



# Sacred Roots Early Learning

Policy Handbook

2026-2027

EARLY LEARNING

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# **1. Philosophy and Mission**

Sacred Roots Early Learning was founded on the understanding that children thrive when their earliest experiences are grounded in meaningful connection: connection to trusted adults, to their community, and to the natural world that holds them. Developmental research affirms what we witness each day: relationships, sensory-rich environments, and time in nature form the bedrock of cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

As a home-based micro-preschool, Sacred Roots offers a setting where learning feels both alive and deeply supported. Our intimate class size allows instruction to be responsive and personal, while hands-on exploration invites children to stretch their curiosity and deepen their understanding. We have created a space that feels grounded, safe, and richly engaging, one that nurtures emotional literacy, fosters authentic relationships, and allows growth to unfold holistically across mind, body, community, and spirit.

## **1.1 Our Mission**

Our mission is to cultivate the conditions in which whole-child development can truly unfold, conditions shaped by emotional attunement, responsive teaching, and learning experiences rooted in the natural world. We recognize that children think, create, and relate most expansively when they feel secure in their bodies and connected to the people and environment around them.

Through an integrative, inquiry-driven curriculum, we invite children to engage deeply with ideas, materials, and one another, cultivating dispositions of curiosity, empathy, resilience, reflective thought, and environmental stewardship that will guide them throughout their lives.

Rooted in research, informed by lived experience, and inspired by the rhythms of the natural world, our mission honors the early years as a sacred and formative season. We aim to cultivate confident, curious, and compassionate individuals; children who grow with a sense of respect for themselves, for others, and for the world we share.

## **1.2 Our Commitment to Quality**

At Sacred Roots, we offer a low teacher-to-student ratio of 1:6 and a maximum class size of 12 to ensure each child receives individualized attention, meaningful support, and the space to thrive. With this intention, connection remains at the heart of our teaching and every child is guaranteed to feel safe, noticed, and valued. Together, these conditions create an environment where children can engage deeply, build authentic relationships, and grow with confidence across all areas of development.

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## **2. Our Approach to Learning**

### **2.1 A Healthy, Non-Toxic Environment**

At Sacred Roots Early Learning, we believe that the environment itself is a teacher; shaping children's experiences, influencing their nervous systems, and either supporting or hindering their capacity to learn, connect, and thrive. The spaces we create for young children matter deeply, not only for what happens within them, but for how they feel, what they communicate about safety and care, and how they impact developing bodies and brains.

Our classroom is intentionally designed to be non-toxic and gentle on developing bodies and nervous systems. Every material, every piece of furniture, every element in our space has been thoughtfully selected with children's long-term health and well-being at the forefront. We have created an environment that is not only safe from obvious hazards, but also free from the hidden dangers of toxic chemicals, endocrine disruptors, and unnecessary synthetic materials that pervade so many conventional early childhood settings.

This commitment goes beyond meeting minimum safety standards, it reflects our deep respect for the vulnerability of young children and our responsibility to protect their health during the most critical period of physical and neurological development.

#### **a. Why a Non-Toxic Environment Matters for Young Children**

Young children are not simply small adults. Their bodies and brains are rapidly developing, making them uniquely vulnerable to environmental toxins that adults might tolerate with less harm.

##### **i. Rapid Growth and Development**

During the first five years of life:

- Children's brains develop at an unprecedented rate, with millions of neural connections forming every second
- Their bodies are growing faster than they ever will again
- Their organs and systems are still developing and maturing
- Their immune systems are still learning to protect them

This rapid development means that exposure to toxins during early childhood can have lasting impacts that might not appear until later in life.

## **ii. Higher Exposure Rates**

Young children are exposed to more toxins relative to their body size than adults because they:

- Breathe more air per pound of body weight
- Spend more time on the floor where dust and chemicals settle
- Put their hands and objects in their mouths frequently
- Have thinner, more permeable skin
- Are less able to metabolize and eliminate toxins

## **iii. Longer Lifespan to Experience Effects**

Because children have their whole lives ahead of them, early exposures have more time to manifest as health problems. Reducing toxic burden in early childhood is a form of preventive care that can influence health outcomes for decades to come.

## **iv. The Developing Nervous System**

The nervous system is particularly vulnerable during early childhood. Exposure to certain chemicals, even at low levels, can disrupt:

- Brain development and cognitive function
- Attention and behavior regulation
- Sensory processing
- Emotional regulation
- Learning and memory

Creating a low-toxin environment supports optimal nervous system development and helps children feel calm, regulated, and ready to learn.

## **b. Our Commitment to Material Safety**

Every material in our space has been thoughtfully selected to prioritize high-quality, non-toxic materials that also come from sustainable sources, supporting both children's health and the well-being of our planet.

### **i. Third-Party Certifications**

We prioritize materials that provide evidence of third-party certification to ensure they meet stringent safety and environmental standards. These certifications offer independent verification that products have been tested and meet specific criteria for:

- Low or zero VOC (Volatile Organic Compound) emissions
- Absence of harmful flame retardants
- Freedom from phthalates, BPA, and other endocrine disruptors
- Absence of heavy metals (lead, cadmium, mercury)
- Low formaldehyde emissions
- Safe dyes and finishes

#### **Certifications we look for include (not limited to):**

- GREENGUARD Gold: Certifies low chemical emissions for better indoor air quality
- GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard): For organic fabrics and textiles
- Oeko-Tex Standard 100: Certifies textiles are free from harmful substances
- FSC (Forest Stewardship Council): For sustainably sourced wood products
- Cradle to Cradle: For products designed with environmental and human health in mind
- ASTM F963: Safety standard for toys
- EN71: European safety standard for toys and children's products

### **ii. Natural and Sustainable Materials**

Whenever possible, we choose natural materials over synthetic alternatives:

#### **Wood:**

- Solid wood furniture and toys rather than particle board or MDF (which often contain formaldehyde)

- FSC-certified wood from sustainably managed forests
- Finished with non-toxic, low-VOC oils, waxes, or water-based finishes
- Unfinished or naturally finished wood whenever appropriate

**Natural Fibers:**

- Organic cotton, wool, silk, and linen for dress-up clothes, blankets, and textiles
- Natural rubber rather than plastic for balls, teethers, and other manipulatives
- Hemp and bamboo as sustainable alternatives
- Undyed or naturally dyed fabrics when possible

**Metal and Glass:**

- Stainless steel rather than plastic for food containers and water bottles
- Glass rather than plastic for certain storage and art materials
- Cast iron or stainless steel for dramatic play kitchen items

**Natural Earth Materials:**

- Clay, beeswax, and natural plant-based dyes
- Stones, shells, wood slices, pine cones, and other natural loose parts
- Wool felt made from 100% wool without synthetic dyes

**iii. What We Avoid**

We actively avoid materials known to contain or off-gas harmful chemicals:

**Plastics:** While we recognize that some plastic is unavoidable in a modern classroom, we:

- Minimize plastic use wherever possible
- Choose plastics marked #1, #2, #4, or #5 (safer plastics) over #3 (PVC), #6 (polystyrene), or #7 (often contains BPA)
- Avoid soft, flexible plastics that often contain phthalates
- Choose plastic items that are phthalate-free, BPA-free, and PVC-free when certified
- Never heat food in plastic containers
- Regularly replace plastic items that show wear, cracks, or cloudiness

**Vinyl/PVC:**

- PVC (polyvinyl chloride) often contains phthalates and can release toxic chlorine gas if burned
- We avoid vinyl flooring, shower curtains, raincoats, tablecloths, and toys

**Flame Retardants:**

- Many conventional furniture items, mattresses, and fabrics are treated with flame retardant chemicals linked to endocrine disruption, neurological impacts, and cancer
- We choose items that meet fire safety standards through design and material choice rather than chemical treatment
- We seek out furniture and nap mats specifically certified as flame-retardant-free

**Synthetic Fragrances:**

- We do not use air fresheners, scented candles, plug-in fragrance dispensers, or scented cleaning products
- We avoid personal care products, hand soaps, and lotions with synthetic fragrances
- Natural essential oils may be used sparingly and only in ways that do not expose children directly (never applied to skin, never diffused in occupied spaces without parent consent)

**Formaldehyde:**

- We avoid pressed wood products (particle board, MDF) that off-gas formaldehyde
- We choose solid wood or formaldehyde-free certified products
- We ensure adequate ventilation, especially when introducing any new furniture or materials

**Heavy Metals:**

- We avoid toys and art supplies that may contain lead, cadmium, or other heavy metals
- We choose art supplies specifically labeled non-toxic and AP (Approved Product) certified by ACMI (Art & Creative Materials Institute)
- We are cautious with imported products that may not meet US safety standards

## c. Furniture and Learning Materials

### i. Furniture Selection

Our furniture is chosen with health, durability, and sustainability in mind:

- **Solid wood tables, chairs, and shelving** rather than particle board or laminate
- **Natural or low-VOC finishes** on all wood furniture
- **Formaldehyde-free** and GREENGUARD Gold certified when possible
- **Ergonomically appropriate** sizing for young children's bodies
- **Sturdy and stable** to prevent tipping and ensure safety
- **Minimal metal hardware** to reduce exposure to heavy metals
- **Flame-retardant-free cushions and upholstery** when soft seating is used

### ii. Nap and Rest Materials

Sleep and rest are times when children's bodies are particularly vulnerable to off-gassing and chemical exposure:

- **Organic cotton or wool nap mats** free from flame retardants and waterproof vinyl coatings
- **Natural fiber bedding** (organic cotton sheets and blankets)
- **Non-toxic, wipeable covers** when waterproofing is necessary (food-grade polyethylene or certified non-toxic alternatives)
- **Individual, labeled bedding** washed weekly

### iii. Art Supplies

Art materials are chosen for safety, quality, and environmental responsibility:

- **AP Certified non-toxic** paints, crayons, markers, and chalk
- **Natural beeswax crayons and blocks**
- **Plant-based, biodegradable paints** when possible
- **Natural clay** rather than synthetic modeling compounds
- **Non-toxic, washable glue** (white glue, glue sticks)
- **Unbleached, recycled paper products**
- **Natural dyes** made from plants, vegetables, and spices for special projects

- **Avoidance of glitter** (microplastics) in favor of natural alternatives

#### iv. Toys and Manipulatives

Toys and learning materials are the tools of children's work, and we select them carefully:

- **Natural wooden toys** from sustainable sources
- **Wool felt play materials** (puppets, play food, dress-up items)
- **Natural rubber balls and toys** rather than plastic or PVC
- **Stainless steel or wooden kitchen items** for dramatic play
- **Natural loose parts** (stones, shells, wood slices, seed pods, fabric scraps)
- **Cloth dolls and stuffed animals** made from organic cotton or wool
- **Board books and cloth books** for infants and toddlers (avoiding plastic-coated board books when possible)
- **Age-appropriate, safety-tested toys** that meet ASTM and CPSC standards

#### d. Indoor Air Quality

The air children breathe indoors can be more polluted than outdoor air, especially in spaces with new furniture, synthetic materials, or inadequate ventilation. We prioritize healthy indoor air through:

##### i. Ventilation

- **Fresh air circulation** through open windows whenever weather permits
- **Air exchange** between indoor and outdoor environments throughout the day
- **HEPA air purifiers** in spaces where ventilation is limited
- **Regular filter changes** and maintenance of any HVAC systems

##### ii. Low-VOC Everything

- **Low-VOC or zero-VOC paints** on all walls and surfaces
- **Natural, low-VOC finishes** on wood floors and furniture
- **Avoidance of conventional cleaning products** that off-gas harmful chemicals
- **Time for off-gassing** before children occupy newly painted or furnished spaces

### iii. Humidity Control

- **Appropriate humidity levels** (30-50%) to prevent mold growth and respiratory irritation
- **Prompt attention** to any water leaks or moisture issues
- **Dehumidifiers or humidifiers** as needed based on seasonal conditions

### iv. Plants for Air Purification

- **Non-toxic houseplants** (such as spider plants, Boston ferns, or bamboo palms) placed out of children's reach
- **Regular care and monitoring** to prevent mold growth in soil

### v. Dust and Allergen Control

- **Regular cleaning** with HEPA-filtered vacuums
- **Damp mopping** rather than dry sweeping to prevent dust from becoming airborne
- **Washable rugs and fabrics** that can be cleaned frequently
- **Minimal fabric and upholstery** that can trap dust and allergens

### e. Cleaning and Hygiene Products

The products we use to clean and sanitize our space directly impact children's health. We choose cleaning products that are:

**i. Free from harsh chemicals** such as bleach, ammonia, synthetic fragrances, and phthalates

**ii. Third-party certified** (EPA Safer Choice, Green Seal, or EWG Verified)

**iii. Plant-based and biodegradable** when possible

**iv. Effective and appropriate** for use in early childhood settings, meeting health department requirements

Common cleaning solutions we use:

- **Vinegar and water** for general surface cleaning
- **Castile soap** for washing hands, dishes, and surfaces
- **Hydrogen peroxide** for disinfecting

- **Baking soda** for scrubbing and deodorizing
- **EPA-approved, non-toxic disinfectants** when higher-level sanitization is required (following illness outbreaks or for restroom areas)

## **f. Outdoor Environment**

Our outdoor space is an extension of our commitment to health and sustainability:

### **i. Natural Play Spaces**

- **Natural, untreated wood** for climbing structures, raised beds, and borders
- **Chemical-free grass and gardens** maintained without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers
- **Organic soil and compost** for gardening projects
- **Natural ground cover** (wood chips, sand, grass) rather than rubber mulch (which can contain heavy metals and off-gas VOCs)

### **ii. Shade and Sun Protection**

- **Natural shade** from trees and structures
- **Non-toxic, mineral-based sunscreen** available for families who request it (applied by parents or with written permission)
- **Protective clothing** encouraged (hats, long sleeves) on sunny days

### **iii. Pest Management**

- **Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** approach that prioritizes prevention over chemical treatment
- **Physical barriers** and habitat modification to reduce pest problems
- **Non-toxic pest control** methods when intervention is needed
- **Avoidance of synthetic pesticides and herbicides**

## **g. A Sensory-Friendly, Regulation-Supporting Space**

Beyond avoiding toxins, our environment is designed to support children's nervous systems and sensory processing:

### **i. Natural Light**

- **Abundant natural light** from windows whenever possible
- **Full-spectrum LED lighting** that mimics natural light when artificial light is needed
- **Avoidance of fluorescent lighting** which can flicker and cause sensory distress for some children

### **ii. Calm, Uncluttered Spaces**

- **Intentionally organized** materials displayed on open shelving
- **Clutter-free environments** that reduce visual overstimulation
- **Neutral, natural color palettes** on walls and large surfaces
- **Pops of color** introduced thoughtfully through natural materials, art, and children's work

### **iii. Natural Materials and Textures**

- **Wood, stone, fabric, and plants** that provide grounding sensory input
- **Variety of textures** to engage tactile exploration
- **Living elements** (plants, natural light, views of nature) that support nervous system regulation

### **iv. Acoustic Considerations**

- **Soft surfaces** (rugs, fabric wall hangings, pillows) to absorb sound
- **Small group spaces** that naturally reduce noise levels
- **Quiet areas** where children can retreat when they need calm

### **v. Connection to Nature**

- **Visual connection** to the outdoors through windows
- **Indoor plants** and natural materials
- **Easy access** to outdoor spaces for frequent transitions between indoors and out

### **h. Continuous Improvement and Transparency**

Creating a truly non-toxic environment is an ongoing process. We are committed to:

### **i. Staying Informed**

- **Monitoring new research** on children's environmental health
- **Learning about emerging safer alternatives** to conventional products
- **Participating in early childhood environmental health networks**

### **ii. Gradual Replacement**

- **Replacing items** with safer alternatives as they wear out or need updating
- **Prioritizing upgrades** based on greatest potential health impact

### **iii. Transparency with Families**

- **Openly sharing** our materials and product choices with families
- **Welcoming questions and concerns** about environmental health
- **Providing resources** for families who want to create healthier home environments

### **iv. Continuous Evaluation**

- **Regularly assessing** our space and materials for opportunities to improve
- **Seeking feedback** from families and staff
- **Adapting** as new information and better products become available

### **i. The Holistic Impact**

All of these choices work together to create a space that feels healthy, breathable, and grounding, supporting regulation, deep focus, and meaningful engagement in learning, while freeing children from overstimulation and toxic burden so curiosity and connection can truly flourish.

