

# Valley of the Flowers School

## Multi-Age Kindergarten Parent Handbook 2024-2025

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*"I am struck by the fact that the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think that the same is true of human beings. We do not wish to see children precocious, making great strides in their early years like sprouts, producing a soft and perishable timber, but better if they expand slowly at first, as if contending with difficulties, and so are solidified and perfected. Such trees continue to expand with nearly equal rapidity to extreme old age."*

- Henry David Thoreau

## *Table of Contents*

Multi-Age Kindergarten Program Overview.....	3
Foundations for Literacy & Numeracy in Early Childhood.....	5
Nourishing Meals.....	7
Dress Code.....	8
Media.....	11
Illness.....	13
Parent Meetings.....	13
Parent and Teacher Conferences.....	13
Volunteer Opportunities and Community Contributions.....	14
Home Visits.....	14
Birthday Celebrations at School.....	14
Suggestions for Home Birthday Celebrations.....	14
Minimizing Challenging Behavior.....	15
Early Childhood Discipline Policy.....	16
Required Parent Reading.....	17
Helpful Resources.....	18

## *What to Bring to School*

- 1) Indoor Shoes OR slippers that can stay at school: Comfortable indoor shoes that your child can run, jump and play in. We recommend Soft Star shoes or similar as they don't fall off, are cozy but not too hot. Please no crocs, loose slippers or sandals as they fall off during vigorous play.
- 2) Extra Change of Clothes to stay at school: Seasonally appropriate socks, shirts, pants, underwear, etc. Hats, gloves and an extra layer are nice for early cold morning weather.  
**Please label clothing with your child's name.**
- 3) Seasonally appropriate attire - see section on Appropriate Clothing

Success of your child's experience in school is greatly enhanced by the collaboration of both the parents and the teachers. We depend on you to help us in our endeavor to provide your child with the optimum play and learning environment. Please read through the following sections carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

## ***Multi-Age Kindergarten Program Overview***

At Valley of the Flowers School the essence of our work is to nurture and protect the innocence and innate wonder of early childhood. Working from Rudolf Steiner's insights on child development, we strive to allow the potential of each child to unfold. Our kindergarten environment develops the growing child's senses, imagination, physical body and awareness of self and others in a nurturing, rhythmical, and homelike environment full of love, warmth and joy. The child is secure in the feeling that he or she is loved. This creates the basis for healthy development and brings forth the child's reverence and joy for living.

We have a mixed-age kindergarten, where children from three years old to six years old share the day together from 8:30am to 2:30pm. This age range gives children many opportunities to share in the experience of a large, extended family.

Our program is based upon the concepts of imitation, rhythm, and creative play. The name "Kindergarten" means "children's garden." This is the image that we choose to carry on behalf of the young child: a place where childhood is considered a valid and honorable experience, not a time to be rushed toward adulthood. In the Kindergarten, a child will gradually become accustomed to working within a group, listening to stories, interacting with a teacher, and following a daily routine, while at the same time being aided in his or her development as an individual through the encouragement of creative play, practical life skills, and artistic opportunities. We deeply understand the young child and the need for movement, as well as the child's devotion to learning about the world through imitating everything he or she experiences (hence our striving to be worthy of imitation). Here are some of the core activities of a Waldorf Early Childhood Program and the significance of each in relationship to lifelong learning.

Please note that a child's participation will depend on their age. The youngers are happiest playing. As they get older their participation will increase.

***Circle Time*** The class is brought together to sing songs and recite verses with the teacher. These may be connected with the seasons, a particular fairy tale or story, or just part of the general lore of childhood. Circle time also includes developmental movement activities to accompany the songs and verses. Repeating and remembering verses sets the stage for the more intense memory work that will be required in elementary school. Repetition is lauded as a foundation for healthy brain development. Rhyming sounds and alliteration found in poems and songs educate the ear, forming the beginnings of spelling and phonics. Directed movement is another basis for healthy brain development.

***Craft and Artistic Activities*** Wet-on-wet watercolor painting, beeswax modeling, crayon drawing, as well as various forms of handwork such as finger knitting, simple sewing,

and woodworking are done as group activities or at the individual initiative of the older kindergarten child. These activities encourage the child's natural sense of beauty, color, and form, as well as laying the groundwork for artistic techniques that will be needed later. They also aid in the development of fine motor skills.

