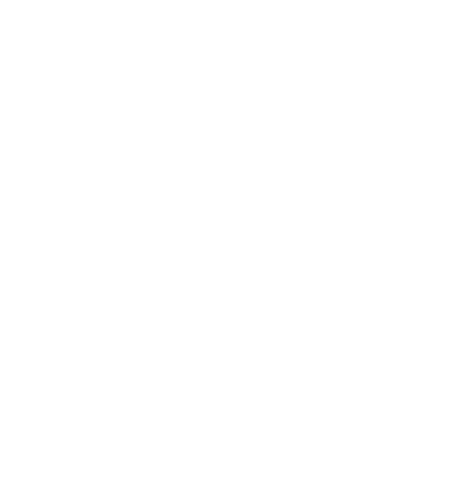
TheSecretGarden



Nature, Play, Relationship Based Preschool/KG for Children 2-6 years

**Cultivating Creativity, Heart, & Readiness for Life**

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**Handbook 2019/20**

**Director:** Paula Lynam

**Teacher:** Dave Nourie

**Assistants:** Brigieta Balsimo, Reecca Douthit, and Amy Hoffmeister

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# **School Bio**

Several, several years ago, recognizing the value in Paula’s work as a Therapeutic Educational Support Specialist, several families nudged her to open a pre-school for their young children. The pre-school started as Stone Soup, and later unfurled to become The Secret Garden. Dave and Paula purchased the property on Park Street, allowing the freedom and space to do things the way Paula had envisioned…a Nature rich, beautiful environment offering loads of opportunities for young children, and their families, to feel free, loved, nourished, creative, and capable, with a deep sense of belonging.

A few years later, Dave joined Paula as her assistant, while taking the Waldorf Teacher Training in Eugene. *(He drove to Eugene twice a week for 2 years!)* Paula earned her M.Ed. (emphasis in Holistic Early Childhood Education) from Southern Oregon University where she immediately started teaching as an adjunct instructor in the Education Department – a dream come true!

Now, 14 years later, Paula serves as the Director, (is writing her Ph.D. dissertation in Eco psychology) and Dave is the Lead Teacher assisted by Rebecca, Amy and Brigieta (each of whom were practicum students here funnily enough), and were invited to be here, because of varying strengths and qualities, particularly the sparkle in their eyes, their natural curiosity, and kind presence.

So, there you have it…we are grateful to be here, with each other and your children, and excited for another beautiful year!

**Mission**

The Secret Garden Preschool and Kindergarten, supports healthy family culture and child development through nature-guided, holistic early childhood, and family enrichment programs, classes, coaching, mentoring and community events.

**Vision**

At The Secret Garden we strive to positively impact the world of children and families through nature-rich programs imbued with unshakable respect for individual potential, curiosity, creativity, and the innocence of childhood.

**Philosophy**

The vital importance of the first 7 years of life is deeply understood at The Secret Garden Preschool and Kindergarten. We are dedicated to preserving the essential qualities of childhood innocence, while encouraging capable, respectful human beings; at home in their body, nature and with others; filled with curiosity, imagination, and creativity.

At The Secret Garden, we recognize harmonious family culture as central to the foundation for learning and the future success of all children. We provide a natural, warm, and respectful environment to nourish and support each child’s individual development and growth, inviting a sense of curiosity for children and their families. Our holistic approach is nature-play-relationship based and offers all children the opportunity to learn through purposeful interactions with their environment while fostering joy, creativity and wonder.

**Pedagogy and Practices**

In our fast-paced world, where the full experience of childhood is often compromised, the Steiner early childhood curriculum gives children the time and space to be themselves and grow at their natural pace. At The Secret Garden we embrace each child’s individuality and developmental needs by offering rich multi-sensory experiences.

Through play, the children’s physical, emotional, social and cognitive skills are enhanced. These experiences combined with the daily, weekly and seasonal rhythm fosters security and trust, contributing to a solid foundation for their future schooling and overall success.

A balanced, holistic approach to the educational experience sets the stage for children to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to go forth into the world with self-confidence and responsibility for their own destiny. We are dedicated to offering uplifting programs for children, families and other adults.

**Practices**

At The Secret Garden, our holistic early childhood practices are based upon the fundamental need for connection and a sense of belonging. Relationship-based care (bonding and continuity), the living arts (domestic, nurturing, creative and social arts) are recognized as central to the advancement of children’s social, emotional and intellectual skills.

* Adult and child activities include practical life skills such as building, gardening, cleaning, cooking, washing, repairing, and sewing, among other things.
* Movement/play curriculum emphasizes activities that promote healthy musculoskeletal development, providing opportunities for unstructured, spontaneous movement in a safe environment. Traditional games and finger-plays encourage the children to imitate healthy movement, develop senses to support the foundations for learning, and increase both small and large motor skills.
* The children spend much of their time outside in all weather. This serves to nurture their relationship with the environment in which they live, while building strength, ability and endless learning opportunities.
* Child guidance is based on: observation, presence, respect,  communication and warmth, (with a big dollop of humor).
* Natural organic foods are provided and often prepared together.
* Foundation for lifelong literacy is fostered through storytelling and puppetry, individual lap time with a book, poetry, verse, daily singing and music, drama, and the daily interactions of play and movement in a healthy, secure environment.
* Emphasis is on loving human interaction with warm speech, live singing, verses, and stories rather than technology. The Secret Garden is a television and video-free environment.
* Celebrations honoring traditional seasonal festivals, cultural backgrounds of the families, and children’s birthdays are offered.
* When possible, ongoing relationships are established with senior adults and youth who visit on a regular basis.
* Community friends who speak a native language other than English may be invited to play simple games, sing, craft or prepare traditional foods with the children.
* Our program provides a developmentally appropriate, play-based approach found in Steiner preschools and kindergartens throughout the world.

**Holistic/Waldorf (Steiner) Early Childhood Education Outlined**

*“Receive the children in reverence, educate them in love, and send them forth in freedom.” Rudolf Steiner*

Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy on education (Waldorf Education) is based in these words and his spiritual-scientific research of the human being. From Steiner’s viewpoint, the personal work of the teacher and parent plays a significant role in the well-being of the child. The first 7 years being the foundational years, wherein the child is learning through imitation, are of great importance and influence upon the later years. “The first thing to be aimed for is a living comprehension of the child in all its pulsing life” (Steiner, The Child's Changing Consciousness, 1996)

The early childhood teachers and parents model behavior worthy of imitation and are attentive to the quality of the child’s surroundings; the rhythm of their day; the senses, including the warmth or manner in which the children are clothed and fed; their relationship to nature and the seasons; the significance of play, movement, storytelling and music and the artistic environment are aspects comprising Waldorf/Steiner Early Childhood Education. “Our bodies are permeated by rhythm, in the beating of our hearts, the breathing of our lungs, women’s cycles of fertility, and the circadian rhythms of our metabolism. But as modern human beings, we have also established a life that is removed from the rhythms of nature.” (You Are Your Child's First Teacher, 2000) Steiner’s educational philosophy is detailed and widely studied. There are over 1,000 Waldorf schools worldwide, with over half of those being in the United States. Waldorf education goes through high school with the majority of the schools being 1st through 8th grade, wherein the class teacher remains with the class for the duration. Steiner based Early Childhood programs are generally in “home like” settings, offer nature, play and relationship based curriculum with substantial parent education and the celebration of seasonal festivals. (You Are Your Child's First Teacher, 2000)

Steiner’s philosophy is based on his study of human development, which forms the outline of Waldorf education. That the children are actively involved in their learning and environment is a given. The curriculum is brought to the children through close interaction with the surroundings, via poems, songs, movement, circle, storytelling, puppetry, and arts. (Steiner, Rhythms of Learning, 1998)

Steiner’s ideas are certainly applicable, effective and desirable for today’s early childhood programs. Teachers appear to be hungry for a deeper knowledge of their work and have an interest in the health that this philosophy presents, including the inner work of the teacher and nourishing quality of Waldorf Early Childhood programs. In Waldorf early childhood programs, the inner work or soul life of the teacher is of prime importance in order that they may be better prepared to meet the challenges of today’s early childhood programs and more able to be adults worthy of imitation. The therapeutic aspects of this educational model have much to offer our educational system in general, particularly in the early years. “Everything that affects a child from outside is recreated within”. (Steiner, Rhythms of Learning, 1998)

Dancy, R. B. (2000). *You Are Your Child's First Teacher.* CA: Celestial Arts.