When children spend their days in an environment that honors their developing bodies and nervous systems, they:

- Feel calmer and more regulated
- Experience fewer respiratory and allergy issues
- Demonstrate better attention and focus
- Engage more deeply in learning

- Build a relationship with natural materials and the natural world
- Develop in an environment that supports, rather than hinders, optimal growth

This commitment to a healthy, non-toxic environment is not just about avoiding harm, it is about actively creating the conditions for children to thrive. It is about honoring the sacred responsibility we hold as adults caring for young children during the most vulnerable and formative years of their lives.

At Sacred Roots, we believe children deserve to learn, play, and grow in spaces that are as pure, beautiful, and life-giving as possible. This is our promise and our practice.

## **2.2 Integrated, Study-Based Curriculum**

Rather than relying on a single, rigid curriculum or predetermined weekly themes, we believe in the strength of an integrated, study-based approach that invites us to deep-dive into investigations inspired by children's interests. This approach, also known as inquiry-based, investigative, or project-based learning, allows us to remain responsive to each child's developmental needs, curiosity, and pace, creating learning that feels meaningful rather than forced or superficial.

In a study-based model, learning unfolds through extended investigations that naturally weave together multiple content areas and developmental domains. Instead of teaching reading at 9:00, math at 10:00, and science at 11:00, we create rich contexts where children simultaneously develop language and literacy, mathematical thinking, scientific reasoning, social-emotional skills, and physical competence, all within the same meaningful experience.

### **a. What Is Study-Based Curriculum?**

Study-based curriculum organizes learning around in-depth investigations of topics that hold genuine meaning and interest for children. Rather than spending a week on "apples" before moving on to "pumpkins," we might spend six weeks exploring a question like "How do things grow?" or "What makes structures strong?"

### **i. Studies Are Extended Over Time**

A study typically lasts several weeks or even months, giving children time to:

- Build deep knowledge rather than superficial exposure
- Revisit ideas from multiple angles and perspectives
- Develop expertise and confidence in a topic
- See complexity and nuance within a subject
- Experience the satisfaction of sustained inquiry and meaningful work

### **ii. Studies Are Driven by Questions**

Each study is guided by authentic questions, sometimes posed by children, sometimes carefully framed by teachers based on children's observed interests and developmental needs. These questions provide focus and direction while remaining open-ended enough to allow for genuine discovery.

Examples of guiding questions:

- "How do living things change and grow over time?"
- "How can we build structures that don't fall down?"
- "Where does water go and how does it move?"
- "How do light and shadow work?"
- "What do our bodies need to be healthy and strong?"

### **iii. Studies Are Multisensory and Hands-On**

Study-based learning is inherently active. Children don't just read about a topic, they investigate it through direct, hands-on exploration with real materials, real problems, and real discovery.

### **iv. Studies Integrate All Learning Domains**

This is the heart of what makes study-based curriculum so powerful: learning is not compartmentalized into separate subjects. Within a single investigation, children naturally develop skills and knowledge across all domains.

## **b. The Power of Integration**

Traditional early childhood programs often teach skills in isolation: circle time for literacy, manipulatives for math, science as a separate activity. But young children don't think in subjects, they experience the world holistically.

Study-based curriculum honors how children actually learn by creating contexts where all domains develop simultaneously and in relationship to one another.

### **Example: A Study of Waterways and Flow**

Children become fascinated with how water moves during outdoor play. Teachers notice this sustained interest and launch a study guided by the question: "How does water move and what can we do to direct its flow?"

*Within this single study, children develop:*

#### **i. Scientific Thinking**

- Observing water's properties (flows downhill, takes the shape of its container)
- Testing hypotheses (predicting which materials will absorb water, block water, or channel water)
- Understanding cause and effect (if we raise this end, water flows faster)
- Exploring concepts like gravity, absorption, evaporation, and states of matter
- Documenting observations and noticing patterns

#### **ii. Mathematical Reasoning**

- Measuring and comparing (which container holds more water? How far did the water travel?)
- Understanding concepts of more/less, full/empty, fast/slow
- Counting and quantifying (how many cups did it take to fill the bucket?)
- Exploring spatial relationships (what happens when we change the angle of the ramp?)
- Noticing and creating patterns (the water makes a zig-zag pattern as it flows)

#### **iii. Language and Literacy**

- Rich vocabulary development (flow, pour, channel, absorb, downstream, current, dam, reservoir)
- Descriptive language and observation ("The water rushes fast here but slows down when it gets wider")
- Asking questions and making predictions
- Using language to plan, negotiate, and solve problems with peers
- Dictating observations for documentation
- Engaging with books, poems, and stories about water and rivers

#### **iv. Physical Development**

- Fine motor skills (pouring, squeezing, manipulating tubes and connectors)
- Gross motor skills (digging channels, carrying water, moving large materials)
- Hand-eye coordination and control
- Sensory integration through working with water

#### **v. Social-Emotional Growth**

- Collaboration and shared problem-solving ("How can we work together to keep the water from leaking?")
- Turn-taking and negotiation
- Persistence when dams break or channels collapse
- Pride in accomplishments ("We built the longest waterway ever!")
- Perspective-taking and communication
- Emotional regulation when things don't work as planned

#### **vi. Creative Expression**

- Representing understanding through drawings, paintings, and sculpture
- Building and designing waterways with intention and creativity
- Documenting discoveries through photographs and documentation panels
- Using dramatic play to reenact and process experiences
- Expressing ideas about water through movement and music

This is not six separate lessons, it is one rich, integrated experience where all learning happens simultaneously and authentically.

### **c. How Studies Unfold at Sacred Roots**

While every study is unique, there is a general rhythm to how study-based curriculum develops in our classroom:

#### **i. Observation and Emergence**

Teachers observe children's play, conversations, and explorations closely, noticing:

- What are children repeatedly drawn to?
- What questions are they asking?
- What are they trying to figure out?
- What problems are they working to solve?
- What delights, puzzles, or fascinates them?

These observations, combined with teachers' understanding of what children need developmentally, guide the selection of study topics.

#### **ii. Launching the Study**

Teachers introduce the study with a provocation; a carefully chosen collection of materials, images, books, or experiences designed to spark curiosity and invite investigation.

For example, launching a study of structures might include:

- A variety of building materials (blocks, cardboard, sticks, clay)
- Photographs of bridges, towers, and buildings from around the world
- Books about architecture and construction
- An invitation to explore: "What can we build? What makes something strong?"

#### **iii. Investigation and Exploration**

Children explore the topic through multiple entry points and modalities:

- Hands-on experimentation with materials
- Observation of phenomena (in nature, in the built environment, in books and media)
- Conversations and collaborative problem-solving
- Representation through art, building, and dramatic play

- Field experiences and community connections
- Documentation of discoveries and theories

Teachers support this investigation with:

- Open-ended questions that deepen thinking
- Additional materials and provocations that extend exploration
- Documentation that makes children's learning visible
- Small-group and individual support tailored to each child's developmental level

#### **iv. Representation and Communication**

Children represent their understanding in multiple ways:

- Through drawing, painting, and sculpture
- Through building and construction
- Through dramatic play and storytelling
- Through dictation and emergent writing
- Through movement, music, and dance

This representation serves multiple purposes:

- It deepens understanding (teaching is one of the best ways to learn)
- It reveals children's current thinking to teachers
- It gives children pride and ownership in their learning
- It communicates learning to families and the broader community

#### **v. Documentation and Reflection**

Teachers document the study through:

- Photographs of children's work and processes
- Transcriptions of children's conversations and theories
- Collection of children's representations (drawings, writings, constructions)
- Written observations and reflections

This documentation is shared with children, inviting them to reflect on their own learning journey: "Look at what we thought at the beginning of our study! What do we know now? What questions do we still have?"

#### **vi. Integration and Extension**

As the study progresses, teachers intentionally weave in learning experiences across all domains, ensuring that every child is developing skills in:

- Literacy and language
- Mathematical thinking
- Scientific reasoning
- Social-emotional competence
- Physical development
- Creative expression

The study becomes a rich context for meeting individual developmental goals while maintaining the cohesion and meaning of the investigation.

#### **vii. Celebration and Closure**

When a study comes to a natural close, we celebrate what we've learned and reflect on the journey:

- Creating a documentation display or book
- Sharing our learning with families
- Reflecting on how our thinking has changed
- Noticing what new questions have emerged

Sometimes the end of one study naturally leads into the next investigation.

### **d. Examples of Integrated, Study-Based Learning**

#### **i. A Study of Light and Shadow**

*Guiding question:* "How do light and shadow work, and what can we do with them?"

*Integration across domains:*

- **Science:** Properties of light, how shadows are formed, transparency and opacity, reflection
- **Math:** Measurement (comparing shadow lengths at different times of day), spatial relationships, shapes
- **Literacy:** Vocabulary (shadow, light, reflection, translucent, opaque), shadow puppet storytelling, books about day and night
- **Art:** Shadow tracing, silhouette portraits, exploring light and dark in painting
- **Physical:** Shadow tag, shadow dancing, manipulating light sources and objects
- **Social-emotional:** Collaborative shadow puppet shows, problem-solving together, wonder and curiosity

## ii. A Study of Trees and the Changing Seasons

*Guiding question:* "How do trees change through the seasons, and what do they need to live and grow?"

*Integration across domains:*

- **Science:** Life cycles, seasons, tree anatomy, observation over time, photosynthesis (in age-appropriate ways)
- **Math:** Measuring tree trunks, counting branches and leaves, sorting leaves by size/shape, graphing seasonal changes
- **Literacy:** Tree vocabulary (trunk, bark, roots, canopy, deciduous, evergreen), nature journals, tree poetry, stories about trees
- **Art:** Leaf rubbings, bark textures, seasonal tree paintings, natural sculptures
- **Physical:** Climbing, balancing on logs, collecting natural materials, using large muscles to move branches
- **Social-emotional:** Caring for trees, patience as we observe slow changes, collaboration in tree-building projects

## iii. A Study of Our Bodies and How They Work

*Guiding question:* "What do our bodies need to be healthy, and how do different parts of our body help us?"

*Integration across domains:*

- **Science:** Body systems (simplified and age-appropriate), five senses, nutrition, exercise, illness and health
- **Math:** Counting body parts, measuring height and growth, graphing favorite healthy foods
- **Literacy:** Body vocabulary (muscles, bones, heart, lungs, stomach), books about bodies and health, dictating what we know
- **Art:** Self-portraits, body tracings, creating anatomical drawings, representing movement through dance
- **Physical:** Yoga and movement exploration, testing what our bodies can do, developing awareness of body in space
- **Social-emotional:** Understanding emotions in the body, learning to listen to body signals, respecting differences, consent and body autonomy
- **Anti-Bias Education:** Noticing and appreciating our differences and similarities in skin tones, face shapes, height, hair and eye colors, etc.

## **e. Why Study-Based Curriculum Matters**

### **i. Deep, Transferable Learning**

When children explore a topic in depth across multiple weeks, they develop true understanding, not just surface-level familiarity. This deep knowledge becomes a scaffold for future learning.

### **ii. Skills Learned in Context**

Reading, writing, counting, and problem-solving are taught within meaningful contexts where children understand *why* these skills matter. A child learning to measure during a building study understands that measurement is a tool for solving real problems, not just an isolated skill.

### **iii. Authentic Engagement**

Studies are designed around what genuinely interests children. This intrinsic motivation is far more powerful than external rewards or pressure.

### **iv. Development of Executive Function**

Extended studies require children to:

- Remember and build on prior learning (working memory)
- Plan and organize their thinking
- Shift perspectives and try new approaches (cognitive flexibility)
- Persist through challenges
- Reflect on their learning

#### **v. Natural Differentiation**

Within a study, every child can enter at their own developmental level. While one child might be documenting observations through detailed drawings, another might be exploring the same concept through sensory play. Both are learning, just at their appropriate level.

#### **vi. Joy and Meaning**

When learning is integrated and study-based, it feels joyful and purposeful. Children aren't sitting through disconnected activities, they're engaged in meaningful work that matters to them.

#### **f. The Role of the Teacher in Study-Based Curriculum**

Study-based curriculum requires tremendous skill, knowledge, and intentionality from teachers. The teacher's role includes:

##### **i. Observing and Listening**

Teachers must be keen observers, noticing what children are curious about and what they're ready to learn.

##### **ii. Designing Investigations**

Teachers design studies that balance children's interests with developmental goals, ensuring all domains are addressed.

##### **iii. Preparing the Environment**

Teachers curate materials, set up provocations, and create spaces that invite investigation.

#### **iv. Facilitating Learning**

Teachers ask open-ended questions, scaffold thinking, and provide just enough support to keep children engaged in productive struggle.

#### **v. Documenting and Assessing**

Teachers document children's learning, assess progress across domains, and adjust the study based on what children need.

#### **vi. Communicating with Families**

Teachers help families understand the rich, integrated learning happening within studies and invite them to extend investigations at home.

#### **g. Study-Based Curriculum and School Readiness**

Some families worry that a study-based curriculum won't prepare children for kindergarten. Research and experience tell us the opposite is true.

Children who engage in integrated, study-based learning:

- Develop deeper conceptual understanding than children who practice isolated skills
- Show stronger problem-solving and critical thinking abilities
- Have better executive function and self-regulation
- Are more curious, confident, and engaged learners
- Possess the foundational skills in literacy, math, and science needed for kindergarten, but learned in meaningful, lasting ways

#### **h. Trust in Integration**

At Sacred Roots, we trust that when learning is integrated, when children explore ideas deeply over time, and when skills are taught within meaningful contexts, children develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to thrive, not just in kindergarten, but throughout their lives.

By drawing from diverse educational resources and philosophies, we offer children varied entry points to understanding: building critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability through rich experiences that unfold over time. Through these integrated studies, we naturally weave together language and literacy, social-emotional development, cognitive reasoning, and physical growth, helping children make authentic connections in the world around them.

In this model, learning expands beyond skills and standards, it becomes joyful, relevant, confidence-building, and deeply interconnected, just as learning in the real world always is.

## **2.3 Hands-On Learning**

We believe children learn best when they can work with ideas, not just hear about them. At Sacred Roots, hands-on learning is not an occasional activity, it is the heart of how we approach education. Young children are natural scientists, artists, engineers, and explorers, and they make sense of the world through direct, sensory-rich experiences with real materials, real problems, and real discovery.

Hands-on learning plays a crucial role in early brain development, strengthening neural pathways through direct experience rather than passive absorption. When children touch, manipulate, experiment, and create, they engage multiple senses simultaneously, which deepens understanding and builds lasting connections in the brain. This multisensory engagement is how young children are wired to learn; through doing, not just watching or listening.

### **a. The Science Behind Hands-On Learning**

Research in neuroscience and developmental psychology consistently shows that:

#### **i. Active Learning Strengthens Memory and Understanding**

When children physically engage with materials and concepts, they retain information more effectively than through observation or verbal instruction alone. The act of doing creates stronger neural pathways and deeper comprehension.

#### **ii. Hands-On Experiences Develop Executive Function Skills**

Manipulating materials, solving problems, and experimenting with cause-and-effect build critical executive function skills including:

- Planning and sequencing
- Working memory
- Flexible thinking
- Self-regulation and impulse control
- Sustained attention and focus

### **iii. Concrete Experiences Build Abstract Thinking**

Young children think concretely. They need to see, touch, and manipulate objects to understand concepts that adults take for granted. Hands-on exploration with real materials lays the foundation for abstract reasoning that will develop later. For example, a child who has spent time pouring water between containers of different sizes develops an embodied understanding of volume, measurement, and comparison that will support future math learning.

### **iv. Movement and Learning Are Intertwined**

The brain's motor cortex and cognitive centers are deeply connected. When children use their hands, move their bodies, and engage physically with learning, they activate more of the brain than when sitting still and listening. This integration of movement and cognition is especially important for young learners.