***Creative Playtime*** The children have a long period of time each day during which they imagine and play with a wide variety of natural materials and playthings, following their own initiative. During this time, the teachers are involved in meaningful work - preparing lunch and snack, sewing, cleaning, making toys, gardening or any number of practical activities. The children are always welcome to participate. An atmosphere of work and play permeates our garden and classroom. Within the activities of play, children integrate the world and practice their life skills such as movement and balance, sensory integration, speech and language capacity, social and emotional interactions, and imaginative and cognitive development.

***Festivals*** We mark the rhythms of the year through the changing seasons and the coming and going of festivals. As the year weaves from one season and festival to another, we are provided with a true reason for preparation and celebration. For the young child, the preparation is half of the joy. They love decorating the room, creating handcrafts, baking special treats, and learning songs and verses chosen just for that particular festival. The stories that are told give the children a pictorial understanding of the festivals, and speak deeply to them, so that we do not need to make explanations. Each room has a nature table which changes with the seasons, bringing into the room a way for the children to celebrate these changes. You might like to let your child have a small table, shelf, or windowsill to create his or her own nature table at home with treasures from walks and outings. Please mark your calendar and plan to bring the whole family to our school festivals. You can find the dates on the school calendar which is also found on our website.

***Life Arts*** Part of the daily experience is tending to the domestic life (cleaning, gardening, cooking, repairing) and self care (toileting, hair brushing, hand washing). It is a process-oriented approach. For example, the children may grind the grains that they will later mix into their flour for bread making. Involving the children in practical activities and care of their materials, their environment, and themselves lays the groundwork for organizational skills needed in adult life.

***Music*** Singing is woven throughout the day and is often used for transitioning from one activity to another. Sometimes simple instruments, such as chimes and kinder-harps, are also available for the children's use. Simple singing games provide songs and rhymes for parents and children alike to enjoy. The children learn to mark the seasons, develop their sense of rhythm, and enhance their memory skills through the singing of specifically chosen songs. Music lays the foundation for future math and engineering skills and can be a soothing influence throughout life.

***Outdoor Play and Morning Walks*** The nurturing of a child's senses through outdoor experiences and activities is cherished in the early years. Indeed it is crucial! Children deeply experience sunlight and darkness, sparkling frosts, muddy puddles, and clear blue skies. In addition to outside playtime, class walks are taken regularly. We will be outside in all weather so appropriate clothing is non-negotiable! (Please see our Clothing Section below). A child's experience of nature play lays the foundation for later studies of plants and animals, the weather, geology, astronomy, and other natural sciences. Extensive outdoor experiences also hone the child's observation skills.

***Lunch*** The teachers and children share a wholesome, organic, homemade family-style lunch. It is likely that the children have also helped to prepare the food and set the table. Afterwards, they help clear the table and wash their dishes. An emphasis on gratitude for the food and on table manners sets the stage for lifelong social skills. Expression of gratitude for the simple gifts of everyday life builds a foundation of appreciation and respect for our environment.

***Story Time*** Children hear a story every day told directly by the teacher. Stories are often followed by or sometimes told along with a puppet show. The ability to sit and listen to an adult for a sustained period of time is a skill that is gradually developed. The oral tradition of language arts development in Waldorf Schools and the content of the stories expose the children to the beauty of language and literacy.

***Rhythms*** Children are carried along by the rhythms of the world they live in, from the rhythms of breathing in their bodies, to the daily rhythms of sleeping and waking. The yearly cycle of the seasons and the rhythmic procession of stars across the heavens are both part of life's experience for adults and children. The Waldorf view is that children flourish when their daily activities reflect the natural order of life with a rhythmic arrangement of the day. Just as children are carried along by the regular rhythms of the school day, they are also nourished by the regular routine at home. As difficult as it is in modern life to establish regular mealtimes and bedtimes, we strongly encourage you to do so. **It is very important for young children to have an early supper and go to bed at the same time every night. We strongly recommend that bedtime (meaning be asleep time) be by 7 pm, so they can get their needed 12 hours of rest, to be up at 7 am and have time for a healthy, protein breakfast before coming to school.** Please feel free to contact us if you would like some ideas for making this transition a happy one for parent and child.