Michaela Glockler, M. (2000). *A Healing Education.* CA: Rudolf Steiner College Press.

Steiner, R. (1998). *Rhythms of Learning.* NY: Anthroposophic Press.

Steiner, R. (1996). *The Child's Changing Consciousness.* NY: Anthroposophic Press.

**Practicum Students**

Each term, we usually have a practicum student from Rogue Community College, Southern Oregon University or Eugene Waldorf Teacher Training. We relish the opportunity to share our experience with others who are in training. If you have any questions please do ask Paula or Dave.



**Waldorf Early Childhood Education in Practice**

The Waldorf early childhood educator works with the young child by creating a warm, beautiful and loving home-like environment, which is protective and secure, and where things happen in a predictable, rhythmic manner. Here s/he responds to the developing child in two basic ways:

First, s/he engages in domestic, practical, and artistic activities the children can readily imitate (for example, baking, painting, gardening, and handicrafts), adapting the work to the changing seasons and festivals of the year.

Secondly, the Waldorf kindergarten teacher nurtures the children’s power of imagination by telling carefully selected stories and by encouraging free play. This free or fantasy play, in which children act out scenarios of their own creation, helps them to experience many aspects of life more deeply. When toys are used, they are made of natural materials. Wood, cotton, wool, silk, shells, stones, pine cones and objects from nature that the children themselves have collected are used in play and to beautify the room.

Sensory integration, eye-hand coordination, appreciating the beauty of language, sequencing, and other basic skills necessary for the foundation of academic learning are fostered in the kindergarten. In this truly loving, natural and creative environment, children are provided with a range of activities to prepare them for later learning and for life itself.



**What We Are Working Towards**

We strive to develop and nurture in the child a healthy integrated physical body, a well-established sense of rhythm or breath, a deep sense of belonging, and an active imagination; the foundations for future learning, success and well-being. It is our aim to provide an uplifting, enriching experience for your family as we ask and ponder “what can we do to make your life more wonderful?”

**Sense of Belonging**

We intentionally spend much of each day outdoors, in order that the children may learn about their environment, through being actively involved in it, developing a deep relationship with Nature, and thereby a sense of belonging. That each of us has unshakable respect for, and appreciation of the natural world is essential to the future well-being of all. We are dedicated to offering children, and families, abundant opportunities to explore, connect, and develop a lasting friendship with their environment.

**Healthy Physical Body**

As children learn about their own physical body through being actively involved in their environment, they develop the foundations for academic learning, without which, learning and behavior difficulties become common place.

As children move through and complete their developmental stages, they become increasingly comfortable in their bodies and able to learn more effectively. When these stages are incomplete, children are using underdeveloped capacities, creating stress and an inadequate foundation for social skills and future learning to build upon.

The ability to participate in learning and social interactions with ease and satisfaction is the byproduct of good communication from the senses, all of which need to function together with efficiency.

During the first seven years of life, children experience the world through movement and the senses, their every motion and exploration providing them a wealth of sensory experience. Young children absorb each impression, without yet having the ability to discern between positive and negative impressions, trusting the world with a great openness. As adults, we have the capacity of higher thinking and the cognitive ability to sift through our impressions and recognize those, which cause us harm, creating barriers against them as necessary. It is our responsibility as adults and educators to protect children from these harmful outside influences and impressions, so that their senses are not prematurely blunted or taxed. In this way the children are free to experience the world around them.

Together, we protect the senses by supporting the physical systems of the child. Addressing physical comfort and well-being, we ensure the warmth of the children, dressing them in many layers of natural fibers for out door adventures and play. Good nutrition is encouraged as we prepare balanced meals together. The daily rhythm brings a comforting, reassuring sense of routine to the child's experience of the school day, in a natural environment that is stimulating, yet also soothing to the senses.

**Integration of the Senses**

Children learn by experiencing the world through their senses. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf education, spoke not only of the traditional senses, but of others as well, among them movement, touch, balance and sense of life.

By touching an object, information (such as temperature, texture, resistance, friction, moisture, dryness) is gained from it. Through touch, children learn about themselves as well as the world: "Whatever I touch also touches me." This separation and connection with everything surrounding them later translates to relationships with others, and the development of healthy boundaries. The Secret Garden curriculum provides children with a rich array of tactile experiences with which to develop their sense of touch.

Children are naturally quite active, always moving. Their muscles and joints are strengthened as they move and their sense of movement is awakened. This sense gradually develops as children learn to sit up, stand and walk, in the best of circumstances achieving these milestones in their own time, using the forces of their own will to accomplish them. The daily routine in our kindergarten/early childhood program, affords children every opportunity to use their limbs and develop a sense of movement through free and organized play, circle games, and dramatic acting out of stories.

The sense of balance connects us to the three dimensions of space (above/below, left/right, front/back), developing at a natural pace as the child becomes physically ready. The impulse to stand and to walk needs to come from the child's own inner drive, so that balance is learned at the appropriate pace. Prematurely assisting children to stand or walk (before they demonstrate a wish to do so) prevents them from experiencing this step-by-step struggle in development. When we allow the children to learn these skills at their own pace their sense of balance is strengthened. In our early childhood classes we walk on uneven ground, hop, skip, jump, roll around, swing, run and twirl to help stimulate and support the sense of balance. Balance enables the children to feel centered in themselves, have healthy vision, hearing and spatial awareness.

The sense of life concerns our well-being (whether we feel well or not). This sense helps us notice and monitor what our bodies need and interpret the meanings of our aches and pains. We can support the sense of life by providing children with a safe and stable environment where rhythm and routine prevail along with comfort, warmth, nutritious food and adequate sleep.

Math and language come out of the body; we have 10 fingers, 10 toes, 2 arms, 2 legs and so on. As we become more comfortable and at home in our own body, so math and language will develop naturally.

**Rhythm and Routine**

The rhythm and repetition in our early childhood program supports learning and healthy development. From one activity to the next, the day flows logically, following daily, weekly and yearly rhythms in order to develop a sense of security, harmony and expectation.

Rhythms soon become established habits, minimizing the need for instruction and direction. There is a natural "expansion" and "contraction" inherent in the day's activities. Expansion occurs during times of child-initiated activity, as they explore, play and create imaginary worlds within their surroundings. Contraction occurs during teacher-led time, as the children turn more inward and focus on activities. Expansion and contraction work to foster a healthy balance of activity, creating a natural ebb and flow in the classroom. Established routine also helps to develop a child's memory. To this end, each day of the week has a corresponding activity, color and snack. Such predictability helps to develop a sense of order, regularity and security, the seeds of future self- discipline and the development of healthy habits.

**Practical and Artistic Activities**

Household tasks, such as chopping vegetables, kneading dough, washing and drying dishes, sweeping, cleaning and polishing are integrated into the day. Children learn the simple crafts of sanding, sawing, hammering and wood drilling as well as sewing, finger knitting, wool teasing and carding, silk and wool dyeing. Watercolor painting, coloring free form drawings, and modeling with beeswax are part of weekly rhythms, each offering their own tactile experiences. Children sing and dance to seasonal and traditional songs and poems during circle time, and experience stories told by the teacher or presented as a puppet show.

Through all of these, and other practical and artistic activities, the children experience themselves engaged in inherently meaningful and productive ways that bring order, creativity and beauty into the world.

**Weekly Activity Rhythm: Painting:**

The technique is “wet on wet” watercolor painting; the colors are introduced following the rhythm of the seasons. Autumn in the beginning of the season is a bit of yellow; later comes red to meet yellow transforming right before the children’s eyes into beautiful orange; then red stays alone then meets blue. Winter is cold and blue until one day at the end it meets yellow; yellow brings green at the beginning of spring; red joins again creating the rainbow towards the end of school and close to the summer.

**Baking:**

Many skills are involved while we make our bread, a lot of sensory work! The child is able to cross the mid-line while grinding the grain, stirring the ingredients with the proper motion, and kneading. At the end, after singing and baking we have delicious bread to take home, share or eat with our lunch. We usually place the bread in a basket to give to our neighbor Barbara.

**Handwork:**

With the focus on “purposeful work”, we sew, weave, felt and other seasonal projects of arts and crafts strengthening hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills, sense of beauty and accomplishment.