## **b. What Hands-On Learning Looks Like at Sacred Roots**

Hands-on learning takes many forms in our program, and it happens throughout the day in intentional and organic ways:

### **i. Open-Ended Materials and Loose Parts**

We provide children with materials that can be used in infinite ways:

- Natural materials (sticks, stones, pine cones, shells, seeds, leaves)
- Blocks and building materials of various sizes and textures
- Art supplies that invite experimentation (clay, paint, collage materials, natural dyes)
- Sensory materials (water, sand, mud, ice, snow, playdough)

- Tools for real work (child-safe hammers, saws, brushes, tongs, droppers)
- Household items repurposed for exploration (cardboard tubes, fabric scraps, containers)

These materials invite children to experiment, create, and problem-solve without predetermined outcomes or "right answers."

## **ii. Process Over Product**

In our classroom, we value the process of creating, building, and exploring far more than the finished product. When a child spends 20 minutes carefully arranging stones by size, testing which ones balance, and reorganizing their design, they are engaged in deep, meaningful learning, even if the "product" is simply a temporary arrangement that gets cleaned up before lunch.

We resist the temptation to create teacher-directed crafts where every child's work looks the same. Instead, we offer invitations to explore materials and techniques, trusting that each child's unique vision and approach has value.

## **iii. Real Tools and Real Work**

Whenever safe and appropriate, we provide children with real tools and opportunities to do real work:

- Cooking and food preparation (measuring, mixing, chopping with child-safe knives, spreading)
- Gardening (digging, planting, watering, harvesting)
- Building and construction (hammering, sawing, sanding, assembling)
- Cleaning and caregiving (sweeping, washing, caring for plants and materials)
- Scientific exploration (magnifying glasses, measuring tools, scales, timers)

Using real tools builds competence, confidence, and respect for materials. It also sends a powerful message: *You are capable. Your work matters. We trust you.*

## **iv. Inquiry-Based Investigations**

Children's questions and curiosities drive much of our hands-on exploration. When a child wonders, "Why do some things float and others sink?" We don't simply tell them the answer, we gather materials, set up opportunities for experimentation, and let them discover patterns and principles through repeated testing and observation.

This inquiry-based approach might look like:

- Weeks spent exploring shadows, light, and reflection
- Investigations into how water moves, freezes, and evaporates
- Explorations of balance, weight, and gravity through block building and ramp experiments
- Studies of living things through observation, documentation, and care

#### **v. Art as Exploration, Not Instruction**

Art in our program is a language for thinking, feeling, and making sense of the world. Children have daily access to art materials and are encouraged to:

- Experiment with color mixing, texture, and technique
- Express emotions and ideas through visual media
- Represent their observations and experiences
- Explore the properties of different materials (how watercolor behaves differently than tempera, how clay changes when it dries)
- Engage in collaborative art-making

We do not use coloring sheets, stencils, or models to copy. Instead, we trust children's innate creativity and provide rich materials, time, and space for authentic artistic expression.

#### **vi. Sensory Play and Exploration**

Sensory experiences are foundational to learning in early childhood. We intentionally provide:

- Water and sand play (pouring, measuring, scooping, building)
- Tactile materials (playdough, clay, slime, kinetic sand, shaving cream)
- Sensory bins with changing themes and textures
- Opportunities to explore natural elements (mud, ice, snow, rain)

- Materials that engage all the senses (herbs to smell, instruments to hear, textures to touch)

Sensory play is not "just playing," it is how young children integrate sensory information, develop fine motor skills, regulate their nervous systems, and build cognitive understanding.

### **vii. Construction and Engineering**

Building with blocks, loose parts, and recycled materials engages children in early engineering thinking:

- Spatial reasoning and geometry
- Problem-solving and persistence
- Understanding balance, stability, and cause-and-effect
- Planning and revising designs
- Collaboration and negotiation

Construction play also builds frustration tolerance and resilience as children learn that structures fall, plans change, and trying again is part of the process.

### **viii. Dramatic Play and Role-Playing**

Through pretend play, children physically enact their understanding of the world:

- Taking on roles and perspectives
- Practicing social scripts and language
- Working through emotional experiences
- Imagining possibilities and testing hypotheses about how the world works

We provide open-ended props, costumes, and materials that support children's imaginative play without dictating the narrative.

### **c. Integration Across Domains**

One of the greatest strengths of hands-on learning is that it naturally integrates multiple areas of development at once. When a child builds a tower with blocks, they are simultaneously:

#### **i. Developing Cognitive Skills**

- Spatial reasoning and geometry
- Counting and one-to-one correspondence
- Pattern recognition
- Cause and effect understanding
- Problem-solving

## **ii. Building Physical Skills**

- Fine motor control and hand-eye coordination
- Gross motor strength and balance
- Sensory integration

## **iii. Practicing Social-Emotional Skills**

- Persistence and frustration tolerance
- Pride and accomplishment
- Collaboration and turn-taking (if building with others)
- Self-regulation when structures fall

## **iv. Expanding Language and Literacy**

- Vocabulary (taller, wider, balanced, collapsed)
- Descriptive language
- Narrative skills (explaining what they built and why)

This integration mirrors how learning actually happens for young children, not in isolated subjects, but as a holistic, embodied experience.

## **d. The Role of the Teacher in Hands-On Learning**

In a hands-on learning environment, the teacher's role shifts from instructor to facilitator, observer, and co-learner:

### **i. Preparing the Environment**

Teachers thoughtfully select, arrange, and rotate materials to provoke curiosity and support emerging interests.

## **ii. Observing and Documenting**

Teachers watch closely to understand what children are exploring, what questions they're asking, and what skills they're developing.

## **iii. Asking Open-Ended Questions**

Rather than providing answers, teachers ask questions that deepen thinking: "What do you notice?" "What happens if...?" "How could you...?" "Why do you think...?"

## **iv. Providing Support Without Taking Over**

Teachers offer just enough help to keep children engaged in productive struggle, stepping in to scaffold when needed but resisting the urge to solve problems for children.

## **v. Extending and Enriching Learning**

Based on observations, teachers add new materials, pose new challenges, and create new provocations that build on children's current interests and push their thinking forward.

## **e. Hands-On Learning and School Readiness**

Some families worry that hands-on, play-based learning won't prepare children for "real school." Research and experience tell us the opposite is true.

Children who have rich hands-on learning experiences in early childhood:

- Develop stronger problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Have better executive function and self-regulation
- Show higher levels of creativity and flexible thinking
- Possess deeper conceptual understanding (not just rote memorization)
- Are more engaged, curious, and confident learners
- Demonstrate stronger social-emotional skills and resilience

These skills are the true foundation of school readiness. Far more predictive of long-term success than early academic drilling.

#### **f. When Hands-On Learning Meets Real Life**

Hands-on learning at Sacred Roots extends beyond the classroom into daily life and community:

##### **i. Cooking and Meal Preparation**

Children may help prepare snacks and meals, measuring ingredients, following recipes, and seeing cause-and-effect in action (what happens when we mix, heat, or cool foods).

##### **ii. Caring for Our Space**

Children help care for our learning environment; watering plants, cleaning tables, reusing materials, learning responsibility, and developing practical life skills.

##### **iii. Nature Exploration**

Outdoor time is rich with hands-on discovery: climbing, digging, building with natural materials, observing insects, collecting treasures, and engaging all the senses in the natural world.

##### **iv. Community Connections**

When possible, we invite community members to share their skills and trades, giving children hands-on exposure to real work in the world (gardening, woodworking, art-making, music, cooking from different cultures).

#### **g. The Long-Term Impact**

When children spend their early years engaged in meaningful, hands-on learning, they develop more than academic skills, they develop a way of being in the world:

- Curiosity and a love of learning
- Confidence in their ability to figure things out
- Respect for materials and the natural world
- Persistence in the face of challenges

- Joy in the process of creating and discovering

These are the dispositions that will serve them not just in kindergarten, but throughout their lives.

At Sacred Roots, we honor the truth that young children learn by doing. We provide the time, space, materials, and support for hands-on exploration to flourish, trusting that when children are free to touch, build, create, experiment, and discover, deep and lasting learning unfolds naturally.

## **2.4 Nature-Inspired Learning**

At Sacred Roots Early Learning, we believe deeply in the powerful, irreplaceable connection between nature and early childhood development. Nature is not a backdrop for learning, it is a teacher, a laboratory, a source of wonder, and a fundamental human need. Time spent in the natural world is not a luxury or an "extra" when the weather is nice, it is essential to children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Our commitment to nature-based learning is grounded in both ancient wisdom and contemporary research. For millennia, children have learned through direct engagement with the natural world; observing seasons, caring for plants and animals, exploring forests and streams, and developing an embodied understanding of natural cycles and systems. Yet in recent decades, children's access to nature has drastically diminished, with profound consequences for their health, development, and relationship with the living world.

At Sacred Roots, we intentionally restore this vital connection. Outdoor learning and meaningful engagement with nature are woven throughout our curriculum, our daily rhythms, and our physical space. We go outside in (almost) all weather, we bring nature inside, and we structure our days to honor children's deep need for fresh air, natural light, open space, and encounters with the more-than-human world.

### **a. Why Nature Matters: The Research Foundation**

The benefits of nature connection for young children are well-documented across multiple disciplines. Research in developmental psychology, neuroscience, public health, environmental

education, and ecology consistently affirm that nature-based experiences profoundly support children's development and well-being.

### **i. Cognitive Benefits**

Nature experiences enhance children's cognitive functioning in measurable ways:

#### **Attention and Focus:**

- Natural environments restore children's capacity for directed attention
- Time in nature reduces symptoms of ADHD and improves concentration
- The "soft fascination" of nature (watching clouds, listening to birds, observing insects) allows the prefrontal cortex to rest and restore, improving subsequent focus and self-control
- Children who spend more time in nature demonstrate longer attention spans and better task persistence

#### **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking:**

- Natural environments present complex, ever-changing problems to solve (How do we build a dam? How can we climb this tree safely? Where did the caterpillar go?)
- Nature doesn't come with instructions; children must observe, hypothesize, test, and revise their thinking
- Outdoor play develops spatial reasoning, mathematical thinking, and scientific inquiry skills
- The unpredictability of nature teaches flexible thinking and adaptability

#### **Creativity and Imagination:**

- Natural materials are open-ended and invite imaginative play
- The sensory richness of nature stimulates creative thinking
- Unstructured outdoor time allows children's imaginations to flourish without adult-imposed narratives or commercial toys
- Nature provides endless inspiration for art, storytelling, and dramatic play

**Executive Function:**

- Navigating natural environments develops planning, decision-making, and self-regulation
- Risk assessment in outdoor play builds judgment and self-control
- Long-term projects (gardening, nature observation) develop working memory and sustained attention

**ii. Physical Benefits**

Nature profoundly supports children's physical health and development:

**Gross Motor Development:**

- Climbing, balancing, running on uneven terrain develops strength, coordination, and body awareness
- Natural environments offer more varied and challenging physical opportunities than flat playgrounds
- Children move more and move differently in nature; crawling under bushes, balancing on logs, scrambling up hills
- Outdoor play develops vestibular and proprioceptive systems critical for coordination and spatial awareness

**Fine Motor Skills:**

- Manipulating small natural objects (acorns, pebbles, twigs, seeds) develops pincer grasp and finger strength
- Using tools in nature (digging, building, planting) refines hand-eye coordination
- Nature-based art (weaving with grasses, arranging stones, mud work) builds dexterity

**Sensory Integration:**

- Nature provides rich, varied sensory input that supports healthy sensory processing
- Outdoor environments offer proprioceptive and vestibular input that many children crave
- Natural textures, temperatures, smells, and sounds provide sensory diversity
- Sensory experiences in nature support regulation and integration

### **Overall Health:**

- Outdoor time increases Vitamin D production, supporting bone health and immune function
- Exposure to diverse microbes in nature strengthens immune system development
- Fresh air and physical activity support respiratory health
- Natural light regulates circadian rhythms, supporting better sleep
- Regular outdoor play reduces childhood obesity and related health concerns
- Contact with soil microbes may reduce allergies and autoimmune conditions

### **Vision Development:**

- Time outdoors supports healthy eye development and reduces myopia (nearsightedness)
- Looking at distant horizons exercises eye muscles differently than close-up focus
- Natural light provides optimal conditions for developing vision

### **iii. Emotional and Mental Health Benefits**

Nature is profoundly therapeutic for young children's emotional well-being:

#### **Stress Reduction:**

- Time in nature lowers cortisol (stress hormone) levels
- Natural environments activate the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest)
- Green spaces provide respite from the overstimulation of indoor environments
- Nature reduces anxiety and promotes calm

#### **Mood Enhancement:**

- Outdoor time increases positive emotions and reduces negative ones
- Exposure to natural light supports healthy serotonin production
- Physical activity in nature releases endorphins
- Connection to nature is associated with greater life satisfaction, even in young children

#### **Emotional Regulation:**

- Nature provides a calming environment that supports co-regulation and self-regulation

- The rhythms and patterns of nature model regulation (day/night, seasons, weather patterns)
- Physical activity outdoors helps children process big emotions through movement
- Natural environments reduce emotional reactivity and behavioral problems

**Resilience and Confidence:**

- Successfully navigating challenges in nature builds self-efficacy
- Taking appropriate risks outdoors develops courage and resilience
- Mastering physical skills (climbing, balancing) builds confidence
- Nature experiences teach children they are capable and competent

**Attention Restoration:**

- Nature provides relief from "directed attention fatigue"
- After time in nature, children show improved self-control and emotional regulation
- Natural environments reduce mental fatigue and restore capacity for focus

**iv. Social Benefits**

Contrary to the assumption that children need structured playgrounds for social development, nature actually enhances social skills:

**Cooperation and Collaboration:**

- Natural environments invite collaborative projects (building forts, damming streams, creating fairy houses)
- Children must work together to move heavy logs, climb trees, or navigate challenging terrain
- Shared wonder and discovery create bonding experiences
- Nature-based play often involves less conflict and more cooperation than indoor play

**Communication Skills:**

- Children engaged in nature-based play use more complex language
- Outdoor environments provide rich opportunities for descriptive language and storytelling

- Quieter outdoor spaces allow children to hear each other better and practice conversation

**Reduced Aggression:**

- Time in nature is associated with reduced aggressive behavior
- Green outdoor spaces show lower rates of bullying and conflict than paved playgrounds
- Nature's calming effects support peaceful interactions

**Inclusivity:**

- Natural play environments are less structured, allowing children of varying abilities to participate
- Nature invites parallel play and varied engagement levels
- Outdoor spaces often feel more inclusive than competitive playground structures

**v. Spiritual and Existential Development**

Nature nurtures dimensions of development that are often overlooked in early education:

**Sense of Wonder:**

- Nature inspires awe, curiosity, and reverence
- Encounters with beauty, mystery, and life cycles foster wonder
- Wonder is the foundation of lifelong learning and meaning-making

**Connection to Something Larger:**

- Nature helps children understand they are part of an interconnected web of life
- Observing cycles and patterns reveals children's place in the larger natural world
- Experiences of vastness (sky, mountains, ocean) cultivate humility and perspective

**Mindfulness and Presence:**

- Nature invites children to slow down and be present
- Sensory engagement with nature is inherently mindful
- Watching ants, listening to wind, feeling rain; these are practices of presence

### **Relationship with the Living World:**

- Regular nature contact fosters care, empathy, and responsibility toward other living beings
- Children who spend time in nature develop environmental ethics and stewardship
- Love of nature begins with embodied experience, not abstract concepts

### **b. Nature-Inspired Learning in Practice**

At Sacred Roots, nature connection is not relegated to "outdoor time"; it is integrated into every aspect of our program.

