruments, etc.). Small items from the natural world belonging to the season we are celebrating (or to all seasons) can be donated or loaned to our Nature Shelves/Table at any time and/or shared in circle.

TV & VIDEO/COMPUTER GAMES

Children who watch TV and video games really DO affect the school environment and other children. Their fantasy and discussion often focuses on scenes from TV or video games. Then we have a culture in which play is based on TV & movies, drawing them & other kids in to that media world. Children act out the scenes because 1) they're in an age of imitation, and 2) often they need to act them out in order to process it. Their free time should be spent making up games and immersed in make believe and creativity. Every minute they're watching TV they are wiring their brains for thinking passively, being indoors, & needing high media stimulation instead of creatively interacting with the real world. We request families to be careful about selecting quality & quantity of media for children, especially the day before class. Ask if you would like any of my handouts on how to limit TV/video, or put you in touch with one of the families here without a TV for ideas.

ELECTRONIC WORLD VS. NATURAL WORLD

The greatest threat to returning our kids to the nature-based life children have had for millennium is today's electronic-based life of youth culture. As a group mentoring children to bring them closer to nature, we can create support structures for parents and kids to assist each other to unplug in a plugged-in world. Let's support each other in real-world immersion. Let me know if you would like to have a couple of classes, meetings, support groups, whatever, here to assist families in helping these children now to avoid the epidemic of youth media addiction. How about a "Free for 3" campaign for us all to give up TV together for 3 weeks?

FOOD

We will have a snack calendar for the month whereby parents rotate turns for bringing healthy snacks. Group snacks must be at least about 90% organic and contain no sugar or refined grains and no or little packaging. Any grains served must be 100% whole (read label!). On Mondays, Wednesdays & Thursdays, children bring their lunches in non-disposable containers that are reusable and have no advertisements or licensed characters or intense graphics on them (baskets, boxes, cloth bags, zip-arounds, etc.). On Tuesdays, kids will take turns in the kitchen preparing a communal meal from local, organic sources, including from the gardens the kids tend or wild foods here.

SUSTAINABLE EATING

From the most local of our environments (our bodies) to the most global, the most sustainable food system thrives on fresh, locally produced foods. Please try to send zero waste lunches (bulk put in washable containers instead of heavy packaging on individual items). Any waste coming to school with child will go home with child. The attached handout "Wildflowers Food Policy" should be read thoroughly to adhere to the philosophies of our program.

BIRTHDAYS AND HOLIDAYS

We will have celebrations of gratitude, seasons, and the cycle of life, as well as explore many holiday traditions from cultures around the world. Using a Montessori tradition, each child on their birthday will carry a globe around a "sun" (usually a candle) for each year they are born. Family members are welcome to be present for the celebration. Snack that day can be brought by the birthday child's family, but please leave out sugar and refined flour. If your child will have a birthday party outside of school, please don't have invitations passed out at school unless all the students here are invited (can be hard for the uninvited).

POLICIES & PROCEDURES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

TUITION

Our tuition is an annual fee, payable in ten installments (Aug.-May) or all at once (latter gets 6% discount). We have structured our tuition based on whether the child is brought in a carpool or not. Carpooling is important in respecting the neighbors and is in keeping with our philosophy of contributing to a sustainable society. If one family drops off & picks up another family's child, that's a "2 car pool" and both families get the discount. Tuition goes down with the number of cars you take off the road. You will choose the tuition plan that best matches your guess as to how much carpooling you will do. (If a custom plan is needed, we can create one). Otherwise, the rate will be in our original contract according to the carpool plan you choose, so billing will not be necessary. If you need to choose a different carpool plan, let me know & we can change it mid-year, with the associated adjustment in tuition. Ask if you have any questions or special requests, such as monthly receipts. Remember to talk to your tax adviser about child care tax credits. If your family is low income (or lower middle income in Sebastopol or Graton), ask about local programs that assist families with child care costs.

WORK TRADE

We may be able to arrange for the 1st few people who ask to do a work trade for a portion of the tuition. We honor all human beings as being equally worthy of their time so trade is at a flat rate of \$15/hour. Except in special role functions, no multi-month accumulation of hours due can be accrued. For each hour of service put in during one month, \$15 will be deducted from the next installment (or paid outright if year was paid in full). If hours are not put in that month, full tuition is due. Occasionally, we can make special arrangements if it benefits both the school and the family.