**Cooking:**

Together we gather vegetables from our school garden or from individual contributions- and make a delicious soup for our meal. Beyond fine motor skills of chopping vegetables and admiring the beauty of their color and form, we have a social skills exercise where community experience is alive. “Blessings on our meal.”

**Drawing:**

In this activity we have the pre-writing skills from drawing evolving and maturing as the sense perception of the world around the child is identified with more clarity.

**Additional activities:**

Clay, water, woodworking, gardening, chalk, and varied artistic activities permeate our days. Observing the children, we provide opportunities to strengthen and build upon their interests in a variety of ways.

As you can imagine, the repetition and rhythm creates a sense of trust in the child’s life, the trust that everything continues, evolves and that there is always an adult guide into the physical world; that they are not on their own, that they belong. Home/school, school/home are the rhythms that will help shape the forces of the child’s life.

**Nutrition**

*“Earth who gives to us this food Sun who makes it ripe and good Dear Sun. Dear Earth, by you we live. Our loving thanks to you we give. Blessings on our meal, our friends, our family and peace on earth.”*

Every day nutritious, organic meals and snacks are served, consisting of fresh organic and local ingredients wherever possible. Together we prepare gluten, dairy, sugar, additive and soy free food. Parents sign up to bring snack, which adds an extra element of delight for all of us.

The preparation and consumption of wholesome and flavorful food is an element central to our program. We love it! To cook, set the table, measure the ingredients, smell the smells, taste the different tastes, is a delightful part of our day. Nourishing Traditions by Sally Fallon and GAPS by Dr. Natasha Campbell McBride are two resources we reference and draw from in our food preparation.

We all know that good nutritious food is of great importance for your child’s healthy development. Well-balanced meals aid the child’s brain development along with the rest of their body. At The Secret Garden we pay close attention to the seasonal rhythm of the earth. Therefore what we eat has an important value not only nutritionally, but spiritually as well. As the children have been closely involved in the growing, caring for and preparation of the food they eat, the finicky child is a rarity at our table.

We use coconut, olive or flax oil and organic ingredients or grains and produce from bio dynamic and local resources, when available. Pure water is always available. We do not use sugar or serve fruit juice. A tiny amount of local honey may be used in our baking.

The menu changes seasonally. This time frame gives the children the opportunity to become a little more motivated to eat foods that may be unusual or unfamiliar. In our experience it takes a few weeks for children to eat unfamiliar foods. We do not force them to eat. We encourage them by saying “We are learning to eat new things”. Or, “if we taste it we might like it”. If we don't particularly like the taste of something, we say, “this is not my favorite”, and leave it at that. The child will often just eat it any way, and if not, that's all right. We serve very small portions to begin with knowing that the children may always ask for more. No one will starve – the children go home soon enough, so if they have chosen not to eat, it will be all right. Hopefully they are not going home to a “treat”, or a standard peanut butter and jelly sandwich, in lieu of the nutritious meal we have prepared. If so, I would encourage a change in routine to support healthy nutrition.

**Birthday Celebrations**

At The Secret Garden we take special time to celebrate children individually. We hold a special circle in honor of your child’s birthday. We do not have a party (that will be for families to do). We refer to it as “your birthday celebration”. Parents are invited to attend and participate for about half an hour at the end of the school day. We will coordinate the date together, preferably the closest to the child’s actual birth date. Parents bring your child's favorite fruit and come prepared to say a little about your child's growing years.

**Summer Birthdays**

Children born during July or August will be celebrated in June unless the parents have a more convenient date before school is over, or if the child will be attending the summer session.

We will put all the birthdays on the calendar, at the beginning of the school year.

I ask that each attending child bring a flower or little treasure (shell, stone etc.) for the birthday child so they may take a lovely gift home filled with loving thoughts from their friends, so please make sure to note the birth dates on your calendar.

**Play**

Free, imaginative play is one of the most important activities for the young child, both as a means of fostering the capacities ripe for development in the young child and laying the foundation for intellectual skills and emotional well- being. The class provides an oasis where the child’s creative imagination is protected, nurtured and cultivated through play. Children take up unstructured materials such as cloths, crates, rocking boards, blocks of wood, shells and pinecones to create imaginary worlds. Free play strengthens the child’s imagination, providing a critical foundation for future learning in the grade school.

Play is an important factor in promoting healthy physical, social, emotional and intellectual development. In the physical realm, children are using their limbs (through movement) to respond to their environment. The child's natural inclination to be active is honored and respected. Movement is crucial for the developing brain and is essential for optimal learning. Children learn about relationships through cooperation and flexibility. Language skills are enhanced when children describe their play to others in order for them to participate. Discipline, concentration, interpretation, and adaptation are skills learned through socio-dramatic play.

In The Secret Garden early childhood program, the child’s work is PLAY. We provide the children with the elements to bring his or her play to that creative quality. Children’s play is universal. If children around the world are provided with the same elements of play, they come up with the same evolution in their play.

We have natural toys. There is a quality to them that cannot be bought. The child brings his imagination to play and anything is possible.

The child hears stories, rhymes and songs at circle time and throughout the day. In the early childhood years he/she brings those images to play.

Gross motor development is at its best with outdoor play. Children work hard moving logs, climbing with ropes, filling and emptying sand and water. Physics and scientific methods have their beginnings in child’s play. They rediscover and reinvent the world again and again. They experiment with balance and the relationship of their body and space. Child’s play is truly moving and extraordinary. John Christoph Arnold said, *“It is a beautiful thing to see a child thoroughly absorbed in his play; in fact, it is hard to think of a purer, more spiritual activity.”*

**Dressing For The Weather**

Every day the children spend a generous amount of time outside playing in the yard. If children are dressed properly they will fully enjoy the elements. Children delight in the changing seasons; rain, with its puddles and mud brings opportunities for special sensory and play experiences. Rain pants, jackets and boots are essential for school. Snow, sleet and ice are also good ingredients for outdoor play. Children need snow suits, warm mittens, wool socks and hats, which fit snugly around the ears and neck. Pliable waterproof gloves keep hands warm and dry and allow for movement and creativity. Warmth is critical for health and growth.

It is our conviction that when a child is kept warm enough, more energy goes toward growing and maintaining good health (as opposed to maintaining warmth). Toddlers and kindergarten-age children need the support of all caregivers (teachers and parents alike) to dress them warmly, since until the age of nine, children do not usually notice whether they are hot or cold. Layer their clothing to create warmth, using wool or silk or other natural fibers. Hats are a must in chilly weather as so much body heat is lost through the top of the head. Maintaining warmth is a central concern when dressing our children for outdoor play. On sunny hot days, children are encouraged to put on sun hats and to wear sunscreen.

Clothes should fit comfortably to play in and not represent a hazard or prevent child from moving freely. It is best if they are from natural fibers, i.e. cotton, silk, or wool. Shoes should have a good grip with no heels. (“Crocs” are not good *for running).* Shoelaces and buckled shoes are encouraged for older children. As your children will be practicing putting their own clothing on several times a day, please ensure that their fasteners are simple enough for them to do. Save those really cute items that are challenging to put on and take off, for home. This goes for shoes, jackets – everything! The jacket with the zipper that often sticks is not fun for us, let alone your child!

FALL/WINTER CHECK LIST

In addition to the following items, please keep at least two full changes of weather-appropriate, media-free clothing at school and ***label every item with your child’s name*** as so many children have the same or similar clothing**.**

**Indoor slippers (well fitting, natural fiber and character free) One sweater with hood or pullover Warm jacket  
One pair of long johns (cotton, silk, or wool are ideal)  
One warm hat that covers the ears and neck, or a balaclava Water proof pants, jacket, and snow overalls  
Two Pairs of gloves/ cotton and waterproof  
Rain/mud boots/snow boots (depending on outdoor conditions) Rain suit  
Two pairs of warm socks**

SPRING/SUMMER CHECK LIST

Please be sure to label each item with your child’s name before sending to school.

One sun hat  
One pair of long pants  
One pair of shorts  
Two long sleeve shirts  
Two short sleeve shirts  
Two pairs of underwear  
Two pairs of socks  
Sweatshirt with a hood or pullover

Sandals with covered toes only or a pair of sneakers/canvas shoes with shoelaces (not “crocs” or flip- flops).