#### **i. Daily Outdoor Time**

We go outside every day, in (almost) all weather conditions:

#### **Time Outdoors:**

- Children spend significant time outdoors daily (minimum 1-2 hours, weather permitting)
- Outdoor time is protected and prioritized, not the first thing cut when schedules are tight
- We view outdoor time as essential learning time, not a break from learning

#### **All-Weather Approach:**

- We embrace all weather as an opportunity for learning and sensory experience
- Rain, snow, wind, and sun each offer unique experiences
- We dress appropriately and teach children to prepare for weather conditions
- We stay indoors only in cases of extreme cold (below 20°F with wind chill), extreme heat (above 95°F with heat index), severe storms, or unsafe air quality

#### **Why All-Weather Matters:**

- Children learn that weather is something to experience, not something to fear
- Different weather conditions provide different learning opportunities
- Regular exposure to varied conditions builds resilience and body awareness

- Staying inside "because it's cold" or "because it might rain" teaches children to be disconnected from the natural world

### **Outdoor Learning, Not Just Outdoor Play:**

- Our outdoor time includes intentional learning experiences (nature observation, gardening, building projects, art-making)
- Teachers actively engage with children outdoors, asking questions, extending play, and documenting learning
- We bring literacy, math, science, and art outdoors
- We read books under trees, do art with natural materials, conduct science investigations in the garden

### **ii. Our Outdoor Learning Environment**

Our outdoor space is designed to invite exploration, challenge, and connection:

#### **Natural Play Spaces:**

- Natural, varied terrain (hills, flat areas, different ground textures)
- Trees for climbing, shade, and seasonal observation
- Gardens for growing food and flowers
- Spaces for digging, building, and large-scale construction
- Areas with different microclimates and ecosystems
- Natural loose parts (logs, stumps, branches, stones)

#### **Thoughtful Design Elements:**

- Spaces that change with the seasons
- Areas for active play and quiet reflection
- Places to observe wildlife (bird feeders, pollinator gardens, log piles for insects)
- Water features or access to water play
- Natural shade and sunny spots
- Seating areas for storytelling, snack, and observation

### **Minimal Plastic, Maximum Nature:**

- Emphasis on natural, found, and open-ended materials over manufactured playground equipment
- Real tools for real work (shovels, rakes, watering cans)
- Materials that connect children to natural processes (soil, water, plants, seeds)

### **iii. Bringing Nature Inside**

We blur the boundaries between indoor and outdoor learning:

#### **Natural Materials Throughout:**

- Collections of natural loose parts (pinecones, shells, stones, seed pods, driftwood, feathers)
- Seasonal nature tables that change throughout the year
- Plants and living things in the classroom
- Natural materials integrated into all learning areas (blocks, art, dramatic play, sensory)

#### **Nature Observation and Documentation:**

- Windows to observe weather, wildlife, and seasonal changes
- Nature journals and observational drawing
- Collections from nature walks displayed and explored
- Photographs and documentation of outdoor discoveries

#### **Natural Light and Views:**

- Abundant natural light from windows
- Visual connection to outdoor spaces
- Easy transitions between indoors and outdoors

### **iv. Nature-Based Curriculum and Studies**

Many of our extended investigations emerge from and center on the natural world:

**Seasonal Studies:**

- Observing and documenting seasonal changes
- Exploring what happens to trees, plants, and animals through the seasons
- Celebrating seasonal rhythms through art, story, and ritual
- Planting, tending, harvesting

**Life Cycle Studies:**

- Growing plants from seeds
- Observing insects and their metamorphoses
- Caring for classroom animals (if appropriate)
- Exploring decomposition and the cycle of life and death

**Weather and Water:**

- Investigating rain, snow, ice, and evaporation
- Exploring how water moves in the landscape
- Observing clouds, wind, and storms
- Understanding the water cycle through direct experience

**Trees, Plants, and Growing:**

- Tree studies (anatomy, seasonal changes, uses)
- Gardening and food growing
- Exploring what plants need to survive
- Understanding photosynthesis in child-friendly ways

**Animals and Habitats:**

- Observing local wildlife (birds, insects, squirrels, rabbits)
- Creating habitats for wildlife
- Learning about animal adaptations and behaviors
- Understanding interdependence in ecosystems

### **Earth and Geology:**

- Exploring rocks, minerals, and soil
- Understanding erosion, landforms, and natural processes
- Digging, sifting, and investigating what's beneath our feet

### **v. Nature-Based Learning Experiences**

#### **Nature Walks and Hikes:**

- Regular walks in nearby natural areas
- Seasonal observation walks to notice changes
- Scavenger hunts and exploration missions
- Quiet sits and listening walks

#### **Gardening:**

- Planning, planting, tending, and harvesting
- Composting food scraps and observing decomposition
- Attracting pollinators and beneficial insects
- Saving seeds and understanding plant life cycles

#### **Building and Construction with Natural Materials:**

- Fort building with branches and logs
- Creating fairy houses, bird nests, or insect hotels
- Damming streams or creating waterways
- Building with stones, mud, and clay

#### **Nature-Based Art:**

- Land art (arranging natural materials to create temporary art)
- Nature collages and assemblages
- Natural dyes and pigments from plants
- Sculpture with mud, clay, and found materials
- Leaf printing, bark rubbings, flower pressing

### **Sensory and Exploratory Play:**

- Mud kitchens and mud play
- Water and sand exploration
- Sensory bins filled with natural materials (pinecones, acorns, leaves, shells)
- Snow play, ice experiments, puddle jumping

### **Wildlife Observation:**

- Bird watching and identification
- Insect observation with magnifying glasses
- Tracking and identifying animal signs (footprints, scat, nests)
- Creating observation journals

### **Risk and Challenge:**

- Appropriate risk-taking in nature (climbing trees, balancing on logs, navigating uneven terrain)
- Tool use (digging, sawing, hammering with child-safe tools)
- Fire circle experiences (when age-appropriate and with proper safety measures)
- Problem-solving physical challenges

### **vi. Nature as Co-Regulator**

We recognize nature's unique capacity to support nervous system regulation:

#### **Calming Spaces:**

- Quiet spots in nature where children can retreat when overwhelmed
- Sensory-rich natural environments that support regulation
- Opportunities for repetitive, soothing activities (digging, raking, pouring water)

#### **Movement and Regulation:**

- Heavy work in nature (carrying logs, digging, pulling wagons)
- Vestibular input (swinging on ropes, spinning, rolling down hills)
- Proprioceptive input (climbing, jumping, pushing, pulling)

## **Mindfulness and Presence:**

- "Sit spots" where children spend quiet time observing
- Listening walks to attune to natural sounds
- Cloud watching and sky gazing
- Bare feet in grass, mud, or sand

## **c. Developing Environmental Stewardship**

By fostering a bond with the natural world, we also cultivate respect for the environment and a deeper understanding that we are participants in nature, not observers outside of it.

### **i. Relationality, Not Separation**

We teach children that:

- We are part of nature, not separate from it
- We depend on the Earth for everything we need (air, water, food, shelter)
- Our actions affect other living things
- We have a responsibility to care for the natural world

### **ii. Practices of Care**

Children learn environmental stewardship through everyday practices:

- Caring for plants and animals
- Composting food scraps
- Conserving water
- Picking up litter during nature walks
- Learning about reduce, reuse, recycle
- Using resources thoughtfully (paper, materials, food)

### **iii. Advocacy and Voice**

We support age-appropriate environmental advocacy:

- Talking about how we can protect animals and habitats
- Making art or signs about caring for the Earth

- Writing letters about environmental concerns (with adult support)
- Participating in community clean-up or tree-planting events (with families)

#### **iv. Wonder as the Foundation**

We know that environmental stewardship begins not with fear or guilt, but with love. Children who love nature will protect it. Our focus is on:

- Fostering wonder, curiosity, and joy in nature
- Creating positive, embodied experiences outdoors
- Building relationship and connection with the living world
- Trusting that love will lead to care

#### **d. Nature Connection Across Seasons**

We embrace the full cycle of seasons, recognizing that each offers unique gifts:

##### **i. Fall: Harvest and Transformation**

- Collecting and playing with fallen leaves
- Harvesting from gardens
- Observing migration and animals preparing for winter
- Exploring changing colors, temperatures, and light
- Collecting seeds, acorns, and natural treasures

##### **ii. Winter: Rest and Resilience**

- Snow play and ice exploration
- Observing bare trees and winter landscapes
- Tracking animals in snow
- Learning about how plants and animals survive winter
- Appreciating the quiet, stillness, and beauty of winter

##### **iii. Spring: Awakening and Growth**

- Planting seeds and watching them grow
- Observing spring ephemerals (early wildflowers)

- Welcoming returning birds and emerging insects
- Noticing buds, blossoms, and baby animals
- Celebrating renewal and new life

#### **iv. Summer: Abundance and Vitality**

- Tending gardens and harvesting food
- Water play and cooling off outdoors
- Observing insects and pollinators
- Long days for outdoor exploration
- Celebrating the peak of growth and vitality

#### **e. Supporting Families in Nature Connection**

We recognize that many families want to connect their children with nature but may face barriers: lack of access, discomfort in outdoor spaces, safety concerns, or simply not knowing where to start.

##### **i. Resources and Encouragement**

We provide families with:

- Suggestions for local nature spaces to explore
- Ideas for nature activities at home
- Information about community nature programs
- Book recommendations about nature and outdoor play
- Tips for dressing children for all-weather outdoor time

##### **ii. Modeling and Normalizing**

We model outdoor time in all weather and help families understand:

- How to dress children appropriately for cold, rain, or snow
- Why outdoor time in varied weather is beneficial
- How to supervise appropriate risk-taking
- How to embrace mess and weather as part of learning

### **iii. Invitations to Participate**

We invite families to:

- Join us for outdoor workdays (gardening, trail maintenance, habitat creation)
- Participate in nature walks or outdoor adventures
- Share their outdoor knowledge and skills
- Help children develop a family relationship with nature

### **f. Addressing Barriers and Concerns**

#### **i. "What About Safety?"**

We take safety seriously while recognizing that:

- Risk is different from hazard, appropriate risk builds competence
- Natural environments offer developmentally beneficial challenges
- Overprotection limits children's development and confidence
- Our role is to supervise thoughtfully, not eliminate all challenge

Safety measures we take:

- Close supervision and appropriate ratios
- Teaching children to assess and navigate risks
- Clear boundaries and expectations
- Staff trained in first aid and emergency response
- Regular inspection of outdoor spaces

#### **ii. "What About Dirt and Mess?"**

We embrace mess as a sign of engaged learning:

- Extra clothes available for children who get muddy or wet
- Washable, weather-appropriate clothing encouraged
- Hand washing and hygiene practices taught and practiced
- Communication with families about the value of messy play

### **iii. "What If Children Don't Like Being Outside?"**

Some children initially resist outdoor time, especially if they have limited nature experience.

We:

- Start where children are, respecting their comfort levels
- Gradually build positive associations with outdoor time
- Offer varied outdoor experiences (active play, quiet observation, building, art)
- Never force or shame, but gently encourage and invite
- Trust that over time, most children develop love for outdoor time

### **iv. "What About Bugs, Poison Ivy, and Other Concerns?"**

We teach children to:

- Observe insects with curiosity rather than fear
- Recognize plants to avoid (poison ivy, thorny plants)
- Respect wildlife and give animals space
- Ask adults before touching unfamiliar plants or creatures
- Stay safe while still being curious and engaged

### **g. The Long-Term Impact of Nature Connection**

When children grow up with regular, meaningful nature experiences, they:

- Develop physical competence, confidence, and resilience
- Show enhanced cognitive function and creativity
- Experience better emotional regulation and mental health
- Build stronger social skills and cooperation
- Develop environmental awareness and stewardship
- Carry a sense of wonder and connection to the living world throughout their lives
- Are more likely to protect and care for the environment as adults

### **h. Our Commitment**

At Sacred Roots, nature-based learning is not a trend or a program add-on, it is foundational to who we are. We are committed to:

- Prioritizing outdoor time regardless of weather
- Designing curriculum that honors the natural world
- Creating outdoor spaces that invite exploration and connection
- Modeling respect, wonder, and care for nature
- Supporting families in developing their own nature connection practices
- Staying current with research on nature-based education
- Continually deepening our own relationship with the natural world

We believe that children who grow up rooted in nature, who climb trees, dig in mud, plant seeds, watch caterpillars transform, feel rain on their faces, and build forts from branches, develop not just knowledge about nature, but a lived, embodied relationship with the Earth that will sustain them and the planet for generations to come.

Nature is not separate from learning, it is the context for our deepest, most meaningful learning. At Sacred Roots, we honor this truth every single day.

## **2.5 Emotional Literacy as a Foundation**

At Sacred Roots, emotional literacy is not an add-on, it is woven into every aspect of our day. We believe that helping children understand, name, and navigate their emotions is as essential as teaching letters and numbers. When children develop strong emotional literacy, they gain the foundation for all future learning, relationships, and well-being.

Emotional literacy means more than simply recognizing feelings. It encompasses the ability to identify and express emotions, understand their origins, regulate responses, and navigate social interactions with empathy and confidence. Young children experience big feelings in small bodies, and our role is to help them make sense of those feelings in a safe, supportive environment.

Through intentional coaching, reflective conversations, and a responsive approach to big feelings, we support children in developing:

### **a. Self-Awareness and Emotional Vocabulary**

- i. Learning to recognize and name their own emotions

- ii. Understanding that all feelings are valid and temporary
- iii. Building a rich vocabulary for emotional expression beyond "mad," "sad," and "happy"
- iv. Connecting physical sensations in the body to emotional experiences

**b. Self-Regulation and Co-Regulation Skills**

- i. Practicing calming strategies that work for their individual needs
- ii. Experiencing co-regulation with trusted adults who remain calm and present
- iii. Learning that regulation is a skill that develops over time with practice and support
- iv. Understanding the difference between feeling an emotion and choosing how to respond

**c. Empathy and Perspective-Taking**

- i. Recognizing emotions in others through facial expressions, body language, and tone
- ii. Understanding that others may feel differently in the same situation
- iii. Developing compassion and the desire to help when someone is hurting
- iv. Learning to consider how their actions affect others

**d. Healthy Relationship Skills**

- i. Expressing needs, boundaries, and preferences clearly and respectfully
- ii. Listening to others and responding with kindness
- iii. Navigating conflicts with support and developing problem-solving skills
- iv. Building and maintaining friendships based on trust and mutual respect

**e. Confidence in Expressing Needs and Boundaries**

- i. Knowing it is safe to share feelings, even difficult ones
- ii. Understanding they have agency over their own bodies and choices

- iii. Asking for help when they need it
- iv. Trusting that adults will respond with care and understanding

### **Our Approach to Emotional Literacy:**

Emotional literacy is taught not through isolated lessons, but through consistent, responsive interactions throughout the day. Teachers model emotional awareness by naming their own feelings, practicing regulation strategies openly, and approaching children's big emotions with curiosity rather than judgment.

When a child is overwhelmed, we don't simply redirect behavior, we help them understand what they're feeling, why it might be happening, and what they can do about it. We validate their experience while teaching skills for managing intensity. We create space for feelings to be felt, processed, and moved through, rather than suppressed or dismissed.

Children also learn emotional literacy through stories, songs, movement, art, and play. We use books that reflect diverse emotional experiences, offer art materials as tools for emotional expression, and engage in role-playing and puppetry to explore social scenarios in a safe, playful way.

By centering emotional literacy in our program, we honor the truth that cognitive learning flourishes when children feel emotionally safe, seen, and supported. When children trust themselves and their feelings, they are free to take risks, ask questions, make mistakes, and grow.

## **2.6 Anti-Bias Education**

At Sacred Roots Early Learning, anti-bias education is woven into the fabric of our daily practice. We believe that creating a truly inclusive, equitable learning community requires more than good intentions, it requires ongoing reflection, intentional curriculum choices, authentic representation, and a commitment to examining our own biases and challenging systems of inequity.

Anti-bias education is not a separate curriculum or a special unit we teach during a designated month. It is a lens through which we approach everything we do: the books we read, the images

we display, the materials we provide, the language we use, the conflicts we mediate, the families we partner with, and the ways we support each child in developing a strong, positive sense of self.

Our approach to anti-bias education is grounded in the work of Louise Derman-Sparks and the Anti-Bias Education framework, which identifies four core goals that guide our practice.