### ***Foundations for Literacy & Numeracy in Early Childhood***

Nurturing and protecting the wonder of childhood is a key element in the Waldorf Early Childhood Programs. Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf Education, was a pioneer in the area of developmentally based, age-appropriate learning, and many of his insights

and practical applications were later borne out by the work of Gesell, Piaget, Gardner, and others.

The Waldorf approach recognizes that children younger than seven years learn best when taught concretely through movement and example, whereas school-age children (ages 7–14) learn best when they are engaged imaginatively and artistically. Then, when children reach high school, around age 14, their growing ability to analyze and think abstractly has a rich body of experience on which to draw.

The first stage (Birth to Seven) is the time of adventure, discovery, and mastery of movement. A child under age seven has not yet completed the process of physical and sense maturation, and it is in his best interest to be in an environment where these aspects are nurtured. This is indeed learning of a very important sort. All of a child's innate activity and focus during this stage is devoted to optimizing the workings of the body and discovering the world through the senses. A body that has mastered this stage is coordinated, capable, strong, and willing. The child's body will continue to grow and their senses sharpen based on the happenings of the first seven years. If a focus toward cognitive abstraction pushes into this stage, the child is prematurely giving their attention to the next stage at the expense of mastering the first.

Therefore, in a Waldorf school we consider a relevant and developmentally appropriate kind of learning through play, movement, and relationships with the adults and the peers. The question for the first grade readiness is not proving that the child is academically ready, but asking if she/he is physically and socially ready.

### ***Hellos, Good-byes, and Separation***

We will greet your child each morning as they arrive. Please accompany your child to the garden and take a moment to greet your child's teachers and sign your child in, providing a model for your child and helping to create a positive transition. It is important to be punctual for the start of each school day; this allows the child to enter into the group's activity with the greatest ease. Please arrive no later than 9 am. For new students or younger students, please arrive 5-10 minutes earlier. It will be easier for your child to encounter children one at a time as they arrive, rather than walking into an already large group. At 8:35 we will all, parents, children and teachers join together for a short and sweet Morning Greeting Circle. You may then bid your child farewell as they go to Mother Earth's Tea Shop.

Saying good-bye, especially at the start of the school year, can be challenging for both parents and children. Preparations at home can help you and your child have the most successful separation. Having your child's clothes and school bag ready the night before, getting up early enough for grooming and a nourishing breakfast will allow you

the opportunity to spend time with your child saying good-bye in a calm, unrushed manner.

To ensure that your child has a good start to each school day it is helpful to consider the following: -Have they had enough sleep? (ideally 7:00pm to 7:00 am) -Have they had a good, warm breakfast including some protein? -Are they dressed warmly and appropriately for outdoor play in all weather? (layers are the best! Please see clothing section...) -Have they had a bowel movement?

The first separation can be a big step. It is helpful for the child to sense the parent's confidence that this is indeed something positive and joyous, and that you will soon be reunited (turn the child's attention toward reunion). It also helps children to know how drop-off time will go. For example, you may inform them ahead of time, something like this: "When we get to school we will say "Hello to ...", and then you can show me the playground. Then I need my 3 hugs and 3 kisses to last me through the day. I will pick you up after school, and we will..." Then give 3 hugs and 3 kisses, and leave with confidence, knowing that your children are in good hands. If they cry for long, we promise to call, but that is a rare event. Usually the anticipation of you leaving is the worst part. Soon your child will be happily playing or helping the teacher. Experience has shown that a short and sweet ritual is best in helping children transition to begin their day with the other children. For a child that is struggling to say goodbye, you may 1) give the child to their Primary Teacher after your goodbye (the Teacher will *Never* take the child from you); or 2) When arranged in advance parents may stay during the whole outdoor time *IF* engaged in meaningful work.

Dismissal is at 2:30 pm. For your child's sake, please be punctual when picking up. Also, as dismissal is a very busy time, **please make sure to sign your child out when you arrive.** Late fees may apply.

### ***Nourishing Meals***

A warm, healthy, homemade lunch made in the tradition of Nourishing Traditions will be provided every day. These generally include a grain of the day, soaked overnight, vegetables and a protein source. We strive to use organic and local ingredients as often as possible. Snack can be apple slices with nut butter (almond, cashew or sunflower), sourdough flatbread, or oatmeal made with sprouted oats. While our snack does include foods containing gluten, with your help, we are able to adjust for students with other food allergies. We strive to expand children's palates, while offering kid-friendly meals. Cool filtered water is always available.