Note: These items must stay at school. If your child has the need to change, please remove soiled clothing and replace the next school day. Clothes to wear at school must be play clothes and free of media pictures or signs.

HEALTH

We take special interest in your child’s health. A well-rested child who is dressed warmly in winter and protected from the sun in summer, who is fed a wholesome diet is best prepared to withstand the onslaught of winter colds and health ailments. It is normal, however, for children to experience sickness as they grow.

The lively playschool is not a soothing environment for a child who is not well. Please arrange your lives so that your child can be in a quiet and restful environment when he or she is ill.

Most working parents know the desperate feeling of needing to go to work when a little one is not feeling well. We are very sympathetic with the situation, and urge parents to arrange back-up care. Please support us in our work by keeping your children home when they show the first signs of being unwell.

After an illness, children often appear healthy in the morning but are still not up to the vigorous activity of the playschool. Please allow your child at least one full day of rest after an illness. We will make every effort to support you in keeping your child healthy. **If your child will be absent please call the school the night before or in the morning before 8:00. 541.482.5543.**

**Make-up days**.............these are not a given. We cannot give credit for missed days.

**Medications**  
Please give your child medicine at home.

* If a child must take medication at school, it must come in its original container with the physician’s instructions. Parents must also fill out an authorization form.
* Children are not to have medicine in their cubbies or packs. It is to be handled adult-to-adult. Give the medicine to a car pool parent if you are not bringing the child to school. Vitamins are treated as medicine.
* In an emergency we will use the information you have provided regarding contact numbers and specific instructions. In case no parent or guardian can be reached, your signed contract will allow us to give the medical attention your child might need.

**Immunizations**  
Our policy in regard to immunization is that it is the parent’s right and responsibility to choose to immunize or not. Following are our needs regarding either choice.

* + We are required to keep records of your child’s immunizations status.
  + When a child is not immunized, a parental letter stating the same is required. If an outbreak of a known disease were to occur, children not immunized for this condition are required by Government Health Authorities to remain away from school during the outbreak.

**You must notify us:**

If your child develops a communicable disease, (for example, chicken pox or whooping cough) please notify us at once. We will send out a form to alert other Secret Garden families.

**We will contact you:**

If your child shows any communicable disease symptoms during school, we will phone his/her parent(s) or legal guardian(s), or, if in our opinion, your child is unable to participate fully in a normal day, whether due to illness, fatigue, or unusual distress.

**Please follow these guidelines for when you must keep your child at home:**

* If fever is present, or has had one during the previous 24 hours
* A child is contagious 24 hours after a fever has broken
* Heavy nasal discharge
* Constant cough
* Vomiting
* Symptoms associated with a communicable disease- reddened eyes, sore throat, headache, abdominal pain, fever o Impetigo
* Chicken pox
* Pin-worms
* Lice- please check regularly

**Please remember that make-up days** are not a given. We cannot give credit for missed days.

**Sleep**

Audrey McAllen, a well-known Waldorf educator, states that two of the most important educational factors in the life of young child are learning how to sleep and to eat. Sleeping is a rhythmic activity akin to breathing. Monitoring your child's sleeping and waking, meals, amount of play, and stimulation during the day helps to create a rhythmic life pattern. A special bedtime ritual of perhaps lighting a candle and a simple story or verse is food for sound, deep sleep.

During the first seven years of life, children absorb everything in their environment through their senses. Exploring and experimenting within their surroundings, children constantly have new experiences. They take in every word we speak (the sounds of words particularly interest them as well as the tone of voice we use). These daytime experiences are often processed at night, so consequently a healthy amount of sound sleep is necessary for the full digestion of the day's experiences.

**WHAT WE ASK OF PARENTS**

Our job in caring for your child and family is greatly facilitated when there is a feeling of mutual support. Following are some suggestions for how to work together to provide the best experience for all.

Communication

Please talk to us about things you have wonders or curiosities about. Dave is the teacher, Paula the Director. We are here to support the well-being of your family, and ask that you bring your concerns to either of us. We are most certainly interested in what you have to say, and how we can be helpful.

**Guiding Behavior**

Communication with children works best when it is clear and uncomplicated. Engaging them with endless decision-making questions about what they want to wear, play with or do overwhelms young children and they can often feel overly conscious, even burdened. Children need for us to provide them with the security that can come from our making decisions for them.

Here are some hints based on our experience:

"May" is the magic word when working with children, as in, "You may clear your place." It is neither authoritarian nor permissive but carries a quality of privilege; it invites the child to be the beneficiary of your guidance and loving authority. Sometimes children can be unruly or defiant. Staying calm and centered while addressing them helps children to regain their composure. Explaining and reasoning with them often does no good, because developmentally, they are not yet capable of reason and logic on the same level as an adult. It is our experience that this approach of reasoning a child into compliance prematurely awakens the intellect and pulls them out of the dreamier world of early childhood, and is so rarely effective.

A rhythmic lifestyle can create the security and sense of expectation that lessens the need for discipline. The comfort of knowing what is coming eliminates the insecurity that can lead to unruly behavior.

Young children learn through imitation and self-discipline. We all strive to support this by:

* Providing appropriate play spaces that foster imagination
* Communicating through clear verbal messages with limited choices
* Establishing a rhythmic lifestyle
* Offering real work experiences to develop a sense of purpose, and

maintaining a positive attitude.

When home and school share the same or similar philosophy, the children feel more deeply nourished.

**Media**

Premature exposure to media can work against the healthy development of children. Exposure to media inhibits a child's natural ability to create worlds entirely from imagination. From my experience, developing imagination to its fullest extent during the early years will enable the children to be more intelligent and creative problem solvers later on. Exposure to media is also inherently passive, encouraging neither exercise nor activity.

For these reasons and more, we strongly urge parents to limit their children's exposure to electronic media in its various forms. The ideal we strive for is no media exposure in the early childhood years. In their early developmental stages, when children learn through imitation, (first 7 years), being mindful of the images we provide is key. “Is \_x,y,z\_\_ worthy of imitation?” is a useful parenting tool. Often, children may be adversely affected causing disturbances in their behavior, sleep or play activities. Media- influenced behavior tends to be a detriment to the atmosphere of the classroom. We have found that a home as free of electronic media as possible contributes to an improved quality of life for the whole family and our school culture. Media mindfulness is discussed at Parent Enrichment evenings.

**Personal Items Brought to School** – Leave Your Treasures at Home

We ask that children not bring personal items such as toys and jewelry to school. These can be lost and are a distraction best left at home. Contributions to our nature table from a walk in the woods or an organic vegetable or fruit to contribute to the snack are always welcomed, whereas toys and playthings generally create havoc.

**Working Together**

We are co-workers with the shared goal of furthering our understanding of each child, in order that we may guide them rightly during this phase of their development. To facilitate this process, we will regularly share information with you about the pedagogy, discuss your children's developing strengths and consult with you regarding their challenges in Parent Enrichment Evenings and Parent/Teacher conferences. We welcome your questions and reflections in this often challenging and hopefully most satisfying process.

**Parental Involvement**

Your involvement helps things to flow well and create a supportive, nourishing environment for all of us here at The Secret Garden Playschool and Kindergarten. It is wonderful for the children to experience the participation of their parents in the well-being of their school, and uplifting for the teachers to be supported in this manner. We welcome your visits and time spent here, and ask that you follow our guidance in order to maintain the integrity of the program. We ask that visiting adults be actively involved in purposeful work, so please refer to the list of possible activities and let us know how you would best like to serve.

Often parents can see that a garden bed needs weeding, that the laundry is ready for folding, or the painting paper needs to be prepared. Please dive right in and lend your helping hands. It is so good for your children to hear and model “how may I help?”, or to see their parents take the initiative to trim the drooping grapes, tidy the Little Library or sweep the side entrance.

If you would like to arrange a time to share a specific project of interest to you, please sign up ahead of time. The children’s experience is deeply enriched by parents sharing their gifts, so, if you love to play the guitar, or harmonica or whatever you enjoy, please let us know and sign up for a time to share these wonders with the children!

Suggested hours of Parent Participation  
5 and 4 day programs 10 hours per school year = 1 hour per month

We usually like to have two school work-party days a year, one in the Fall and the other in the Spring.