### **a. The Four Goals of Anti-Bias Education**

#### **Goal 1: Identity**

*Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.*

We want every child at Sacred Roots to:

- Feel proud of who they are: their family, their culture, their body, their abilities, their unique characteristics
- See themselves reflected positively in our classroom environment, materials, and curriculum
- Develop language to describe themselves and their identities with accuracy and pride
- Understand that all aspects of their identity have value and deserve respect

#### **How we support identity development:**

##### **i. Mirrors: Seeing Ourselves Reflected**

Children need to see themselves in their learning environment in order to feel they belong. We ensure that children encounter:

- **Books and stories** that feature characters who look like them, live in families like theirs, and have experiences they can relate to
- **Images and photographs** displayed throughout the classroom that reflect the diversity of our students and the broader world
- **Dolls and dramatic play materials** that represent diverse skin tones, hair textures, body types, abilities, and family structures
- **Music, songs, and stories** from children's home cultures and languages

- **Representation of diverse family structures** including single-parent families, two-parent families, same-sex parent families, multi-generational families, adoptive and foster families, and blended families

## ii. Affirming All Aspects of Identity

We explicitly affirm and celebrate:

- **Racial and ethnic identity:** We use accurate language to describe skin tones and racial identities. We never use "color-blind" language that suggests we don't see or value racial differences.
- **Cultural and linguistic identity:** We honor children's home languages, cultural practices, and traditions. We invite families to share their cultural knowledge with the classroom community.
- **Gender identity and expression:** We respect how each child identifies and expresses their gender. We avoid gender stereotypes and allow children to explore interests and roles without limitation.
- **Family composition:** We recognize and celebrate all family structures without privileging any one type as "normal" or "ideal."
- **Ability and disability:** We talk openly and positively about different abilities, adaptive equipment, and ways of learning and moving through the world.
- **Economic diversity:** We are mindful not to make assumptions about families' resources or to create situations where economic differences become sources of shame or exclusion.

## iii. Identity-Affirming Language

We use precise, respectful language when talking about identity:

- We use the terms families prefer for their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities
- We use children's chosen names and pronouns
- We describe bodies, abilities, and differences accurately and positively
- We avoid euphemisms or silence around differences, which teaches children that differences are shameful or scary

#### **iv. Partnerships with Families**

Families are the primary source of children's identity formation. We:

- Ask families about their cultural practices, values, and traditions
- Invite families to share their knowledge, skills, and cultural practices with the classroom
- Respect families' wishes regarding cultural and religious observances
- Communicate in families' home languages when possible
- Recognize that families are the experts on their own cultures and experiences

#### **Goal 2: Diversity**

*Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring connections across all dimensions of human diversity.*

We want children at Sacred Roots to:

- Notice and appreciate differences among people as natural and interesting, not as sources of fear or judgment
- Ask questions about differences with curiosity rather than discomfort
- Build meaningful friendships with children who are different from themselves
- Understand that there are many ways of being, living, communicating, and moving through the world, and all have value

#### **How we support appreciation of diversity:**

##### **i. Windows: Seeing Beyond Our Own Experience**

While children need mirrors that reflect their own identities, they also need windows that allow them to see and learn about people whose experiences differ from their own. We provide:

- **Books and stories** featuring characters from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, ability, and family backgrounds
- **Images and photographs** that represent global diversity in authentic, non-stereotypical ways
- **Music, art, and stories** from cultures around the world

- **Information about different ways of living, celebrating, communicating, and being in the world**

## **ii. Authentic, Non-Stereotypical Representation**

We are intentional about avoiding:

- **Tourist curriculum** (superficial engagement with cultures through food, flags, and festivals without deeper understanding)
- **Stereotypical images** (Native Americans only in historical dress, people of color only in poverty, people with disabilities only as recipients of help)
- **Tokenism** (one book about one identity group checked off a list)
- **Exoticizing differences** (treating other cultures as strange, foreign, or "other")

Instead, we:

- Present diversity as normal and present in everyday life
- Show people from all backgrounds in positions of power, intelligence, creativity, and leadership
- Feature contemporary images alongside historical ones
- Ensure that diversity is visible throughout our environment, not just during designated cultural months

## **iii. Normalizing Differences**

We talk about differences matter-of-factly and positively:

- "Zara's family speaks Arabic at home. Some families speak Spanish, some speak English, some speak other languages."
- "Elijah uses a wheelchair to move around. Some people walk, some people use wheelchairs or walkers, some people move in other ways."
- "In Maya's family, they celebrate Diwali. In Sam's family, they celebrate Christmas. In Jordan's family, they celebrate Hanukkah. Different families celebrate different holidays."

#### **iv. Supporting Cross-Cultural Connections**

We create opportunities for children to:

- Learn words and phrases in classmates' home languages
- Taste foods from different cultural traditions
- Learn songs, games, and stories from around the world
- Understand that there are many "right" ways to do things (eat, greet, celebrate, dress)

#### **v. Age-Appropriate Complexity**

We recognize that even young children can begin to understand:

- That families live in different types of homes and communities
- That people speak different languages and this is wonderful, not confusing
- That bodies come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and abilities
- That there are many ways to be a family
- That traditions and celebrations vary across cultures and all are valuable

#### **Goal 3: Justice**

*Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness (injustice), have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.*

We want children at Sacred Roots to:

- Recognize when something is unfair, even if it doesn't directly affect them
- Name unfairness when they see it
- Understand that unfair treatment hurts people's feelings and bodies
- Develop empathy and a sense of justice from an early age

#### **How we support developing critical consciousness:**

##### **i. Teaching About Fairness**

Fairness is a concept young children grasp intuitively. We build on this understanding:

- We talk about what fairness means: everyone gets what they need, everyone is treated with respect, everyone's ideas and feelings matter
- We help children notice when situations are fair or unfair
- We validate children's feelings when they experience or witness unfairness
- We name injustice when we see it in books, media, or our community

## **ii. Age-Appropriate Conversations About Bias and Discrimination**

We do not shield children from awareness of injustice, but we frame it in developmentally appropriate ways:

- We read books that address bias, exclusion, and discrimination in ways young children can understand
- We use simple, clear language: "Sometimes people are treated unfairly because of the color of their skin. That's not okay. It's called racism, and many people are working to stop it."
- We acknowledge painful realities (prejudice, discrimination, inequity) while also emphasizing that people are actively working for justice
- We help children understand that rules and laws can be unfair, and that people work together to change unfair rules

## **iii. Recognizing Exclusion and Bias in Action**

We help children notice when:

- Someone is left out because of who they are
- Assumptions are made based on identity (race, gender, ability, family structure)
- Rules or systems treat some people differently than others
- Stereotypes limit what people are allowed to do or be

## **iv. Connecting to Children's Experiences**

We build on children's own experiences of unfairness:

- "Remember when someone said you couldn't play because you're a girl? That wasn't fair. Sometimes people make rules that aren't fair based on who someone is."

- "You noticed that our classroom has a ramp so everyone can get inside. Some buildings don't have ramps, and that makes it hard for people who use wheelchairs. That's not fair. People are working to change that."

#### **v. Naming Systems, Not Just Individual Actions**

We begin to introduce the idea that unfairness can be built into systems, not just individual mean behavior:

- "A long time ago, there were unfair laws that said people with different skin colors couldn't go to the same schools. That was wrong. People worked very hard to change those laws."
- "Sometimes buildings are designed in ways that make it hard for people who can't see or who use wheelchairs. That's not fair. We can design buildings to work for everyone."

#### **Goal 4: Activism**

*Each child will demonstrate a sense of empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.*

We want children at Sacred Roots to:

- Believe they have the power to make things more fair
- Stand up for themselves when they are treated unfairly
- Speak up when they see others being treated unfairly
- Work with others to solve problems and make things better
- Develop the courage and skills to be upstanders, not bystanders

#### **How we support developing activism and agency:**

##### **i. Empowering Children to Act**

We teach children that they don't have to accept unfairness, they can do something about it:

- "If someone is being left out, you can invite them to play."
- "If you hear someone say something unkind about how someone looks, you can say, 'That's not okay. All bodies are good bodies.'"

- "If you see a rule that doesn't seem fair, you can tell a teacher and we can talk about it."

## **ii. Modeling Activism**

We model taking action against bias and unfairness:

- We intervene immediately when we witness bias, exclusion, or hurtful language
- We name what's happening and why it's not okay
- We involve children in problem-solving and making things right
- We share stories of real people (including children) who have worked for justice

## **iii. Age-Appropriate Activism**

Activism for young children looks like:

- Including someone who has been left out
- Speaking up when someone uses hurtful words
- Making a sign or drawing to express an idea
- Writing a letter (or dictating one) to someone in power
- Participating in a peaceful march or demonstration with family
- Learning about people who have made change and understanding that ordinary people can do extraordinary things

## **iv. Building Skills for Activism**

We teach the skills children need to be change-makers:

- **Critical thinking:** "Does this seem fair? Why or why not?"
- **Perspective-taking:** "How do you think they feel? What might they need?"
- **Communication:** "What words can we use to tell someone their actions hurt us?"
- **Collaboration:** "How can we work together to solve this problem?"
- **Persistence:** "This is hard, but it's important. Let's keep trying."
- **Courage:** "It can feel scary to speak up, but we can be brave."

## **v. Stories of Resistance and Change**

We share stories of people who have stood up against injustice:

- Civil rights leaders who fought for equality
- Disability rights activists who fought for access and inclusion
- Children who have spoken up and made change in their communities
- People from diverse backgrounds who have used their voices, creativity, and actions to make the world more just

#### **vi. Classroom as a Practice Ground**

Our classroom is a place where children practice activism in everyday ways:

- Challenging gender stereotypes in play ("Girls can be superheroes too!")
- Speaking up when someone is excluded ("That's not fair. Everyone can play.")
- Questioning rules that don't make sense ("Why can't we...?")
- Solving problems collaboratively
- Making the classroom more inclusive through their ideas and actions

#### **b. What Anti-Bias Education Is NOT**

To clarify our approach, it's important to name what anti-bias education is not:

##### **i. It Is Not Political Indoctrination**

We do not promote any political party, candidate, or specific political ideology. We teach universal values of kindness, fairness, respect, and inclusion that transcend politics.

Recognizing that all people deserve dignity and respect is not a political stance, it is a human one.

##### **ii. It Is Not About Making Children Feel Guilty**

We do not teach children to feel guilty or ashamed about their identities or backgrounds. We teach all children to feel proud of who they are while also developing empathy and awareness of how systems of bias and inequity affect people differently.

##### **iii. It Is Not "Teaching Division"**

Naming and celebrating differences does not create division, it acknowledges reality. Ignoring differences (a "color-blind" approach) actually perpetuates harm by invalidating children's lived

experiences and identities. Anti-bias education brings people together through understanding and respect.

#### **iv. It Is Not Age-Inappropriate**

Young children notice differences from infancy. They absorb messages about whose lives matter, whose stories are told, and who holds power. Anti-bias education gives them the language and tools to make sense of what they're already noticing in developmentally appropriate ways.

#### **v. It Is Not Optional or "Extra"**

Anti-bias education is not something we do in addition to our "real" curriculum. It is integrated into everything we do: from the materials we choose to the conflicts we mediate to the questions we ask and the relationships we build.

### **c. Our Commitment to Families**

#### **i. Respecting Family Values**

We recognize that families are the primary teachers of values, culture, and identity for their children. We deeply respect this role.

We do not seek to impose beliefs or values that conflict with your family's cultural, religious, or personal convictions. Our goal is to create a space where all children feel safe, seen, and valued, not to tell families what to believe.

#### **ii. What We Do Teach**

While we honor diverse family values, we uphold these non-negotiable principles in our classroom:

- All people deserve to be treated with kindness and respect
- All families and all types of families are valuable
- All bodies and all abilities have worth
- Exclusion and cruelty are not acceptable
- We stand up for ourselves and others when we see unfairness

These principles are foundational to creating a safe learning community and are not subject to opt-out.

### **iii. What We Don't Teach**

We do not:

- Tell children what their families should believe about religion, politics, or social issues
- Undermine parents' authority or values in their own homes
- Pressure children to adopt specific personal, cultural, or political views
- Promote any particular religious or spiritual belief system

### **iv. Transparency and Communication**

We are committed to:

- Being transparent about our anti-bias curriculum and practices
- Welcoming questions and conversations with families about our approach
- Listening to families' concerns and perspectives
- Partnering with families to support each child's identity development
- Providing resources for families who want to extend anti-bias education at home

### **v. When Values Conflict**

If a family's values include beliefs that some people or groups are inferior, unworthy of respect, or should be excluded or harmed based on their identity, we will:

- Engage in respectful conversation about our classroom commitments
- Explain that we cannot allow expressions of bias or discrimination in our space
- Work to find common ground around shared values of kindness and safety
- Acknowledge that families may teach different perspectives at home while maintaining our classroom commitments

We trust that most families choosing Sacred Roots share our commitment to raising children who are kind, inclusive, and aware of the diverse world they live in.

## **d. Anti-Bias Education in Practice: What It Looks Like Daily**

### **i. In Our Materials and Environment**

- Books featuring characters of diverse races, ethnicities, abilities, family structures, and gender expressions
- Dramatic play materials that represent diversity (dolls, play food, cultural items)
- Images and posters that show people of all backgrounds in positions of power, creativity, and joy
- Art supplies that allow children to represent their own skin tones accurately (diverse crayons, paints, paper)
- Maps, globes, and images that help children understand the wider world

### **ii. In Our Language**

- Using accurate, respectful language for all identities
- Avoiding gendered language when it's not necessary ("friends" instead of "boys and girls")
- Correcting stereotypes and bias when we hear them
- Naming differences positively rather than pretending we don't see them
- Using families' preferred terms for their identities and cultures

### **iii. In Our Curriculum**

- Studying topics through multiple cultural lenses
- Learning about diverse people who have contributed to society
- Exploring how different cultures solve similar problems in different ways
- Reading books that address themes of fairness, identity, and justice
- Inviting families to share their cultural knowledge and practices

### **iv. In Our Conflict Resolution**

- Addressing exclusion and bias when they arise in children's play
- Teaching children to recognize and name unfairness
- Supporting children in standing up for themselves and others
- Helping children develop empathy and perspective-taking skills

- Repairing harm and building understanding when bias occurs

#### **v. In Our Relationships**

- Building authentic relationships with families from all backgrounds
- Examining our own biases and how they might impact our teaching
- Continuously learning about cultures, identities, and experiences different from our own
- Seeking feedback and remaining open to growth and change

#### **e. The Long-Term Impact**

When children grow up in anti-bias learning environments, they:

- Develop strong, positive identities and pride in who they are
- Feel comfortable and curious about human diversity
- Build genuine friendships across lines of difference
- Recognize unfairness and have the courage to speak up
- Believe in their power to make change
- Carry a commitment to justice and inclusion throughout their lives

Anti-bias education is not about perfection, it is about commitment. It is our commitment to creating a learning community where every child can thrive, where differences are celebrated, where unfairness is named and challenged, and where children learn that they have the power to make the world more just.

At Sacred Roots, we believe this work is sacred work. It is part of our responsibility to nurture not just children's minds and bodies, but also their hearts and spirits, helping them grow into compassionate, courageous, critically-thinking humans who will build a more equitable and loving world.

## **2.7 Research-Based Practice**

Our work is informed by research, but shaped by children. At Sacred Roots, we ground our teaching in decades of evidence from early learning science, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and social-emotional research, while remaining flexible, responsive, and attuned to the unique children in front of us each day.

We believe that research should serve as a foundation for intentional practice, not a rigid script. Evidence-based frameworks guide our understanding of how children learn, develop, and thrive, while our daily observations and relationships with children inform how we apply that knowledge in meaningful, individualized ways.

### **a. Foundations in Child Development Theory**

Our approach draws upon the work of influential educators and developmental theorists whose research continues to shape best practices in early childhood education:

#### **i. Jean Piaget – Cognitive Development and Constructivism**

Piaget's research on how children actively construct knowledge through hands-on exploration informs our emphasis on discovery-based learning. We recognize that children learn by doing, experimenting, and making meaning of their experiences rather than passively receiving information.