## ***Dress Code***

Clothing worn to school needs to be simple and comfortable, allowing the child to play freely and to participate without concern in their many daily activities. Clothing can be the cause of distraction, and images on clothes can serve as impetus for play.

**Please, no media inspired clothing.** In cold weather include extra hats and mittens. Don't forget plenty of socks and underwear. All clothing must be labeled with your child's name. Toys, jewelry, blinking shoes, umbrellas, collections, or anything of the latest media fads, are all too distracting and interfere with the children engaging actively and creatively during play time. Please leave these items at home, it can be a traumatic experience when they get lost or broken at school.

## ***Warmth***

Preserving warmth in the children's bodies preserves their health – cold is a stress for the body. Children are also not fully aware of their need for more layers; they may tell you they are warm even while their lips turn blue! It is helpful to check a child's fingers, toes, or forehead; if they are cold, then their body is shunting away warmth from the extremities in order to maintain their core temperature (this is a survival instinct). In early childhood, the internal organs are still developing, and maintaining core body temperature is vital to this process. Children often become either overactive or underactive when cold, and this distracts from their ability to be fully present in the group. When they are dressed warmly, they are able to focus and join in comfortably. Warmth has a very nurturing quality! Being dressed warmly enough can feel like a reassuring hug.

## ***Appropriate Clothing***

Our guidelines for appropriate clothing have been established to provide the children with the necessary comfort and warmth to fully engage in our school activities without distraction. Please shop from our carefully curated [SHOPPING LIST](#). Our teachers update and edit the list each year to make sure you can find adequate and functional gear for our outdoor based program. Oftentimes making a substitution results in spending more money in the long run as inadequate clothing/gear tends to result in cold, wet, and unhappy children.

## ***In the Winter, Late Fall and Early Spring... - Layers! Layers! Layers!***

There's an old saying - "*It's easier to stay warm, than to get warm.*" We can always remove a layer or two as the day progresses and needs change. It is much easier to undress a bit than to try to bundle up a child after they already have a chill. Natural fibers like silk or woolen undergarments are very warming for the children and will keep them warm even when damp. Cotton does not! There are excellent sources of soft (not itchy) merino wool long underwear available. With 100% wool, washing is needed only every few weeks, if they are aired out each evening.



Dressing your child for the weather is one of the most important things you can do to ensure that your child has a positive experience being outdoors. Each child needs to come to school fully dressed for the day (the teachers are not responsible for dressing the children). Again, please shop from our teacher curated [SHOPPING LIST](#).

It's as simple as 1, 2, 3:  
a base layer,  
a layer of warm play clothes  
and an outermost waterproof layer

### ***Rain Gear***

This is needed in the late fall through spring even when it is not raining. The children are walking in the tall, dewy grass, sitting on the wet ground, running in the wind, and possibly rolling in the mud. Rain pants are essential for these months for warmth and dryness, as well as for providing the freedom to explore their environment without having to worry about the weather conditions. In the Spring, as the weather is often unpredictable, please be prepared to send rain gear daily. Again, please choose from the [SHOPPING LIST](#).

### ***In the Summer, Early Fall, Late Spring...***

If you use it, send your child to school with sunscreen already on and a sun hat, preferably one with a round broad brim that can protect their face, back of the neck and shoulders. Even on cloudy days, it is necessary to have a sun hat available just in case. Pants are recommended even in hot weather (instead of shorts or skirts/dresses). Please always send your child to school in sturdy walking shoes (and not flip-flops or crocs). They are going to be running and climbing and supportive, closed toed footwear is imperative. In the early fall and late spring, one layer of lightweight woolens are a good idea to have just in case.

### ***Tops and Bottoms***

We suggest buying a larger size top than you might initially think, but properly sized bottoms so they are not bunchy in their boots. Some parents like to save money by purchasing cashmere sweaters from the thrift store, shrunk to fit!

### ***Extra Rain Gear***

In terms of quantity, some families have found it best to have an extra set of rain gear at home during the rainy season (this can be the same gear that lives in the spare clothes bins before the rainy season begins). These do not have to be the expensive kinds recommended on the shopping list. REI rain gear is just fine for their backup set.