Please let us know about areas in which you are handy, such as PLUMBING, ELECTRICITY, BUILDING, PAINTING, CLEANING, SEWING, PAINTING and if we may call on you, as well as other abilities you may be interested in offering*.* If you notice something that needs attention, please let us know or take care of it yourself.

**Activity Examples**

* Special events helper: assists with classroom or grounds preparation for special events and festivals, and/ or assist with organizing the clean-up after such events.
* Building/construction maintenance: Sign up for odd jobs as needed.
* Special request projects: (these tasks can often be done at home; (i.e. sewing).
* Parent activity: prepare or arrange to bring and share special activity or skill, i.e. special craft, story, project.
* Snack coordinator: arrange for parents to bring snack each morning. Classroom Parent: help with preparation for class projects.
* Cleaning
* Calendar support: to help keep the calendar on target.

We welcome your involvement and know that the children’s experience will be richer because of the additional joy that you bring, so please let us know how you would like to participate. From classroom help during big projects on craft days, fund raising, yard maintenance, cleaning, bringing flowers; to joining us on nature days or sharing something you feel excited about, please let us know that you would like to help and together we will make a plan. Your support creates breath for us, a deeper sense of community for all and is greatly appreciated.

*“The young child instinctively expects guidance. Without the certainty of his parents and teachers he loses his security . . . Constantly being asked what he wants creates bewilderment in his mind . . . Instead we must develop consciousness and consciously meet the child’s paramount needs. They are easily stated: security and an awareness of growth, love and a certain amount of protection . . . The conscientious and conscious parent will have to play an active and positive role in the education, the leading forth of his child . . . lead the child by conveying firmness permeated with love.” Margaret Meyerkort (Waldorf Kindergarten Educator)*

**About Kindergarten or First Grade Readiness**

Kindergarten readiness is a topic of considerable activity of late. Please note, The Secret Garden serves children from 2 to 6 (or first grade) and holds that these first years are of paramount importance to the child’s continued success. Even though there is a push to have children go to “Kindergarten”, it is well known in the Waldorf and holistic education arena that the multi-age group typical of many Waldorf early childhood programs is an ideal environment for the children to complete their development prior to entering first grade. This program is what is traditionally known as a Kindergarten. First grade, or at the loss of the first teeth is the time for children to begin more formal instruction and engagement of their intellect. Prior to that we are cultivating strong physical body, creativity and sense-of-self and wonder.

Readiness to continue on to first grade is determined not merely by the child's date of birth, but by observation of a very broad spectrum of physical, emotional and intellectual indicators.

Referencing research and experience in Holistic Therapeutic Education, these indicators, combined with our direct knowledge and observations of each child's strengths and challenges, gauge readiness for academic learning. Our goal is not only the immediate success of the child in first grade, but also his/her long-term success throughout the grade school years. A child who is ready socially, emotionally and physically will do well to move on to first grade, as a child who is not ready in these areas will benefit from an additional year in Kindergarten in order to complete their development.

The Foundations for Learning

Recommended Reading

The following reading list can help you learn more about Waldorf /holistic education and parenting.

* Bradley, B. P. (2000). *Beyond the Rainbow Bridge.* Amesbury: Michaelmas Press.
* Dancy, R. B. (2000). *You are Your Child's First Teacher.* Berkley: Celestial Arts.
* Diana Carey, J. L. (1982). *Festivals, Family and Food.* Stroud: Hawthorn Press.
* Gerber, M., & Johnson, A. (1998). *Your Self-Confident Baby.* John Wiley & Sons.
* Healy, J. (1980). *Endangered Minds.* NY: Touchstone.
* Healy, J. (1994). *Your Child's Growing Mind.* NY: Doubleday.
* Jaffke, F. (1989). *The Significance of Imitation and Example for the Development of the Will*
* *J*affke, F. (2006). *Work and Play in Early Childhood.* Edinburgh: Floris Books.
* Jenkinson, S. (2001). *The Genius of Play.* London: Hawthorn Press.
* Jones, B. (1996). *A Child's Seasonal Treasury.* Berkley: Tricycle Press.
* Kranowitz, C. (1998). *The Out of Sync Child.* NY: Penguin.
* Louv, R. (2005). *Last Child in the Woods.* Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.
* Pelo, A. (2018). The Goodness of Rain. Lincoln: Exchange Press
* Steiner, R. (1996). *The Education of the Child.* NY: Anthroposophic Pres

Community Resources:

Licensing Specialist: Renee Breznay 541.776.6060 x 295

**Health:**  
Bonnie Nedrow, ND – Naturopathic Care – 541.488.8858  
Judith Sanford – Cranial Sacral Practitioner – 541.858.4459  
Treasure Wheeler, OD – Developmental Optometrist – 541.779.2095 Developmental Disability Services – 541.774.8205 Family Planning – 541.774.8209  
Maternal and Child Health – 541.774.8009  
Mental Health Child Services – 541.774.7971  
Women, Infants and Children Program – 541.774.8203

ABOUT THE SECRET GARDEN

* **Paula Lynam**: Director/Owner
* **Dave Nourie**: Lead Teacher/Maintenance Specialist/Owner
* **Rebecca Douthit**: Assistant/Afternoon Educarer
* **Brigieta Balsimo:** Assistant T/Th
* **Amy Hoffmeister:** Assistant W
* The Secret Garden is registered with the Office of Childcare as a Certified Family Childcare Home #CF501849. We have a 3 Star Rating.
* All staff have:
  + Current First Aid/CPR
  + Central Background Check
  + Past and current training in Early Childhood Education
* The Secret Garden/Paula Lynam is aLifeWays Affiliate,
* A member of:
  + - * North American Association of Environmental Education,
      * Children & Nature Network and
      * The National Association for Family Child Care,
      * National Association for the Education of the Young Child,
      * Oregon Association for the Education of the Young Child
* Paula Lynam has her M.Ed. in Education/Holistic Early Childhood; is pursuing a Ph.D. in Applied Eco psychology; has been teaching and mentoring families and teachers for over 35 years and is a trained:
  + Waldorf KG teacher
  + Waldorf Remedial/Therapeutic Teacher
  + Waldorf based Games/Movement Teacher
  + Handwork Teacher
  + Paula Is a certified Master Trainer with the state of Oregon,
  + Has earned a step 11 on the Oregon Registry and
  + Teaches in the Education Departments at Rogue Community College, Southern Oregon University, Waldorf Teacher Training Eugene, Office of Childcare and Association for the Education of Young Children conferences.
* Dave Nourie earned his Kindergarten Teacher Certificate from Waldorf Teacher Training Eugene
  + Teaches flatland bike classes and workshops all over,
  + Is a *famous* BMX Flatland rider, (just google his name!),
  + Mentor, finance coach, and
  + He also takes care of the local Zagster bike rental program.
* Both Dave and Paula are required to report any signs of abuse or neglect.
* The Secret Garden follows and adheres to the National Association for the Education of Young Children Code of Ethical Conduct & Statement of Commitment and LifeWays/WECAN Code of Ethics.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Please initial, indicating that you have read, are aware of, and agree to the following:

* HOURS of OPERATION: 8:30am-12:30pm Monday - Friday Aftercare until 2:30 T,W,Th.