#### **ii. Lev Vygotsky – Social Constructivism and the Zone of Proximal Development**

Vygotsky's work reminds us that learning is inherently social and that children develop new skills through interactions with more knowledgeable peers and adults. We carefully scaffold experiences to support children just beyond their current abilities, providing the "just-right" challenge that fosters growth without frustration.

#### **iii. Reggio Emilia Approach – The Child as Capable and Competent**

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, we view children as capable, curious, and full of potential. We honor their ideas, document their learning processes, and create environments that invite inquiry, creativity, and collaboration. The environment itself is considered the "third teacher," intentionally designed to provoke wonder and discovery.

#### **iv. Maria Montessori – Child-Centered Learning and Purposeful Independence**

Montessori's research on children's natural drive for independence and order influences how we structure our environment and routines. We provide children with meaningful work, foster concentration and focus, and support their development of practical life skills that build confidence and competence.

## **b. Evidence from Neuroscience and Brain Development**

Modern neuroscience has deepened our understanding of how young brains develop, and we integrate this knowledge into our daily practice:

### **i. The Critical Importance of Early Years**

Research shows that 90% of brain development occurs before age five, with neural connections forming at a pace that will never be repeated. We take this responsibility seriously, creating rich, stimulating experiences that support healthy brain architecture.

### **ii. The Role of Relationships in Brain Development**

Secure, responsive relationships with caring adults are essential for healthy brain development. Our low ratio of 1:6 ensures that every child receives the individualized attention, attunement, and emotional co-regulation that literally shapes their developing brain.

### **iii. Stress, Safety, and Learning**

When children feel safe and regulated, their brains are primed for learning. When they feel threatened or dysregulated, the stress response takes over and learning becomes nearly impossible. We prioritize emotional safety, predictability, and co-regulation so that children can access the parts of their brain responsible for curiosity, problem-solving, and growth.

### **iv. The Power of Play**

Neuroscience confirms what early childhood educators have long known: play is not frivolous, it is the primary vehicle through which young children learn. Through play, children develop executive function skills, practice emotional regulation, build language and literacy, explore mathematical concepts, and make sense of their social world.

## **c. Social-Emotional Learning Frameworks**

We draw upon established frameworks for social-emotional development, including guidance from:

### **i. CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)**

The five core competencies of SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, are woven throughout our curriculum and interactions.

### **ii. Pyramid Model for Supporting Social Emotional Competence**

This evidence-based framework guides our tiered approach to supporting all children's social-emotional development, from universal supports (nurturing relationships, high-quality environments) to targeted interventions for children who need additional support.

### **iii. Attachment Theory and Trauma-Informed Practice**

Understanding attachment and the impact of early experiences on development helps us respond to children with compassion, patience, and appropriate support. We create a safe base from which children can explore, knowing a caring adult is available when needed.

### **d. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)**

We align with the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) framework for Developmentally Appropriate Practice, which emphasizes:

**i. Age Appropriateness** – Designing experiences that match children's developmental stages

**ii. Individual Appropriateness** – Recognizing and honoring each child's unique strengths, needs, interests, and learning styles

**iii. Cultural and Social Appropriateness** – Respecting and reflecting the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and values of children and families

### **e. Nature-Based Learning Research**

A growing body of research supports the profound benefits of nature connection for young children:

**i. Cognitive Benefits** – Improved attention span, problem-solving skills, and creativity

**ii. Physical Benefits** – Enhanced gross motor development, coordination, and overall health

**iii. Emotional Benefits** – Reduced stress and anxiety, improved mood and self-regulation

**iv. Social Benefits** – Increased cooperation, reduced aggression, and stronger peer relationships

This research informs our commitment to daily outdoor time and nature-integrated curriculum.

#### **f. The Science of Early Literacy and Numeracy**

Research on how young children develop foundational literacy and math skills guides our approach:

**i. Emergent Literacy** – Understanding that literacy development begins long before formal reading instruction, through rich language exposure, storytelling, rhyming, and play with print

**ii. Mathematical Thinking** – Recognizing that children develop number sense, spatial reasoning, and problem-solving skills through hands-on exploration, block play, sorting, patterning, and real-world application

**iii. Language-Rich Environments** – Creating environments filled with conversation, open-ended questions, rich vocabulary, and opportunities for children to express themselves

#### **g. Observation and Documentation as Research**

At Sacred Roots, we view observation and documentation as a form of action research. By carefully observing children's play, interactions, and learning processes, we:

**i. Understand each child's developmental trajectory**

**ii. Identify emerging interests and questions**

**iii. Adjust our environment, materials, and teaching strategies**

**iv. Make intentional decisions about curriculum and individualization**

**v. Communicate meaningfully with families about their child's growth**

This reflective practice ensures that our teaching remains responsive, relevant, and grounded in the reality of who our children are, not who a curriculum manual says they should be.

## **h. Continuous Learning and Professional Growth**

Research in early childhood education is continually evolving, and we are committed to staying current. Our staff engage in:

### **i. Ongoing professional development and training**

### **ii. Collaborative reflection and peer learning**

### **iii. Review of current research and evidence-based practices**

### **iv. Consultation with specialists when needed**

### **v. Participation in early childhood education communities and networks**

## **When Evidence Meets the Child:**

While we are deeply informed by research, we never allow frameworks or theories to override what we observe and know about individual children. Research provides a lens through which to understand development and plan intentional experiences, but the child in front of us, with their unique personality, family context, strengths, and needs, remains at the center.

When evidence-based practice supports intentional, responsive pedagogy, learning becomes purposeful, adaptive, and developmentally robust. Children thrive not because we followed a manual, but because we understood the science of development well enough to meet each child exactly where they are.

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## **3. Enrollment and Admission**

### **3.1 Pre-Opening Admissions Process for Founding Year (2026-2027)**

Sacred Roots Early Learning is excited to welcome our inaugural class of students for Fall 2026. As a new program, our admissions process is designed to build community thoughtfully while working toward final licensing approval. Below is our step-by-step process for our founding year.

#### **a. Complete the Free Pre-Enrollment Form**

Families are encouraged to complete our free Pre-Enrollment Interest Form. This places your family on our Founding-Year Priority List and ensures you receive updates, invitations to information sessions, and early access to tour scheduling.

- i. No fees required
- ii. No commitment required
- iii. Priority access to information and tours
- iv. Early notification of important milestones

#### **b. Information Sessions**

Before tours are available, families are invited to attend an Information Session, where we share:

- i. Our vision, philosophy, and teaching approach
- ii. Program structure and daily rhythm
- iii. Staffing and ratios
- iv. Founding-year timeline
- v. What to expect as we move through licensing
- vi. Q&A with the founder and co-lead teacher

Information Sessions help families understand our values and whether Sacred Roots aligns with their hopes for their child.

### **c. Formal Admissions Application**

Families who feel genuinely aligned with our mission are invited to complete a formal Admissions Application.

This application helps us understand your child more deeply and includes:

- i. Family and child information
- ii. Scheduling needs
- iii. Developmental history
- iv. Values-alignment questions
- v. Health and safety considerations
- vi. Preferred start date

We will open Admissions in February 2026.

### **d. Admissions Review**

Our team carefully reviews each application to ensure that:

- i. We can support your child's needs
- ii. Your family's values align with our program philosophy
- iii. Schedules fit within our licensing ratios and staffing plan

This review determines which families receive a placement offer.

#### **e. Conditional Enrollment Offer**

For our first year, families who are accepted will receive a Conditional Enrollment Offer reserving their child's place for Fall 2026. Conditional enrollment is standard for new programs and simply means the placement is held pending final licensing approval.

Your family receives:

- i. Your child's reserved placement
- ii. Projected start date
- iii. Next steps for onboarding
- iv. Orientation scheduling information

You may accept or decline a conditional offer at this stage.

#### **f. Tours**

Once our facility is finalized and prepared for licensing, we can offer formal tours of our micro-preschool.

Tours give families a chance to:

- i. Explore the learning environment
- ii. Meet the founder and co-lead teacher
- iii. Ask questions about our program and founding-year experience

#### **g. Final Enrollment Confirmation**

Once our state license is officially issued and all inspections are complete, we will send a Final Enrollment Confirmation, which includes:

- i. Tuition contract
- ii. Required health and licensing forms

- iii. Updated family handbook
- iv. Orientation date and details
- v. First day information

At this step, a **non-refundable enrollment fee and deposit of one month's tuition** is required and enrollment becomes official and binding.

#### **h. Welcome to Sacred Roots!**

Before the school year begins, we will host a Founding Family Orientation, a welcoming gathering for all enrolled classmates, their parent(s), and any extended family who would like to join.

Held on a weekend to ensure everyone can attend, this event creates space for our community to:

- i. Meet one another and begin building community
- ii. Explore the classroom environment with their child
- iii. Connect with teachers in a relaxed, playful setting
- iv. Learn about our routines, communication practices, and what to expect on the first day
- v. Celebrate the beginning of our inaugural year together

This orientation is designed to support a smooth transition, ease first-day jitters, and create a sense of belonging from the very start.

### **3.2 Eligibility**

Sacred Roots Early Learning serves children ages 2.5 to 5 years old. Prior to final enrollment confirmation, families must provide:

- a. Proof of child's age (birth certificate or other official documentation)
- b. Proof of Colorado residence

- c. Current immunization records as required by Colorado law (C.R.S. 25-4-901 et seq.)
- d. Completed enrollment forms including emergency contact information
- e. Signed acknowledgment of this Policy Handbook

### **3.3 Immunization Requirements**

In accordance with Colorado state law, all children must be immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases unless a valid medical or non-medical exemption is provided. Documentation must be submitted prior to the child's first day of attendance.

### **3.4 Conditional Enrollment**

#### **For Founding Year (2026-2027):**

Students accepted for our inaugural year will be enrolled conditionally pending final licensing approval from the Colorado Department of Human Services. Conditional enrollment means your child's placement is reserved, but the official start date is contingent upon:

- a. Final facility approval and licensing
- b. Successful completion of all health and safety inspections
- c. Receipt of all required student documentation

Families will be kept informed throughout the licensing process and notified immediately when final approval is received.

#### **For Subsequent Years:**

Students may be enrolled conditionally pending receipt of immunization records or other required documentation. If required documents are not received within 14 days of the child's first day, enrollment will be terminated.

### **3.5 Enrollment Fee and Tuition**

#### **a. Founding Year Timeline:**

- i. **Pre-Enrollment:** Free, no commitment
- ii. **Conditional Enrollment Offer:** No fees due at this stage
- iii. **Final Enrollment Confirmation:** Non-refundable enrollment fee and deposit of one month's tuition due upon receipt of final licensing approval

#### **b. Ongoing Tuition:**

- i. Monthly tuition is due by the first of each month
- ii. Tuition remains due regardless of absences, holidays, or school closures
- iii. A late fee will be assessed for tuition received after the 5th of the month
- iv. Returned payments will incur a fee and may result in required cash or money order payments

#### **c. Enrollment Deposit:**

The enrollment deposit of one month's tuition is:

- i. Non-refundable once submitted
- ii. Applied to the final month of enrollment if the family completes the full school year
- iii. Forfeited if the family withdraws before the end of the school year

### **3.6 Withdrawal**

Families wishing to withdraw their child must provide written notice at least 30 days in advance. Tuition for the 30-day notice period is required regardless of attendance. The enrollment deposit is non-refundable and will not be returned upon withdrawal. Tuition may be prorated in cases of extended illness, family emergency, or relocation at the Director's discretion.

### **For Founding Year Conditional Enrollment:**

Families may withdraw from conditional enrollment at any time before final licensing approval is received without penalty or forfeiture of deposit (since no deposit has been paid at the conditional stage).

### **3.7 Nondiscrimination in Admission**

Sacred Roots Early Learning does not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, color, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, family composition, national origin, religion, ancestry, or need for special services in admission decisions or the provision of educational services.

### **3.8 Priority and Waitlist**

#### **a. Founding Year Priority:**

Families who complete the Pre-Enrollment Interest Form receive priority access to:

- i. Information sessions
- ii. Tour scheduling (when available)
- iii. Admissions application
- iv. Conditional enrollment offers

#### **b. Enrollment Capacity:**

Sacred Roots maintains a maximum enrollment of 12 children with a teacher-to-student ratio of 1:6.

#### **c. Waitlist:**

- i. If enrollment reaches capacity, additional qualified applicants will be placed on a waitlist
- ii. Waitlisted families will be notified if a space becomes available
- iii. Waitlist position does not guarantee future enrollment

iv. Families must reapply for subsequent school years

### **3.9 Communication During Pre-Opening Period**

Families who have submitted a Pre-Enrollment Interest Form or Admissions Application will receive regular updates regarding:

- a. Facility selection and preparation progress
- b. Licensing timeline and milestones
- c. Tour availability
- d. Final enrollment confirmation timing
- e. Important dates and deadlines

We are committed to transparent communication throughout our founding year process and encourage families to reach out with questions at any time.

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**Note:** The admissions process outlined in Section 3.1 is specific to our founding year (2026-2027). Once our program is established and licensed, we will transition to a more traditional rolling admissions process. Updated admissions procedures will be provided to families at that time.

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### **3.10 Toileting and Toilet Learning Policy**

#### **a. Our Philosophy**

Sacred Roots Early Learning is a relationship-based preschool program designed for children who are developing independence in self-care within a supportive, respectful environment. We recognize that toilet learning is a developmental process that unfolds differently for every child and family, and we approach this transition with patience, dignity, and collaboration.

#### **b. Program Scope & Licensing Context**

Our preschool program is licensed and staffed to support children who are toilet independent or actively learning to use the toilet. The classroom environment and staffing structure do not allow for routine diapering or full-time toileting care. For this reason, we have established clear expectations to ensure the safety, well-being, and success of all children in our care.

### **c. Enrollment Requirements**

To enroll at Sacred Roots, children must be:

- At least 3 years old by the start of the school year (Fall, 2026)
- Fully toilet trained and independent in toileting routines

### **d. What "Fully Toilet Trained" Means**

A child is considered fully toilet trained when they:

- Recognize the need to use the toilet and communicate this to adults
- Use the toilet independently for both urination and bowel movements
- Wear underwear throughout the day (no pull-ups or diapers)
- Have accidents only rarely (occasional accidents are normal and expected)
- Can manage most aspects of toileting with minimal adult assistance

### **e. Our Approach to Toilet Learning Support**

While we require children to be toilet trained before enrollment, we understand that learning continues after the initial training period. We support children's growing independence by:

- Offering regular, scheduled bathroom breaks throughout the day
- Responding promptly when children indicate they need to use the toilet
- Providing assistance with handwashing, clothing, and cleanup as needed
- Maintaining a calm, supportive attitude toward accidents
- Protecting children's dignity and privacy during toileting
- Encouraging independence while offering help when requested
- Communicating with families about toileting successes and challenges

### **f. Handling Accidents**

We understand that occasional accidents are a normal part of early childhood. When accidents occur:

- Staff will respond with kindness and matter-of-fact support
- Children will be changed into clean, dry clothes from their extra clothing supply
- Children will be encouraged to participate in cleanup to the extent they are able
- Soiled clothing will be placed in a sealed bag and sent home
- Parents will be notified of the accident at pickup or via communication app

### **g. Frequent Accidents**

If a child is having frequent accidents (more than 2-3 per week consistently), this may indicate that they are not yet ready for a preschool environment. In these cases:

- Staff will document the pattern of accidents
- The Director will schedule a conference with the family
- We will work together to develop a plan, which may include temporary withdrawal to focus on toilet learning at home
- The child may return once consistent toilet independence is established

### **h. Naptime Considerations**

Children are expected to remain dry during naptime. We understand that nighttime and naptime dryness sometimes develops later than daytime control. However, for the health and comfort of all children:

- Children must use the toilet immediately before rest time
- Pull-ups or diapers are not permitted during naptime
- If naptime accidents become a pattern, we will work with families to address this need

### **i. What Families Need to Provide**

To support your child's toileting success, please provide:

- At least 2-3 complete changes of clothing (shirt, pants, underwear, socks) kept at school in a labeled bag
- Easy-to-manage clothing (elastic waistbands, no complicated buttons or buckles)
- Extra underwear beyond the complete outfit changes
- Replenishment of clothing supply when items are used and sent home

### **j. Partnership with Families**

Successful toileting requires consistent partnership between home and school. We ask families to:

- Ensure your child is consistently toilet trained at home before enrollment begins
- Use the same language and routines at home that we use at school
- Communicate any toileting concerns or challenges promptly
- Maintain a positive, patient attitude about accidents and setbacks
- Ensure your child uses the toilet before drop-off each morning
- Work collaboratively with staff if challenges arise

### **k. When Enrollment May Be Delayed or Suspended**

We recognize that toilet learning is a significant developmental milestone and that some children need more time. In the interest of your child's emotional well-being and success:

- Children who are not yet toilet trained may have their enrollment start date delayed until they are ready
- Children experiencing frequent accidents may be asked to withdraw temporarily to focus on toilet learning at home
- Re-enrollment will be welcomed once toilet independence is consistently demonstrated

This policy is designed to support each child's dignity and developmental readiness while maintaining a healthy, safe environment for all children in our care.