### ***Caring for your child's gear***

Once it is really wet and muddy, rain and snow gear can go in the wash by itself when you get home on the rinse cycle (without soap - to preserve the waterproofing a little

longer), and then either drip dry or put it in a low-heat dryer cycle. Jackets may be slightly less muddy than pants, so you may get a few days of wear out of them before needing to rinse them. If you do need to use a detergent, consider Nikwax Tech Wash for washing and revitalizing water repellency and breathability and Nikwax TX.Direct Wash-In for re-waterproofing.

Tear-Aid is a product for repairing raingear. This product is much more effective than duct tape in the long run (duct tape gets gummy), but for a short-term fix duct tape works in a pinch.

Kookaburra or Eucalan wool wash products protect the lanolin in the wool which maintains the warm-when-wet properties. Unicorn Beyond Fibre Wash (NOT BEYOND CLEAN- IT IS TOO POWERFUL) & Unicorn Beyond Soft are also nice for washing wool as well as Woolite Delicate Hypoallergenic Liquid Laundry Detergent.

We acknowledge that purchasing the recommended items and brands may add hundreds of dollars to the cost of your child's school experience at our school, but feel it is a worthwhile investment since they live in this climate whether they attend school outdoors or not, and it is always beneficial to have quality gear so that you preserve your child's health and so that they enjoy their time in nature. Thank you for your commitment to supporting your child and our work at Valley of the Flowers School.

### ***Safety Outdoors***

We strive to meet meaningful health and safety standards. Safety has priority over all other considerations.

- A comprehensive first aid kit is always carried along with health forms for each child. Communication devices to be carried by all teachers.
- The low child-adult ratio allows continuous observation of the children as they interact with each other and their environment. Children will never be left unsupervised. If an activity becomes dangerous, we redirect it in a safe direction.
- The risks from potential dangers in the children's daily outdoor experiences are minimized because the teachers know the site: where stinging nettle grows, where there's a deep spot in the creek, and where dense undergrowth blocks clear vision. Risk assessments will be done at the beginning of each day, and will continue during the day.

Several other aspects of the experience also promote safety:

- The teachers will be well versed in plant/fungus identification and wilderness survival.
- The children will learn how to be safe around wildlife.
- The activities will be introduced gradually and children will be given opportunities to learn the safety rules quickly. The rules will be reviewed often.

- The children’s parents will be told how to clothe their children appropriately (see above). When children are properly dressed they enjoy being outside in even the coldest and wettest weather. With poor clothing the experience can not only be miserable, but dangerous. For the safety of all children we will be strict about our dress code. During the cold and wet season waterproof gear and wool/silk layers are key. Rainy days are some of the most fun days for children, when puddles for jumping in are everywhere. Preparing for any kind of weather, especially being appropriately dressed in waterproof clothing, is something that parents and kids quickly learn!

### ***Tree climbing***

Children will be allowed to climb trees. But, never higher than they themselves or the teacher feel comfortable.

### ***Sticks***

This is a unique childhood activity. Children will be instructed to carry sticks pointed down and never pointed at a person. Throwing is allowed into the forest and away from the others.

### ***Plants***

Children will be asked to bring any harvested plants to the teacher for identification. We will be learning to identify plants and to understand their use.

### ***Insects***

It is important to teach children how to recognize potentially harmful insects and those that are safe. Precautions will be taken and these will be taught to the children.

### ***Stones***

Throwing stones is fun and children will be allowed to throw stones into the water, or set aim under supervision.

### ***Weather***

We follow the same weather guidelines as the Bozeman School District. “Generally students will go outside for recess unless the temperature falls below 0 degrees Fahrenheit or if the combination of wind chill and temperature necessitate limited outdoor exposure.”

### ***Media***

Our vision is creating a sacred, natural space for children where they are free from exposure to media influences and distractions.

Media includes television, computers, video games and radios, and has become an intensely invasive force into the imagination and souls of our children. Their senses and nerve systems are greatly assaulted by rapidly flashing images on screens, interfering with their concentration and visual tracking. Ideas and images are being imposed upon them, rather than allowing them to develop their own imaginations. Media often presents frightening scenarios which reinforce stereotypes.