*"Childhood is a unique and valuable stage in the human life cycle. Our paramount responsibility is to provide care and education in settings that are safe, healthy, nurturing, and responsive for each child. We are committed to supporting children’s development and learning; respecting individual differences; and helping children learn to live, play, and work cooperatively. We are also committed to promoting children’s self –awareness, competence, self-worth, resiliency, and physical well-being.” NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*

ABSENSES: Please let us know as soon as possible if your child(ren) are going to be absent. Payment for absences is expected, as the position is held for your child. We cannot give credit for missed days. \_\_\_\_\_\_

ADULT-CHILD INTERACTIONS: The adults who interact closely with the children regularly are expected to recognize and respect the unique qualities, abilities, and potential of each child; to be positive, attentive to the children, their activities and interests, aware and interactive, calm, worthy of imitation in speech and action, kind and joyful. Their language and manner of communication is to be child appropriate, using open-ended statements such as “I wonder....?” as well as gently acknowledging the children’s emotions with genuine warmth and clear communication. They are encouraged to join the children in their activity, but not to dominate the play. This is a place for children to unfold in their way, at their own individual pace so care must be taken to allow such development to take place, as opposed to overloading the children with questions, constant chatter or adult agenda. It is more beneficial to be calmly present and observant, noting when it is time to draw near, to engage the children in a project or quietly weed the garden near by. Young children do not need a constant commentary from the adults. They need time to breathe and learn about their own world for themselves in the presence of caring adults. No visiting adult shall discipline any child. \_\_\_\_\_\_

APPROPRIATE DRESS: Please make sure children are dressed appropriately for all weather and play, and keep extra clothing stocked and labeled. \_\_\_\_\_\_

CALENDAR: We will follow the Ashland School District/Siskiyou School calendars, unless otherwise stated. \_\_\_\_\_\_

CONFERENCES AND HOME VISITS: Once enrolled, we schedule a home visit, which is a delightful means of uniting school and home. These visits are short and sweet. We also schedule 2 annual parent/teacher conferences, in the Fall and Spring to support your family and your child’s development. There is no school on Conference days. We are available for meetings and conversations at other times. Please check our office hours and call to schedule a meeting as needed. \_\_\_\_\_\_

DROP OFF & PICK UP: Please by here as close to starting time as possible. We understand if you are having a late morning. In the event you are running late for pick up please call the school 541-482-5543 or text Dave at 541-840-8925. It is important for us to inform your child. Repeated late pick-up’s are not fun for any of us and can be worrying to the children. We are just as ready for a rest at the end of our day as are your children, so please be punctual. A fee of $25 per 5 minutes late at pick up will be charged, after the first 5 minutes\_\_\_

GROUP SIZE AND CHILD-STAFF RATIOS: The children spend most of their days with the same providers, who spend the morning together with the children. At times the children naturally divide into two groups, such as inside and outside, or older and youngers and are always in the direct presence of either of the teachers (or approved adult). Parents are invited to participate on a regular basis and interns are, at times, in attendance. *P-1.2 “We shall care for and educate children in positive emotional and social environments that are cognitively stimulating and that support each child’s culture, language, ethnicity, and family structure.” \_\_\_\_\_\_*

GUIDING BEHAVIOR: Respect of both, adults, children and the space, is the basis of any behavior guidance at The Secret Garden. As teachers, we are attentive to how we speak to and treat each other, the children, families and the environment. We pay particular attention to the rhythm of the day, which is seen to be a preventative measure for behavior challenges. If a child is using his hands in an unkind way, s/he may be given a useful task to do, putting his hands to good use in addition to taking care of anyone who was hurt. Communication is important, as is the awareness that “it takes two to tango”. Assisting the children in safely expressing their emotions, being heard, listening to others and knowing how to take care of things all support healthy community, self-discipline and social emotional development. \_\_\_\_\_\_

ILLNESS: Please do not bring your child(ren) if they have fever, diarrhea, vomiting, or other indications of illness. If your child becomes ill during our day, we will call you, or other emergency contact person to pick your child up. Children must stay home for at least 48 hours after a fever has broken. \_\_\_\_\_\_

INCLUSIVITY: We support the right of each child to play and learn in an inclusive environment that meets the needs of children with and without disabilities. Activities throughout the day are adjusted to meet the needs of each child in attendance. *P-1.7 “We shall strive to build individual relationships with each child; make individualized adaptations in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula; and consult with the family so that each child benefits from the program.” \_\_\_\_\_\_*

MEALS & FOOD: We cook and prepare organic, local and healthy food each day. Please make sure the children have had a hearty breakfast, and a good night’s sleep. We all wash hands before and sit together for snack and lunch, sing a simple blessing and eat together. The children help to serve the food by handing out the bowls of food, pouring water and take turns to bring snack. This is a lovely time for finger plays and a short story, which often ignites conversation between the children and teachers. We all help to clean up after singing “napkins on our fingertips, napkins all around our lips, fingertips, around our lips, thank you for our meal.” \_\_\_\_\_\_

MEDIA: This is a media-free environment and we strongly urge parents to limit their children's exposure to electronic media in its various forms. The ideal we strive for is no media exposure in the early childhood years. There is a saying “no TV before the age of 3”. In their early developmental stages, when children learn through imitation, (first 7 years) being mindful of the images we provide is key. “Is \_\_\_ (Superman/woman.... etc.) worthy of imitation?” is a useful parenting tool. Often, children may be adversely affected causing disturbances in their behavior, sleep or play activities. Media- influenced behavior tends to be a detriment to the atmosphere of the classroom. We have found that a home as free of electronic media as possible contributes to an improved quality of life for the whole family and our school culture. A child who is exposed to daily movies, TV, computer games etc. may be at a loss when playing with children who spend more time playing outdoors and the like. \_\_\_\_\_\_

COMMUNICATION: Please make sure to let us know what is going on in your family/child’s life. The more we know, the better able to serve we are. We greatly appreciate open, respectful communication, generally after hours and in such a way as to be mindful of the children. If you have concerns, worries or questions, we genuinely love to talk with you about these things and help come to some sort of resolution. We have also served as mediators with heart filled ears many times over the years and welcome your challenges. This is an area, we both feel fairly skilled so please, do ask for our support. We LOVE helping to solve problems or point families in a different direction.\_\_\_\_\_\_

NOTICE OF CANCELLATION: It is very important for us to have 30 days notice in writing if you choose to withdraw your child out of this program. This is not only for the business side of things, but to allow a smooth transition for yours and the other children. We are forming community here, and all care deeply about and for each other. You are still **responsible** for paying tuition for **30 days from the time you give notice**, in writing, that you choose to withdraw your child from The Secret Garden. *P-1.7 “We shall strive to build individual relationships with each child; make individualized adaptations in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula; and consult with the family so that each child benefits from the program. If after such efforts have been exhausted, the current placement does not meet a child’s needs, or the child is seriously jeopardizing the ability of other children to benefit from the program, we shall collaborate with the child’s family and appropriate specialists to determine the additional services needed and/or the placement option(s) most likely to ensure the child’s success.” \_\_\_\_\_\_*

PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES: Please pay on time, be on time, communicate with and keep us informed about any changes in your schedule, or home which may affect your child(ren) and please attend festivals and scheduled gatherings. Sign up to volunteer to help in the classroom, garden, cleaning, fund raising and anything else you would like to contribute to help create a wonderful environment for all who attend. **THIS IS A CELL PHONE FREE ZONE. \_\_\_\_\_\_**

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: The children spend the first hour of each day, no matter what the weather, outside running, playing, climbing, swinging, sliding, jumping, digging, lifting, pushing and gardening. Our morning circle later on, incorporates a movement journey during which we use a wide array of movements to support their development. We have balls, jump ropes, indoor swings, heavy bags, play planks and play frames, movement games and songs for the children to use at any time. \_\_\_\_\_\_

SAFETY RULES: “When you are ready, you will do it. (Refrain from putting children into places they cannot get to themselves.) Tools stay down to do their work. Kind hands ..... Working hands .....” \_\_\_\_\_\_

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES: We promise to be attentive to your child(ren), provide opportunities to support their continued growth, innocence and wonder, maintain a high quality program and communication between us. \_\_\_\_\_\_

TUITION: Payment is due, in advance, on or before the first of each month and is late from the 5th. Payment received after the 5th of the month is considered late and should include the additional $25 late fee. No refunds. Please make checks payable to: **Playful Concepts**.\_\_\_\_\_\_

TOILETING: Children are not required to be out of diapers when attending The Secret Garden. There are several bathroom times throughout the morning where children are invited to use the toilet whether in diapers or not, individually or in a small group. After using the toilet the children sing a hand washing song while they wash their hands, encouraging healthy personal hygiene. When children are ready to use the toilet, they will. They often require some guidance or instruction on each step of the process from taking their pants down to aiming. It is all part of the process and is approached in a light-hearted manner. \_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please sign to acknowledge that you have read, and agree to the above.