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## **4. Nondiscrimination and Equal Opportunity**

### **4.1 Policy Statement**

Sacred Roots Early Learning is committed to providing equal educational opportunities and a safe, welcoming environment for all children and families. Sacred Roots does not discriminate on the basis of disability, race, color, gender, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, family composition, national origin, religion, ancestry, or any other protected class in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices.

### **4.2 Protected Classes**

For purposes of this policy:

- a. Race includes hair texture, hair type, hair length, or protective hairstyles such as braids, locs, twists, cornrows, Bantu knots, afros, and headwraps that are commonly or historically associated with race
- b. Sexual Orientation means an individual's identity in relation to the gender(s) to which they are sexually or emotionally attracted
- c. Gender Expression means an individual's way of reflecting and expressing gender through appearance, dress, and behavior
- d. Gender Identity means an individual's innate sense of their own gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth
- e. Family Composition includes all family structures, including single-parent families, multi-generational families, same-sex parent families, adoptive families, foster families, and families formed through assisted reproduction

### **4.3 Harassment, Discrimination, and Bullying Prohibited**

Harassment, discrimination, and bullying based on protected class are prohibited on school premises, during school activities, and when such conduct has a connection to the school.

- a. Bullying is defined as any written or oral expression, physical or electronic act or gesture, or a pattern thereof, that is intended to coerce, intimidate, or cause any physical, mental, or emotional harm to another. For young children, this may include persistent exclusion, name-calling, physical aggression, or other behaviors intended to hurt or upset another child.
- b. Harassment is any unwelcome conduct directed at a child based on their protected class that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment or interferes with the child's ability to participate in school.
- c. Discrimination occurs when a child is denied or limited in the ability to participate in school activities on the basis of their protected class.

#### **4.4 Safe and Supportive Environment**

Sacred Roots is committed to creating an environment where:

- a. Every child feels welcomed, valued, and safe
- b. Diversity is celebrated and respected
- c. Children develop positive social identities
- d. Families feel respected and included as partners
- e. Staff model inclusive language and behavior

#### **4.5 Reporting Concerns**

Any person who witnesses or experiences discrimination, harassment, or bullying should report it immediately to the Director or Co-Lead Teacher. Reports may be made verbally or in writing.

All reports will be taken seriously and investigated promptly and fairly. Retaliation against anyone who reports concerns or participates in an investigation is strictly prohibited.

#### **4.6 Investigation and Response**

When a report is received:

- a. The Director will conduct a prompt and impartial investigation
- b. Families of children involved will be notified and kept informed
- c. Appropriate supportive measures will be provided to affected children
- d. If discrimination, harassment, or bullying is found, corrective action will be taken
- e. Follow-up will occur to ensure the behavior does not recur

Supportive measures may include:

- i. Additional supervision and monitoring
- ii. Modifications to classroom arrangements
- iii. Social-emotional support and skill-building
- iv. Communication strategies with families
- v. Referrals to appropriate resources

#### **4.7 Outside Agencies**

Families may also file complaints with:

Colorado Civil Rights Division (CCRD)  
1560 Broadway, Suite 825, Denver, CO 80202  
Telephone: 303-894-2997 or 800-886-7675  
Email: DORA\_CCRD@state.co.us

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights  
1244 Speer Blvd., Suite 310, Denver, CO 80204-3582  
Telephone: 303-844-5695  
Email: OCR.Denver@ed.gov

## **5. Student Conduct and Guidance**

### **5.1 Philosophy**

Sacred Roots Early Learning believes that positive guidance helps children develop self-control, respect for others, and appropriate social skills. Our approach emphasizes teaching, modeling, and reinforcing positive behaviors rather than punitive measures.

We understand that challenging behaviors are a normal part of early childhood development and represent opportunities for learning and growth. Our role is to help children develop the skills they need to express their feelings, solve problems, and interact positively with others.

### **5.2 Behavioral Expectations**

Children at Sacred Roots are learning to:

- a. Treat others with kindness and respect
- b. Use words to express feelings and needs
- c. Listen to and follow directions from teachers
- d. Care for materials and the environment
- e. Participate cooperatively in group activities
- f. Resolve conflicts peacefully with support

We recognize that these are developing skills and that young children need patient teaching, modeling, and practice to internalize these expectations.

### **5.3 Positive Guidance Strategies**

Our teachers use developmentally appropriate guidance techniques that support children's social-emotional growth:

- a. Proactive Strategies:

- i. Establishing clear, consistent, and age-appropriate expectations
- ii. Creating predictable routines and smooth transitions
- iii. Designing the environment to support positive behavior
- iv. Teaching social-emotional skills explicitly
- v. Building strong, trusting relationships with each child
- vi. Recognizing and reinforcing positive behaviors
- b. Responsive Strategies:
  - i. Staying calm and regulated to help children co-regulate
  - ii. Acknowledging children's feelings and helping them name emotions
  - iii. Redirecting to appropriate activities or behaviors
  - iv. Offering choices when appropriate
  - v. Using natural and logical consequences
  - vi. Teaching and practicing alternative behaviors
  - vii. Providing brief breaks or calming strategies when needed
- c. Reflective Strategies:
  - i. Problem-solving with children after incidents
  - ii. Helping children make amends and repair relationships
  - iii. Documenting patterns to understand underlying needs
  - iv. Adjusting the environment or schedule as needed
  - v. Communicating with families to ensure consistency

## **5.4 Prohibited Practices**

Sacred Roots Early Learning strictly prohibits the following discipline practices:

- a. Corporal punishment of any kind, including spanking, slapping, or any other physical punishment
- b. Harsh or humiliating treatment, including yelling, shaming, or ridicule
- c. Frightening or threatening children
- d. Withholding food, rest, or bathroom access as punishment
- e. Physical restraint except when necessary to prevent immediate danger to the child or others
- f. Isolation or seclusion as punishment
- g. Denial of outdoor time as punishment

Any staff member who uses prohibited practices will be subject to immediate disciplinary action, up to and including termination, in accordance with Colorado law.

## **5.5 Physical Intervention and Restraint**

Physical intervention may only be used when necessary to prevent immediate harm to the child or others. When physical intervention is necessary:

- a. It will use the minimum force necessary to ensure safety
- b. It will not restrict the child's breathing or cause physical harm
- c. It will be documented immediately
- d. Families will be notified the same day
- e. The incident will be reviewed to identify preventive strategies

Physical intervention is never used as punishment, to gain compliance, or for staff convenience.

If a child is physically held for safety, the hold will last only as long as necessary for the child to regain control and for the situation to be made safe, typically less than one minute.

## **5.6 Challenging Behaviors**

When challenging behaviors occur, our approach is:

### **a. Immediate Response:**

- i. Ensure safety for all children
- ii. Stay calm and provide support to help the child regulate
- iii. Redirect to appropriate activities when the child is ready
- iv. Provide comfort to any children who were affected

### **b. Follow-Up and Prevention:**

- i. Document the incident, including antecedents and consequences
- ii. Look for patterns or triggers
- iii. Communicate with families to understand possible contributing factors
- iv. Adjust the environment, schedule, or teaching strategies as needed
- v. Develop a behavior support plan if behaviors persist

### **c. Behavior Support Plans:**

When a child exhibits ongoing challenging behaviors, we will partner with families to develop a behavior support plan that:

- i. Identifies specific behaviors of concern
- ii. Explores possible underlying needs or triggers
- iii. Establishes consistent strategies for prevention and response

- iv. Includes goals and a timeline for review
- v. Involves collaboration between home and school
- vi. May include referrals to outside specialists or resources

## **5.7 Suspension and Expulsion**

Sacred Roots recognizes that suspension and expulsion of preschool-aged children should be extremely rare and used only as a last resort when necessary to protect the safety of children and staff. We are committed to working with families to support children's success and will exhaust all other interventions before considering removal.

### **a. Our Commitment:**

Before any suspension or expulsion is considered, Sacred Roots will:

- i. Partner with families to understand and address the behavior
- ii. Implement a comprehensive behavior support plan
- iii. Consult with specialists or mental health professionals when appropriate
- iv. Provide referrals to community resources and support services
- v. Make reasonable modifications to support the child's success
- vi. Document all interventions and their outcomes

### **b. Grounds for Suspension or Expulsion:**

Suspension or expulsion may be considered only when:

- i. A child's behavior creates a serious, ongoing safety threat that cannot be addressed through other means
- ii. All appropriate interventions have been attempted and documented

iii. The child's continued attendance would pose an unreasonable risk to themselves, other children, or staff

c. Prohibited Grounds:

A child may never be suspended or expelled solely for:

- i. Developmental delays or disabilities
- ii. Behaviors that are typical for their age and stage of development
- iii. Toilet training challenges
- iv. Crying, whining, or other age-appropriate expressions of emotion
- v. A single isolated incident (unless it involves serious violence)

d. Required Considerations:

Before making any decision to suspend or expel a child, the Director will carefully consider:

- i. The child's age and developmental level - Behaviors must be evaluated in the context of what is typical for the child's age
- ii. The child's history - Is this a pattern or an unusual occurrence?
- iii. Disability or special needs - Does the child have a disability that may be contributing to the behavior? Have appropriate accommodations been made?
- iv. Effectiveness of interventions - Have multiple strategies been tried over an adequate period of time?
- v. Severity and immediacy of safety threat - Is there an immediate danger that cannot be mitigated?
- vi. Impact on the learning environment - Can the school continue to provide a safe and appropriate learning environment for all children?

vii. Availability of alternative supports - Are there additional resources or services that could be accessed?

Additionally, the Director must determine that:

i. Failure to remove the child would create a safety threat that cannot otherwise be addressed

ii. Alternative interventions have been documented and exhausted

iii. Removing the child is the only reasonable option to preserve safety

e. Process:

If suspension or expulsion is being considered:

i. Family meeting - Families will be notified immediately and a meeting will be scheduled to discuss concerns and develop a support plan

ii. Intervention period - A behavior support plan will be implemented for a minimum of 4-6 weeks with regular progress monitoring

iii. Reassessment - If behaviors continue to pose a safety threat despite interventions, a second family meeting will be held to discuss next steps

iv. Written notice - If the decision is made to suspend or expel, families will receive written notice including:

- Specific reasons for the decision
- All interventions that were attempted
- Documentation of safety concerns
- Information about the appeals process
- Referrals to alternative programs and support services

v. Appeal process - Families may appeal the decision in writing within 10 days. Appeals will be reviewed by Owner, whose decision will be final

f. Suspension:

If a temporary suspension is necessary:

- i. It will be for the shortest time possible, typically 1-3 days
- ii. Families will receive a written notice with specific reasons
- iii. A plan for the child's return will be developed
- iv. Support services and strategies will be in place before the child returns
- g. Support During Transition:

If expulsion is necessary, Sacred Roots will:

- i. Provide referrals to other programs that may be a better fit
- ii. Share information about community mental health resources
- iii. Offer to communicate with the new program (with family consent)
- iv. Provide documentation to support the child's transition
- v. Handle the transition with sensitivity and respect for the child and family

h. Prohibited Practices:

Sacred Roots will never:

- i. Use suspension or expulsion as punishment or to gain compliance
- ii. Suspend or expel a child without first implementing and documenting interventions
- iii. Refuse to serve a child based on disability or special needs without engaging in the required process
- iv. Use threats of expulsion to manipulate behavior

## **5.8 Family Partnership**

Families are essential partners in supporting children's social-emotional development. We believe that open communication, mutual respect, and shared goals are critical to each child's success.

a. Our commitment to families:

i. We will communicate regularly about your child's day, including both successes and challenges

ii. We will work collaboratively to understand the whole child

iii. We will share strategies that are working at school

iv. We will ask about what works at home

v. We will respect cultural differences in child-rearing practices

vi. We will listen to your concerns and ideas with an open mind

vii. We will partner with you to develop plans that support your child

b. We ask families to:

i. Communicate openly about your child's needs, experiences, and home life

ii. Share strategies that work well at home

iii. Follow through on agreed-upon plans and strategies

iv. Keep us informed of any changes that might affect your child

v. Work with us as a team to support your child's growth

Together, we can help every child develop the social-emotional skills they need to thrive.

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## 6. Health and Safety

### 6.1 Illness Policy

To protect the health of all children and staff, children must stay home when experiencing:

a. Required Exclusion:

- i. Fever of 100.4°F or higher (without fever-reducing medication)
- ii. Vomiting (more than once or accompanied by other symptoms)
- iii. Diarrhea (more than one loose stool or stool)
- iv. Undiagnosed rash, especially with fever or behavior changes
- v. Pink eye (conjunctivitis) with drainage
- vi. Impetigo or other contagious skin conditions
- vii. Lice or nits (until after first treatment)
- viii. Persistent cough or difficulty breathing
- ix. Signs of a contagious illness (e.g., hand-foot-mouth disease, strep throat)
- x. Lethargy or behavior changes that prevent participation
- xi. Any illness that prevents the child from participating comfortably

b. Children may return to school when:

- i. Fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication
- ii. No vomiting for 24 hours
- iii. Diarrhea resolved and child has had one formed stool
- iv. Cleared by a healthcare provider (if required)

v. Able to participate fully in all activities, including outdoor time

If a child becomes ill during the school day, families will be contacted immediately and asked to pick up the child within one hour.

## **6.2 Health Screenings**

Daily health checks will be conducted upon arrival. Staff will observe each child for signs of illness and may take temperatures when needed. Children showing signs of illness will not be admitted.

## **6.3 Medication Administration**

Prescription and over-the-counter medications may be administered by trained staff only with proper authorization and documentation.

a. Requirements:

- i. Completed and signed Medication Authorization Form from parent/guardian
- ii. Written order from healthcare provider (for prescription medications)
- iii. Medication in original container with current prescription label showing:

- Child's name
- Medication name and dosage
- Administration instructions
- Prescribing physician's name
- Pharmacy information and date

b. Medication Policies:

- i. All medications must be handed directly to staff (never placed in child's bag)
- ii. Medications will be stored in a secure location inaccessible to children
- iii. Staff will maintain a medication log documenting each dose administered

- iv. Families will be notified if any medication errors occur
- v. Medications must be picked up by families; unused medications will not be sent home in children's bags
- vi. Expired or discontinued medications will be returned to families

c. Topical Products:

Sunscreen may be applied with written parental permission on file. Products must be provided by families in original containers labeled with the child's name.

d. Emergency Medications:

For children with serious allergies, asthma, or other conditions requiring emergency medication (e.g., EpiPen, inhaler), families must:

- i. Provide current medication with unexpired dates
- ii. Complete an Emergency Care Plan with healthcare provider input
- iii. Provide updated information whenever medication or care needs change
- iv. Ensure backup medication is available at school

## **6.4 Allergies and Dietary Restrictions**

Families must inform Sacred Roots of any:

- a. Food allergies (especially life-threatening allergies)
- b. Dietary restrictions or preferences
- c. Environmental allergies
- d. Medication allergies

Food Allergy Management:

For children with serious food allergies, Sacred Roots will:

- i. Develop an individualized Food Allergy Action Plan with family input
- ii. Post allergy information (with family permission) in relevant areas
- iii. Store emergency medication in an easily accessible location
- iv. Train all staff on allergy management and emergency response
- v. Make reasonable accommodations to reduce exposure risks
- vi. Communicate with all families about classroom food policies

Sacred Roots is not an allergen-free facility, but we take food allergies seriously and work to minimize risks. Families of children with life-threatening allergies should discuss specific concerns and protocols with the Director.