REGISTRATION FEE

In keeping with standard local practice, we do ask for a one-time \$150 registration fee in only the child's first year. Returning students (students who paid that fee the prior year) do not need to pay this fee again. This can be paid with August installment or at time of paying annual tuition. We do not charge a separate materials fee.

LAST MONTH'S INSTALLMENT = DEPOSIT

A pre-paid May 2012 installment (or 1/10th of the annual tuition if the year is paid in full at the beginning of the year) is asked for as a deposit. This will fully apply to the May 2012 installment (or annual tuition). There is an option to pay half at the time of registration and the balance by July 1st. Once at least half of a full month's installment is paid (or 1/20th of the annual tuition if you were planning to pay the year in full), space is reserved for your child. If the deposit is paid to reserve a space and then the family decides that the child will not be attending Wildflowers School after all, half of the deposit (1/20th of annual tuition) will be retained as the non-refundable deposit that was paid to hold the space for the child.

SUBJECT TO SIGN-UP

If not enough children are signed up for a particular slot (for instance, 1-3pm Monday or...), we reserve the right to cancel that option or offer it at a higher rate.

SIBLINGS

Siblings in the same program and time length receive 10% off tuition for the 2nd child. Registration fee for siblings is 50% off (\$80).

AFTER-SCHOOL CARE

After-school care must be previously arranged & is not always available. The rate will be \$15/hour per child or \$11/hour each for 2 children or more (related or not). Signing up for the regular afterschool program (on Monday & Wednesday 1-3pm) for the school year costs between \$7 and \$9.36/hr depending on which carpool and payment plan you choose (see rate chart). Space permitting, you can arrange for your child to “drop-in” for \$11/hour.

BILLING AND LATE PAYMENT FEE

We do not do billing. If you're not sure what you owe, a bill can be requested with 7-10 days notice. Occasionally we will bill those who have forgotten to pay. Whether we do or not, any bills left unpaid will incur a 10% late charge on the 10th of the month. Families chronically not paying their bills may be asked to leave the school. Please, if you're having financial difficulties mid year, don't hesitate to ask for a meeting with me about it. There are often (not always) creative solutions to alleviate some of the burden when something unexpected comes up in the family finances.

LATE PICK-UP FEE

If parents pick up their child more than 15 minutes late without previous arrangement, they may be billed \$15 every 15 minutes they are late. If parents are more than 15 minutes late without previous arrangement more than 5 times in a school year, the provider has the option of terminating this contract.

TERMINATION OF CONTRACT

This arrangement can be terminated either by mutual consent or by either party if the safety or well-being of any child is at risk or if the other party does not uphold the responsibilities contained herein. In these cases, a refund of tuition will be given on a pro-rated basis, though the deposit will not be refunded. For other reasons, such as but not limited to, changing one's mind, a space opening up in another school, going on vacation, etc., responsibility for remaining installments of annual tuition are still due and payable.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

WILDFLOWERS NATURE SCHOOL

2011-12 RATES FOR PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

	NO CARPOOL	2 CAR POOL	3 CAR POOL	PEDESTRIAN
9-1 : 4 days				
Yearly tuition	5520	4968	4692	4416
Monthly installment (10)	552	497	469	442
Year pd by 8/15/11 (6% off)	5189	4670	4410	4151
9-1: 3 days				
Yearly tuition	4250	3825	3613	3400
Monthly installment (10)	425	383	361	340
Year pd by 8/15/11 (6% off)	3995	3596	3396	3196
9-1: 2 days				
Yearly tuition	3550	3195	3018	2840
Monthly installment (10)	355	320	302	284
Year pd by 8/15/11 (6% off)	3337	3003	2836	2670
add on 1-3pm: 2 days				
Yearly tuition	1300	1170	1105	1040
Monthly installment (10)	130	117	111	104
Year pd by 8/15/11 (6% off)	1222	1100	1039	978
4 days: 2 from 9-1 & 2 from 9-3				
Yearly tuition	6250	5625	5313	5000
Monthly installment (10)	625	563	531	500
Year pd by 8/15/11 (6% off)	5875	5400	4994	4700