LIABILITY WAIVER

In consideration of premises, services, and/or the equipment provided, I, for myself and any minor children for which I am the parent, legal guardian or otherwise responsible, any heirs, personal representatives or assigns, do hereby release Paula Lynam, David Nourie, Playful Concepts LLC, The Secret Garden Playschool and Kindergarten, volunteers, practicum students, employees and sub-contractors contracted, from all liability and expressly waive any claim for damage arising from any cause whatsoever associated with activity at Playful Concepts LLC, The Secret Garden Playschool and Kindergarten with the exception of that which is the result of gross negligence or wanton and willful misconduct.

|  |
| --- |
| Date: |
| Parent/Guardian Name: |
| Parent/Guardian Signature: |
| Participant Name: |
| Provider Names: Paula Lynam David Nourie |
| Provider Signatures: |

WITH OUR FACULTY IN MIND (applicable to families however)

# We welcome you to The Secret Garden as a healthy role model, and member of our faculty. We have the privilege of being here with the children and each other. In order for things to flow smoothly and harmoniously, there are some points that absolutely must be adhered to. Failure to do so may affect your position here. We take our work with the children and families seriously and expect that you do too. It is no small matter that we have each been entrusted with the care of these young children, and their families.

**Cell Phones**

Please do not use your phone around the children. This is a cell-phone free facility – a safe place. Check your phone when you go to the bathroom. Photos are to be taken discretely, usually by the teacher, and are to be sent to the Director. The teacher, or after-care provider may use his/her phone to contact late parents etc. if need be.

**Self-Care**

# It is essential that you come each day to be with the children awake, aware, on your toes, present, with smiling eyes and kind hearts. The children and families count on you to be the “best version of you” possible, as do your colleagues. If there is something troubling you, please ask for help, do your inner work,, whatever you need to do to free your heart and attention up in order that you may be present here. We will do all we can to help. Your well-being matters greatly to each of us.

**Faculty Meetings**

All faculty are required to attend monthly meetings. These will be held on a mutually agreeable time to be determined.

**Faculty Schedule**

Please include the Director in communications about changes to the schedule, absences, substitutions and the like, as you may not have all the information.

**Personal and Professional Behavior**

You are representatives of The Secret Garden Preschool & Kindergarten, and it is anticipated that your behavior will be professional at all times.

**Communication**

The communication between each of us must be healthy, clean and imbued with personal integrity. Third party communication, or any other convoluted form of communication is uncalled for, unhealthy, and undermines the work that we are here to do, together. How we, as the faculty and staff of The Secret Garden communicate with each other affects the children, and families very deeply. It must be clean and uncluttered. If you have a worry, concern or uneasy feeling about something, please bring it to the attention of the Director, in order that we may sort it out together. Failure to do so may affect your position here.

**Confidentiality, Privacy, and Trust**

At times families share important, confidential information with Paula (Director) and Dave (Lead Teacher), which may be shared with faculty on a need-to-know basis. Under no circumstances may any information about the families and children attending The Secret Garden, be shared in any public arena, or with anyone other than the Teacher and Director. Please do not discuss children or their families amongst yourselves. It is completely inappropriate to talk about the children and families outside of meeting time with the Director or Teacher.

Assistants are not in the position to be handing out advice to families, and are encouraged to discuss any concerns with Paula and guide families to meet with her, as the Director, or Dave as the Lead Teacher. Of course, this does not apply to the day-to-day drop off and pick up brief check in’s.

Under no circumstances may faculty post pictures of the children on ANY social media or public arena, EVER. Pictures, films, videos taken of the children attending The Secret Garden are to be sent to the Director and may not be considered the property of the staff member.

**What Children Need: The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education**

By Susan Howard WECAN

Is there a Waldorf early childhood curriculum? Are there specific activities—puppet plays, circle games, watercolor painting, for example—that are essential to a Waldorf program? Are there certain materials and furnishings—lazured, soft-colored walls, handmade dolls, bees wax crayons, silk and other natural materials—that are necessary ingredients in a Waldorf setting?

What makes Waldorf early childhood education “Waldorf”?

Rudolf Steiner spoke on a number of occasions about the experiences that are essential for the healthy development of the young child. These include:  
• love and warmth  
• an environment that nourishes the senses

• creative and artistic experiences  
• meaningful adult activity to be imitated  
• free, imaginative play  
• protection of the forces of childhood  
• gratitude, reverence, and wonder  
• joy, humor, and happiness  
• adult caregivers pursuing a path of inner development

**Love and Warmth**

*Children who live in an atmosphere of love and warmth, and who have around them truly good examples to imitate, are living in their proper element*.

—Rudolf Steiner, The Education of the Child

Love and emotional warmth, rather than any particular early childhood program, create the basis for the child’s healthy development. These qualities should live between the adult educarer and the child, in the children’s behavior toward one another, and among the adults in the early childhood center. When Rudolf Steiner visited the classes of the first Waldorf School, he often asked the children, “Do you love your teacher?”

Children are also served if this love and warmth exist in the relationships between the teachers and the parents, between the early childhood teachers and the rest of the school, and in the surrounding community.

**An Environment that Nourishes the Senses**

*The essential task of the kindergarten teacher is to create the proper physical environment around the children. “Physical environment” must be understood in the widest sense imaginable. It includes not just what happens around the children in the material sense, but everything that occurs in their environment, everything that can be perceived by their senses, that can work on the inner powers of the children from the surrounding physical space*.

—Rudolf Steiner, The Education of the Child

Early learning is profoundly connected to the child’s own physical body and sensory experience. Everything the young child sees, hears, and touches has an effect. Thus a clean, orderly, beautiful, quiet setting is essential.

The physical environment, both indoors and outdoors, should provide varied and nourishing opportunities for self-education—experiences in touch, balance, lively and joyful movement, and also inward listening. The children should experience large- group, small-group, and solitary activities.

The teacher, in integrating diverse elements into a harmonious and meaningful environment, provides surroundings that are accessible to the child’s understanding, feeling, and active will. The care, love, and intention expressed through the outer materials and furnishings of the class, are experienced unconsciously by the child. The child experiences the immediate environment as ensouled and nurturing**.  *Clean up, is a time to demonstrate love and appreciation for the materials. Young children have the tendency to ensoul even the simplest of items, so, please treat the play materials with care and respect. These are not “things”, they are “beings”. “Let’s put our playthings away with care”. Clean up is a time for respectful participation in the ongoing beautification of the facility and materials.***

The adult shapes the temporal environment as well as the spatial. Through a rhythmic schedule, in which the same thing happens at the same time on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, the child gains a sense of security and confidence in the world. Also, the different activities of the day should take place in a comfortable flow with smooth transitions.

**Creative, Artistic Experience**

*In order to become true educators, we must be able to see the truly aesthetic element in the work, to bring an artistic quality into our tasks. . . . [I]f we bring this aesthetic element, then we begin to come closer to what the child wills out of its own nature.*

—Rudolf Steiner, A Modern Art of Education

In the early childhood class, the art of education is the art of living. The teacher is an artist in how s/he perceives and relates to the children and to the activities of daily  
life. S/he orchestrates and choreographs the rhythms of each day, each week, and each season in such a way that the children can breathe freely in a living structure.

In addition, the teacher offers the children opportunities for artistic experiences in singing and music, in movement and gesture—through movement and rhythmic games—and in creative speech and language—through verses, poetry, and stories. The children model with beeswax, draw and do watercolor painting. Puppet and marionette shows put on by the teacher are an important element in the life of the kindergarten. *It is really different for the children to hear a story told from the teacher’s own being, rather than having the same story read to them.* ***Learning the stories, circles, fingerplays, games before bringing them to the children is part of the work of the teacher and assistant. There is perhaps nothing more important than our work with the children, please be prepared.***

**Meaningful Adult Activity as Examples for the Child’s Imitation**

*The task of the kindergarten teacher is to adapt the practical activities of daily life so that they are suitable for the child’s imitation through play. . . . The activities of children in kindergarten must be derived directly from life itself rather than being “thought out” by the intellectualized culture of adults. In the kindergarten, the most important thing is to give children the opportunity to directly imitate life itself.*

—Rudolf Steiner, The Child’s Changing Consciousness

*Children do not learn through instruction or admonition but though imitation. Good sight will develop if the environment has the proper conditions of light and color, while in the brain and blood circulation, the physical foundations will be laid for a healthy sense of morality if children witness moral actions in their surroundings.*

—Rudolf Steiner, The Education of the Child

Real, meaningful work with a purpose, adjusted to the needs of the child, is in accordance with the child’s natural and inborn need for movement, and is an enormously significant educational activity. The teacher focuses on the meaningful activities that nurture life in the in the classroom “home,” such as cooking and baking, gardening, doing laundry and cleaning, creating and caring for the materials in the immediate environment, and taking care of the bodily needs of the children.