When children habitually interact with technology more than with loving family members and nature, they are unable to weave a positive social fabric with each other and adults. The world is in need of people with human initiative and creative problem solving skills in order to recreate culture. This will happen by intimately knowing the self and the natural world around us.

Due to the developmental needs of the young child, we encourage you to find media-alternative ways for your child to spend time. Since young children learn through imitation, the best way to connect and teach our children is to include them in the real domestic work of the family, such as gardening, cooking, carpentry, cleaning, washing, and helping parents or siblings. Providing the children with an environment that will stimulate their imagination will offer them hours of play and the opportunity to practice autonomy. Access to open-ended play items, such as bed sheets or yards of fabric, movable furniture, kitchen cookware, dress-up clothes or play silks, a basket of musical instruments, all provide hours of activity and creative fun. An art corner filled with paper, paint, crayons, glue, string, sticks, etc. can be the answer to that age old question, "What can I do?" or statements like, "I'm bored, there is nothing to do."

In addition, children thrive with movement. Media is passive and a child's energy is stymied when seated in front of a screen. Developmental needs like jumping, dancing, spinning, climbing, hopping, skipping, are crucial for developing awareness of their bodies. In doing so, they are developing neural pathways, which will gradually be utilized intellectually. Completion of sensory integration is the prerequisite for the successful experience of learning math, reading, and writing.

In our recommended reading list at the end of this handbook, you will find sources that can provide you with scientifically based information to support your own common sense reasons for toning down and tuning out modern technology and media in the daily life of your young child.

Please note that drastically limiting exposure to electronic screens will enable your child to get the most out of this school experience. It is rewarding! Teachers at Valley of the Flowers School are here to support you in this endeavor and are happy to answer questions or offer support.

## ***Illness***

The best place for your child to be properly nursed through an illness is at home. School is a busy place and not the right environment for a sick child. **Please do not send your child to school with colored discharges (for example, green snot), a fever, deep cough, rash, diarrhea, after vomiting or any infectious condition.** Children can be adamant about wanting to come to school, but it is far better for them to remain at home until they are truly well. All working parents know the desperate feeling of needing to go to work when a little one is not feeling well. The teachers are very sympathetic to this situation, but we urge parents to arrange back-up childcare. After an illness, children often appear healthy in the morning, but are still not up to the vigorous activity of school. Please allow your child at least one full day of rest after an illness before returning to class.

## ***Attendance Policy***

In the event of an absence, either planned or unplanned, please notify the Teachers (Ms. Gloria and Ms. Elena) that your child will be out of school via text (we will see it at the end of the day). Since rhythm and routine are very important to the young child, Valley of the Flowers School does not offer make-up classes in our programs.

## ***Parent Participation and Responsibilities***

*The healthy social life is found when,  
In the mirror of each human soul,  
The whole community finds its reflection  
And when, in the community,  
The strength of each individual is living.  
~Rudolf Steiner*

## ***Parent Meetings***

Parent meetings are scheduled once or twice a year, providing an opportunity for parents to learn about the operation of our school and to give their input. Please save these important dates on your calendar and plan to attend! Parent participation is vital to the health of our school!

## ***Parent and Teacher Conferences***

Individual conferences are scheduled twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring, providing an opportunity for parents and teachers to share their impressions and concerns. Though these two times are formally scheduled, teachers are grateful to hear immediately of any significant changes or circumstances in the child's life.

Additional conferences can be arranged at any time if parents have a special concern about their child or the class.

### ***Volunteer Opportunities and Community Contributions***

A successful Waldorf school is dependent upon, and truly grateful for, the contributions of energy, talent, support and commitment from the parents, families and the surrounding community. Your profession, talents, hobbies, and the activities that bring you joy, can all help support our school as well as give you the opportunity to become an integral part of our community. We have found, in our experience, that the parents and families, who have been the most involved in the workings of our school, have also been the most fulfilled and satisfied with their experience here. This is the best way to involve yourself actively in your child's education at Valley of the Flowers School. To find out details about how you can best get involved, you can contact your child's teachers, or refer to the school newsletter.

### ***Home Visits***

Having a teacher visit your home can be a wonderful way to bridge the two worlds of home and school for the child. Home visits help the teacher and child connect outside the classroom, as the teacher becomes acquainted with the student's brothers and sisters, family pets, favorite toys, etc. These can be enriching experiences for the teacher, child and parent.

### ***Birthday Celebrations at School***

Birthday celebrations in the Waldorf school are important moments for the birthday child and the entire class. For the teacher, the birthday provides an opportunity to come to know the child more deeply, observing his or her special gifts, strengths and challenges, while considering the child's growth from birth to the present. The outer preparation for the birthday involves parents, teachers and other children. Parents, siblings and close relatives are invited to the classroom celebration for our older kinder children (turning 5 and 6). It is a wonderful opportunity for the birthday child to share his or her family with the whole class.

### ***Suggestions for Home Birthday Celebrations***

A child's birthday is a special time to honor and celebrate the unique individual that he/she is. At home these celebrations can be as simple as a favorite meal with a special dessert, candles, song and a wish. They can also be quite elaborate with many family members and friends, games and activities, festive food, gifts and prizes. As we attempt to build a strong sense of community at VOF and specifically in each class it is helpful to consider the following recommendations when planning your child's home birthday celebration: Either choose to invite the whole class/ all boys or girls/ or just one best

friend. (When some children in a group are invited and others are left out, it undermines the group consciousness we strive to promote.) There are many creative alternatives to gift giving, for those trying to simplify and declutter their lives. You are encouraged to talk with the other parents in your child's class and collectively consider what everyone is comfortable with.

Celebrate outdoors. Children are often very excited at birthday parties and a large space allows for lots of movement. There are many different activities possible during each season (see examples below). Also, being outdoors for a birthday celebration helps children connect to the season in which they were born.

Sample Seasonal Outdoor Activities:

Summer: Swimming/water play, penny carnival  
Autumn: Scavenger hunt, raked leaf maze (children can create and run through).

Winter: Sledding/ice skating, snow sculpturing.

Spring: Hiking (discovering signs of spring), kite flying.

Use your imagination and creativity! Remember less is more, especially for children – they could entertain themselves for hours with an empty box!

### ***Minimizing Challenging Behavior***

The art of being with our fellow human beings with love and dignity is a skill that evolves over our entire lives. We know that children need opportunities to develop confidence, courage, and self-reliance through their own unique and individual experiences, and this requires time and space to explore without adult interruption. The freedom to explore the human environment in the class leads to discovery and the cultivation and creation of skills in finding solutions to human struggles. Early Childhood teachers strive to understand the true nature of the young child. For example, because the child at this age is still learning to have an inner rhythm regarding appropriate behavior, we work strongly with creating a healthy outer rhythm for the child that allows an appropriate balance between "breathing in" and "breathing out" activities. In the Kindergartens, there are long periods each day of open-ended and free play both inside the classroom and out in the garden. As well, on any given day there are certain activities that are the same each day of the week.

Young children often struggle with transition times throughout their day. This can result in acting out because they are feeling insecure about what may be happening next. The same daily rhythm in the classroom (and at home) helps reassure the child and helps eliminate many difficulties that can be found in early childhood.

Teachers strive to be worthy of the young child's imitative nature and how they learn by doing. When conflicts arise and become too difficult for one or both of the children, teachers will intervene and model the ways to resolve it. This may be done by helping

the child to ask for the things they want, or offering a way to respond verbally, such as “I am not done playing with this toy”, or to “right the wrong” if somebody was hurt . Children know that their bodily comfort will be honored and very clear boundaries will be demonstrated repeatedly. The teacher’s guidance relies on connection, reflection, redirection and modeling.

At times, however, the teacher may have the child work with one of the teachers doing a meaningful task, such as setting the table or sweeping until the teacher feels the child is ready to rejoin their classmates. However, when a teacher perceives that a child has reached his or her limit and is no longer able to engage constructively at school, the parent will be called to come and pick up the child. The teacher will contact the parent to discuss the matter later that same day.

If challenges are ongoing, the teacher will request a conference with the parents. The adults in the child’s life can assess the situation and work together to find ways to help the child express him or herself in a healthy way, both physically and socially, and to gain impulse control. As well, parents can assist the work that the teacher does in the classroom by sharing with the teacher any changes in the child's home life that could result in unusual behavior.

### ***Early Childhood Discipline Policy***

There are certain serious behaviors that compromise the health and safety of all the children in the class.