This directed attention of the teacher creates an atmosphere of freedom in which the individuality of each child can be active. It is not intended just that the children copy the outer movements and actions of the adult, but that they experience also the inner attitude—the devotion, care, sense of purpose, focus, and creative spirit of the adult. ***“How we do anything, is how we do everything.” Being attentive, present and aware of how you do things. Notice your hands – how do they move? How do they feel? Are they brisk and cold, or warm and kind?***

**Free, Imaginative Play**

*In the child’s play activity, we can only provide the conditions for education. What is gained through play, through everything that cannot be determined by fixed rules, stems fundamentally from the self-activity of the child. The real educational value of play lives in the fact that we ignore our rules and regulations, our educational theory, and allow the child free rein.*

—Rudolf Steiner, Self Education in the Light of Anthroposophy

In a seemingly contradictory indication, Rudolf Steiner also said:

*Giving direction and guidance to play is one of the essential tasks of sensible education, which is to say an art of education that is right for humanity. . . . The early childhood educator must school her observation in order to develop an artistic eye, to detect the individual quality of each child’s play*.  
—Rudolf Steiner, Lecture of February 24, 1921 in Utrecht, The Netherlands

Young children learn through play. They approach play in an entirely individual way, out of their entirely individual ways, out of their unique configuration of soul and spirit, and out of their unique experiences of the world in which they live. The manner in which a child plays may offer a picture of how he will take up his destiny as an adult.

The task of the teacher is to create an environment that supports the possibility of healthy play. This environment includes the physical surroundings, furnishings, and play materials; the social environment of activities and social interactions; and the inner/spiritual environment of thoughts, intentions, and imaginations held by the adults.

**Protection for the Forces of Childhood**

*Although it is highly necessary that each person should be fully awake in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of pictorial imagination in which his early years of life are passed. For if we allow his organism to grow strong in this nonintellectual way, he will rightly develop in later life the intellectuality needed in the world today*.

—Rudolf Steiner, A Modern Art of Education

The lively, waking dream of the little child’s consciousness must be allowed to thrive in the early childhood group. This means that the teacher refrains as much as possible from verbal instruction. Instead, her gestures and actions provide a model for the child’s imitation. Familiar daily rhythms and activities provide a context where the need for verbal instruction is reduced. Simple, archetypal imagery in stories, songs, and games provides experiences that the children can internalize but that do not require intellectual or critical reflection or explanation. ***Consider how you speak to the children. We must take care of how we say things, using few, well chosen words. Children are not to be bossed about, or ushered here and there. They must be spoken to, and treated with great respect.***

**An Atmosphere of Gratitude, Reverence, and Wonder**

*An atmosphere of gratitude should grow naturally in children through merely witnessing the gratitude the adults feel as they receive what is freely given by others, and in how they express this gratitude. If a child says “thank you” very naturally—not in response to the urging of others, but simply through imitating— something has been done that will greatly benefit the child’s whole life. Out of this an all-embracing gratitude will develop toward the whole world. This cultivation of gratitude is of paramount importance*.

—Rudolf Steiner, The Child’s Changing Consciousness

Out of these early, all-pervading experiences of gratitude, the first tender capacity for love, which is deeply embedded in each and every child, begins to sprout in earthly life.

*If, during the first period of life, we create an atmosphere of gratitude around the children, then out of this gratitude toward the world, toward the entire universe, and also out of thankfulness for being able to be in this world, a profound and warm sense of devotion will arise . . . upright, honest, and true.*

—Rudolf Steiner, The Child’s Changing Consciousness

This is the basis for what will become a capacity for deep, intimate love and commitment in later life, for dedication and loyalty, for true admiration of others, for fervent spiritual or religious devotion, and for placing oneself wholeheartedly in the service of the world.

**Joy, Humor, and Happiness**

*The joy of children in and with their environment must therefore be counted among the forces that build and shape the physical organs. They need teachers who look and act with happiness and, most of all, with honest, unaffected love. Such a love that streams, as it were, with warmth through the physical environment of the children may be said to literally “hatch out” the forms of the physical organs*.

—Rudolf Steiner, The Education of the Child

I*f you make a surly face so that a child gets the impression you are a grumpy person, this harms the child for the rest of his life. What kind of school plan you make is neither here nor there; what matters is what sort of person you are*.  
—Rudolf Steiner The Kingdom of Childhood

The teacher’s earnestness about her work and her serious striving must be balanced with humor and a demeanor that bespeaks happiness. There must be moments of humor and delight in the classroom every day.

**Adults on a Path of Inner Development**

*For the small child before the change of teeth, the most important thing in education is the teacher’s own being*.

—Rudolf Steiner, Essentials of Education

*Just think what feelings arise in the soul of the early childhood educator who  
realizes: What I accomplish with this child, I accomplish for the grown-up person in his twenties. What matters is not so much a knowledge of abstract educational principles or pedagogical rules. . . . [W]hat does matter is that a deep sense of responsibility develops in [the teacher’s heart and mind] and that this affects her or his worldview and the way she or he stands in life.*

—Rudolf Steiner, Education in the Face of the Present-Day World Situation, Lecture of June 10, 1920

Here we come to the spiritual environment of the early childhood setting: the thoughts, attitudes, and imaginations living in the adult who cares for the children. This invisible realm that lies behind the outer actions of the teacher has a profound influence on the child’s development.

The spiritual environment includes recognition of the child as a threefold being—of body, soul, and spirit—on a path of evolutionary development through repeated Earth lives. This recognition provides a foundation for the daily activities in the kindergarten, and for the relationship between adult and child.

Such an understanding of the nature and destiny of the human comes out of the inner life of the adult, the life of the individual Ego. This is a realm that is largely hidden, and hence is difficult to observe directly and to evaluate objectively. Yet ultimately this realm may affect the development of the children most profoundly. It is not merely our outer activities that influence the growing child. What lies behind and is expressed through this outer activity also is crucial. Ultimately, the most profound influence on the child is who we are as human beings—and who we are becoming and how.

**Conclusion**  
The “essentials” described here are qualitative in nature. For the most part, they are not part of a body of concrete “best practices.” Instead, they concern inner qualities and attributes of the teacher that foster healthy development in young children. These qualities can come to expression in a wide variety of ways, according to the age range of the children in the group and their individual characteristics; the nature of the particular program—a kindergarten, playgroup, or extended care program; and the environment and surroundings—urban or rural, home or school or child care center.

Many practices that have come to be associated with Waldorf/Steiner early childhood education—certain daily rhythms and rituals, play materials, songs, stories, even the colors of the walls, the dress of the adults, and the menu for snack—may be mistakenly taken as essentials. The results of such assumptions can be surprising, even disturbing—a “King Winter” nature table appearing in a tropical climate in “wintertime,” or dolls with pink skin and yellow hair in a kindergarten where all the children are brown-skinned and black-haired. Such practices may express a tendency toward a doctrinal or dogmatic approach that is out of touch with the realities of the immediate situation and instead imposes something from “outside.”

There is a parallel concern at the other end of the spectrum from the doctrinal or dogmatic. The freedom that Waldorf Education offers each individual teacher to determine the practices of her early childhood program can be misinterpreted to mean, “anything goes,” according to personal preference and style. Here too, there is the danger that the developmental realities and needs of the children are not sufficiently taken into consideration.

Each of these one-sided approaches may be injurious to the development of the children. As Waldorf early childhood educators, we are constantly seeking middle, universally human path between polarities.

Rudolf Steiner’s advice to the first Waldorf kindergarten teacher, Elizabeth Grunelius, in the early 1920s, can be paraphrased as follows:

*Observe the children. Actively meditate. Follow your intuitions. Work so that all your actions are worthy of imitation.*

Today, those of us who work with young children in a Waldorf environment are challenged to engage in a constant process of renewal. We must actively observe the children in our care, carry them in our meditations, and seek to work consciously and artistically to create the experiences that will serve their development. Our devotion to this task awakens us to the importance of self-education and transformation in the context of community. Our ongoing study of child and human development, our own artistic and meditative practices, and our work with Anthroposophy, independently and together with others, become essential elements for the practice of Waldorf early childhood education. Here we can come to experience that we are not alone on this journey. We are supported through our encounters with one another other and with our sharing of insights, experience, and knowledge. We are helped also by those beings spiritual beings that are committed to our continued development and to the renewal of culture that Waldorf Education seeks to serve.

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