These include:

- Aggressive behavior that may result in injury of a child and/or intentionally injuring a child
- Running away
- Repeated bullying or teasing
- Repeated refusal of teacher's guidance
- Uncontrollable disruptive behavior
- Aggressiveness and/or repeated misuse of toys and/or classroom materials

Any of these behaviors may result in a child being sent home from school. Again, the parent will be called by a member of the Administrative staff to come and pick up the child. The teacher will contact the parent to discuss the matter later that same day. Teachers will use discretion and respond appropriately to the age and individuality of the child. If a child is experiencing ongoing struggles the teacher and faculty may require some steps to support the child, family, and class as a whole.

Here are some possible solutions and plans that the teacher may require for an ongoing situation:



- The teacher may require a conference with the parent before the child is permitted to return to school.
- The early childhood teachers may meet regarding the child and try to come up with safe and appropriate solutions to the challenges of this particular child and develop a "Behavior Support Plan". This plan will outline the steps which will be taken at home and at school to address the child's behavior and help him or her to move in a more positive direction. The Behavior Support Plan may contain measures such as having the child work beside the teacher during free play, restricted contact with other children, early dismissal, a shortened school week, or other possibilities. A meeting will be arranged with the parents, teachers, and at least one other faculty representative to discuss the Behavior Support Plan. The school will continue to work with the situation as long as the individuals and parents follow the agreements outlined in the Behavior Support Plan, which may be modified over time, and work, in good faith, to resolve the difficulties.
- The teacher may request that the parents seek some kind of outside help. This could be a play therapist, occupational therapist or another kind of expert that is deemed appropriate for the needs of the child.
- If the challenges are not shifting or improving and the child is unsafe either with himself/herself or with others, the teacher may require a time at home (suspension). In the case of suspension the Early Childhood Chair and Administrator will also be consulted and notified.
- If the behavior is sufficiently disruptive or endangers other children's safety it may be necessary for the child to be withdrawn from school.

Sometimes, the teacher and parent may come to the conclusion that the child is either not ready for school yet or that it is simply not a good fit all around. If this is the case, the teacher may reassess the situation the following semester. A lot can happen in the young child's life and within themselves in six months. Our primary goal as early childhood educators is to help the child to reach his or her highest potential. We strive in every way to meet the individual needs of each child and the needs of the class as a whole. Most important is the emphasis on open and direct communication between all of the adults in the child's life, for this is essential for the child's success in these formative years.

### ***Expressing a Concern***

If you have any concerns regarding your child's care, we ask that you first take it to your child's Primary Teacher. Many problems are easily resolved with clear, direct, and honest communication. If you do not feel the teacher has adequately heard or dealt with your concern, you may then contact our school Administrator.

### ***Required Parent Reading***

Joyful Toddlers & Preschoolers by Faith Collins

### ***Helpful Resources:***

<http://www.waldorfearlychildhood.org>

<http://www.allianceforchildhood.org>

<http://www.waldorfresearchinstitute.org/pdf/BANonVerbGlockler.pdf>

<http://www.simplicityparenting.com>

<http://www.awsna.org/awsna.html/>

### **Child Development Book Series - Ames:**

Your Two Year Old: Terrible or Tender

Your Three Year Old: Friend or Enemy

Your Four Year Old: Wild and Wonderful

Your Five Year Old: Sunny and Serene

Your Six Year Old: Loving and Defiant

### **Other Helpful Books:**

Simplicity Parenting: Using the Powers of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids - Payne and Ross

The Soul of Discipline: The Simplicity Parenting Approach to Warm, Firm, and Calm Guidance - Payne

The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children - Mogel

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk - Faber and Mazlish

Northwest Earth Institute: Healthy Children, Healthy Planet Discussion Course

Childhood: A Study of the Growing Child - Von Heydebrand

Healing Stories for Challenging Behaviour - Susan Perrow

Heaven on Earth: A Handbook for Parents of Young Children - Sharifa Oppenheimer

The Incarnating Child - Salter

Insights into Child Development - Benians

Parenting Path Through Childhood - Coplen

Parents as People: The Family as a Creative Process - Kane

Rhythms and Turning Points - Schwartz

Waldorf Parenting Handbook - Cusick

Well, I Wonder: Childhood in the Modern World- Sally Schweizer

You Are Your Child's First Teacher - Baldwin