## **6.5 Accident and Incident Reporting**

All accidents and incidents will be:

- a. Documented on an Incident Report form
- b. Reviewed with families at pick-up the same day
- c. Signed by both staff and parent/guardian
- d. Kept in the child's file

Families will be contacted immediately for:

- i. Head injuries
- ii. Injuries requiring medical attention
- iii. Severe behavioral incidents
- iv. Any incident causing significant distress

## **6.6 Emergency Medical Care**

In case of medical emergency:

- a. Staff will assess the situation and provide first aid as trained
- b. For serious injuries or illness, 911 will be called immediately
- c. Parents/guardians will be contacted simultaneously
- d. If parents cannot be reached, emergency contacts will be called
- e. Staff will accompany the child to the hospital and provide medical information
- f. An incident report will be completed and shared with families

Family Responsibilities:

- i. Keep all contact information current and accurate
- ii. Respond promptly to emergency calls
- iii. Provide at least two reliable emergency contacts who can be reached during school hours
- iv. Update medical information and emergency contacts as needed

## **6.7 Safe Sleep Practices**

For children who rest or nap at school:

- a. Each child will have an individual, labeled rest mat or cot
- b. Rest spaces will be spaced appropriately for health and safety
- c. Bedding from home should be washable and sent home weekly for laundering
- d. Staff will conduct regular visual checks during rest time
- e. Children will not be forced to sleep but will be provided quiet rest time

## **6.8 Nutrition and Meals**

Sacred Roots Early Learning promotes healthy eating habits and provides a positive mealtime environment.

### **a. Meals and Snacks:**

- i. Families provide meals and snacks
- ii. Filtered water is available to children throughout the day
- iii. Mealtimes are relaxed, family-style opportunities for conversation and community

### **b. Dietary Accommodations:**

Sacred Roots will accommodate:

- i. Food allergies with appropriate documentation
- ii. Religious or cultural dietary restrictions
- iii. Vegetarian/vegan preferences
- iv. Medical diets with healthcare provider documentation

### **c. Food Policies:**

- i. Birthday celebrations and special treats should be discussed with staff in advance
- ii. Foods must meet basic health and safety standards
- iii. Families will be notified of classroom food policies related to allergies

## **6.9 Outdoor Safety**

Daily outdoor play is an integral part of our program. We will go outside in most weather conditions, as outdoor time supports physical health, sensory development, and connection to nature.

### **a. Weather Guidelines:**

- i. Children will play outside unless temperature (including wind chill or heat index) is below 20° F or above 95° F
  - ii. We will adjust outdoor time in cases of extreme weather, air quality alerts, or safety concerns
  - iii. Children should be dressed appropriately for weather conditions
- b. Outdoor Safety Practices:
- i. Outdoor spaces are inspected daily for hazards
  - ii. Children are supervised at all times according to required ratios
  - iii. Boundaries are clearly established and reinforced
  - iv. Sun protection (hats, sunscreen) is encouraged
  - v. First aid supplies are readily available during outdoor time

## **6.10 Tobacco and Substance-Free Environment**

Sacred Roots maintains a tobacco and substance-free environment in accordance with Colorado law.

Prohibited on all school premises and at all school activities:

- a. Smoking or use of tobacco products (including e-cigarettes, vaping devices)
- b. Marijuana (including medical marijuana) - *Note: Medical marijuana may only be administered to qualified students by a primary caregiver in a designated location and in accordance with Colorado law C.R.S. 22-1-119.3, if applicable. Families should contact the Director to discuss necessary procedures.*
- c. Alcohol
- d. Illegal drugs or controlled substances

Staff, families, and visitors must comply with this policy at all times.

## **6.11 Health and Safety Protocols**

Sacred Roots follows health and safety guidelines established by the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Our practices include:

- a. Regular handwashing routines throughout the day
- b. Sanitation of surfaces, toys, and materials
- c. Proper food handling and storage procedures
- d. Toileting procedures that promote health and dignity
- e. Universal precautions for blood-borne pathogens
- f. Safe storage of cleaning supplies and other hazardous materials

## **6.12 Clothing and Personal Items**

a. Appropriate Clothing:

- i. Children should wear comfortable, washable clothes suitable for active play
- ii. Extra clothes (including underwear and socks) should be provided in a labeled bag
- iii. Closed-toe shoes with non-slip soles are required for safety
- iv. Children should be dressed appropriately for outdoor play in all seasons
- v. Clothing with violent images or inappropriate language is not permitted

b. Personal Items:

- i. Toys from home should remain in backpacks unless arranged with teachers
- ii. Comfort items (loveys, blankets) are welcome during rest time
- iii. All items should be clearly labeled with child's name

iv. Sacred Roots is not responsible for lost, damaged, or broken personal items

### **6.13 Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect**

All Sacred Roots staff are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect as required by Colorado law (C.R.S. 19-3-304).

a. Legal Obligation:

i. Staff must report any reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect to county social services or law enforcement

ii. Reports must be made immediately upon suspicion

iii. Staff cannot investigate allegations themselves

iv. Reporting suspected abuse is not a violation of confidentiality

v. Failure to report is a criminal offense

b. Types of Abuse:

Staff are trained to recognize signs of:

i. Physical abuse

ii. Sexual abuse

iii. Emotional abuse

iv. Neglect

c. If a report is made:

i. Families may or may not be notified, depending on circumstances and guidance from authorities

ii. Sacred Roots will cooperate fully with investigations

iii. Staff making good-faith reports are protected from liability

iv. The safety and well-being of the child is the primary concern

Families with questions about mandated reporting should contact the Director.

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## 7. Family Communication and Records

### 7.1 Daily Communication

Sacred Roots values open, ongoing communication with families. We believe strong partnerships between home and school support each child's success.

#### a. Daily Informal Communication:

- i. Brief conversations at drop-off and pick-up
- ii. Daily reports (for younger children) about meals, naps, and highlights
- iii. Photos or brief updates via [communication app TBD]

#### b. Regular Updates:

- i. Weekly or bi-weekly classroom newsletters
- ii. Updates about upcoming themes, activities, and events
- iii. Suggestions for extending learning at home

#### c. Scheduled Communication:

- i. Parent-teacher conferences at least twice per year
- ii. Additional conferences as requested by families or teachers
- iii. Observation opportunities for families to see classroom in action

#### d. Ongoing Communication:

- i. Families are encouraged to reach out with questions or concerns at any time
- ii. Teachers are available for brief conversations at drop-off/pick-up or via email
- iii. The Director is available to discuss any concerns that require additional support

## **7.2 Student Records**

Sacred Roots maintains confidential records for each enrolled child in accordance with state and federal law.

a. Records Include:

- i. Enrollment and emergency contact information
- ii. Immunization and health records
- iii. Developmental observations and assessments
- iv. Attendance records
- v. Incident and accident reports
- vi. Communication logs
- vii. Any IEPs, IFSPs, or other special services documentation

b. Security and Confidentiality:

- i. Records are stored securely and accessible only to authorized staff
- ii. Electronic records are password-protected
- iii. Records are maintained in compliance with Colorado regulations
- iv. Records are confidential and will not be shared without written consent except as required by law

## **7.3 Access to Records**

Parents/guardians have the right to:

- a. Inspect and review their child's records during regular business hours with reasonable notice
- b. Request copies of records (may be subject to reasonable copying fees)

c. Request amendments to records believed to be inaccurate or misleading

To request access to records:

- i. Submit a written request to the Director specifying which records you wish to review
- ii. Access will be provided within five business days of the request
- iii. A staff member will be available to explain records and answer questions
- iv. You may review records on-site or request copies

To request amendment of records:

- i. Submit a written request clearly identifying the part of the record to be amended and explaining why it is inaccurate or misleading
- ii. Request must be made within 10 business days of reviewing the records
- iii. The Director will respond in writing within 10 business days
- iv. If the request is denied, you may include a written statement of disagreement in the record

## **7.4 Release of Information**

Student records and personally identifiable information are confidential and will not be released without written parental consent except:

a. Permitted Disclosures Without Consent:

- i. To school staff with a legitimate educational interest
- ii. As required by law (court order, child protection investigation)
- iii. To comply with a health or safety emergency
- iv. To officials of another school to which the child is transferring (with notice)

b. Directory Information:

The following may be shared within the school community (such as class rosters shared with enrolled families) unless you object in writing:

- i. Child's name
- ii. Classroom assignment
- iii. Dates of attendance

To restrict directory information, submit written notice to the Director at any time.

## **7.5 Photography and Media Use**

Sacred Roots may photograph or video children for:

- a. Internal Use (no opt-out):
  - i. Classroom documentation and learning portfolios
  - ii. Assessment and observation purposes
  - iii. Communication with families about their own child
- b. External Use (opt-out available):
  - i. Classroom displays
  - ii. Documentation panels
  - iii. Newsletters

We do not participate in external promotional use (e.g. Sacred Roots website, social media platforms, or local media or press materials)

## **7.6 Custody and Authorization**

- a. Authorized Pick-Up:
  - i. Children will only be released to individuals listed as authorized on the enrollment form

- ii. Authorized individuals must be prepared to show photo identification
- iii. Anyone picking up a child must be at least 18 years old
- iv. If an unauthorized person arrives to pick up a child, the child will not be released until an authorized person is contacted and gives verbal permission

b. Changes to Authorization:

- i. Changes to authorized pick-up persons must be submitted in writing (email acceptable)
- ii. For temporary changes (one day only), written or verbal authorization from the parent is required

c. Custody Arrangements:

- i. If custody arrangements restrict a parent's access to the child, a certified copy of the relevant court order must be provided
- ii. Without documentation, both legal parents have equal access to their child
- iii. Sacred Roots is not responsible for enforcing custody arrangements and will comply with legal documentation on file

## **7.7 Communication Methods**

Sacred Roots communicates with families through:

- a. In-person conversations
- b. Email
- c. Phone calls
- d. [Communication app TBD]
- e. Posted notices and newsletters
- f. Website updates

Family Responsibilities:

- i. Keep all contact information current (email, phone numbers, address, emergency contacts)
- ii. Notify the office immediately of any changes
- iii. Check communication channels regularly
- iv. Respond to important communications promptly
- v. Inform all authorized pick-up persons of school policies and procedures

## **7.8 Record Retention**

Records will be maintained in accordance with Colorado Department of Human Services regulations:

- a. Enrollment records: Maintained during enrollment and for three years after departure
- b. Health records: Maintained during enrollment and for three years after departure
- c. Attendance records: Maintained for three years
- d. Incident reports: Maintained for three years

Records will be securely destroyed when no longer required to be maintained.

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## **8. Staff Conduct and Responsibilities**

### **8.1 Professional Standards**

All Sacred Roots staff are expected to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct, including:

a. Relationship with Children:

- i. Treat all children with respect, dignity, and fairness
- ii. Use positive guidance and age-appropriate expectations
- iii. Maintain appropriate physical and emotional boundaries
- iv. Never engage in any form of abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- v. Model positive behavior, language, and problem-solving
- vi. Support each child's individual needs and learning style

b. Relationship with Families:

- i. Communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully
- ii. Maintain confidentiality of family and child information
- iii. Respect diverse parenting styles and cultural values
- iv. Partner with families as equals in supporting children
- v. Address concerns promptly and professionally
- vi. Maintain appropriate professional boundaries

c. Professional Responsibilities:

- i. Arrive on time and prepared for each day
- ii. Fulfill all assigned duties and responsibilities

- iii. Participate in required training and professional development
- iv. Comply with all policies, procedures, and regulations
- v. Report concerns about child safety or welfare immediately
- vi. Maintain a clean, safe, organized learning environment

## **8.2 Background Checks and Clearances**

All staff and regular volunteers who have unsupervised contact with children must:

- a. Pass a criminal background check through the Colorado Bureau of Investigation
- b. Pass a fingerprint-based criminal history check through FBI records
- c. Complete Child Abuse and Neglect background check through Colorado state database
- d. Comply with all Colorado Department of Human Services requirements

Background checks must be current and renewed as required by law.

## **8.3 Training Requirements**

All staff receive training in:

- a. Initial Training:
  - i. Orientation to Sacred Roots policies and procedures
  - ii. Child development and age-appropriate practices
  - iii. Positive guidance and behavior management
  - iv. Health and safety protocols (first aid, CPR, medication administration)
  - v. Recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect
  - vi. Emergency procedures and response

vii. Cultural competency and anti-bias education

viii. Confidentiality and privacy requirements

b. Ongoing Professional Development:

i. Annual training in mandated reporting

ii. Annual training in health and safety updates

iii. Professional development aligned with program goals and individual growth plans

iv. Training hours as required by Colorado Department of Human Services

#### **8.4 Supervision Requirements**

Children will be supervised at all times by qualified staff who maintain child-to-staff ratios:

a. Maximum ratio of 1:6

b. Maximum group size of 12 children

Supervision Practices:

i. Staff position themselves to see and hear all children at all times

ii. During transitions, one staff member remains with children while the other prepares the next space

iii. Children are counted frequently, especially during transitions and outdoor time

iv. No child is ever left alone or unsupervised

v. Toileting maintains appropriate supervision while respecting privacy

#### **8.5 Confidentiality**

Staff must maintain confidentiality of:

a. All information about children and families

- b. Conversations between parents and teachers
- c. Student records and assessments
- d. Health or behavioral concerns
- e. Family circumstances

Permitted Disclosures:

- i. To other staff with a legitimate educational need to know
- ii. As required by law (mandated reporting, court order)
- iii. With written parental consent
- iv. In anonymized form for professional development or program improvement

Violations of confidentiality are grounds for disciplinary action up to and including termination.

## **8.6 Conflict of Interest**

Staff must:

- a. Disclose any potential conflicts of interest to the Director
- b. Avoid situations where personal interests could interfere with professional judgment
- c. Refrain from using their position for personal gain
- d. Maintain professional boundaries with families outside of school

## **8.7 Prohibited Conduct**

The following behaviors are strictly prohibited and may result in immediate termination:

- a. Any form of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- b. Use of prohibited discipline practices

- c. Arriving to work under the influence of alcohol or drugs
- d. Possession or use of illegal substances
- e. Violations of confidentiality
- f. Falsification of records or documentation
- g. Failure to report suspected child abuse or neglect
- h. Inappropriate relationships with families
- i. Theft or misuse of school property
- j. Conduct that endangers children or brings discredit to Sacred Roots

## **8.8 Mandated Reporting**

All staff are mandated reporters and must:

- a. Report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect immediately
- b. Not investigate allegations themselves
- c. Not notify parents before reporting (in cases where parent may be perpetrator)
- d. Complete written follow-up documentation
- e. Cooperate with child protection investigations

Failure to report suspected abuse or neglect is a criminal offense in Colorado.

## **8.9 Professional Boundaries**

Staff maintain professional boundaries by:

- a. Limiting contact with families outside of school to school-related matters
- b. Declining social media friend requests from current families

- c. Avoiding babysitting or providing care for enrolled children outside of school hours
- d. Keeping personal information private
- e. Not discussing personal problems or relationships with families
- f. Maintaining appropriate physical contact with children (comforting, redirecting, ensuring safety)

## **8.10 Staff Health and Safety**

Staff are required to:

- a. Stay home when ill with contagious conditions
  - b. Report work-related injuries immediately
  - c. Use proper lifting techniques and safety equipment
  - d. Follow universal precautions for blood-borne pathogens
  - e. Maintain current first aid and CPR certification
  - f. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear for active engagement with children
-

## **9. Emergency Procedures**

### **9.1 Emergency Contacts**

Families must provide and maintain current:

- a. Primary parent/guardian contact information (home, work, cell phone)
- b. Secondary parent/guardian contact information (if applicable)
- c. At least two emergency contacts who can pick up the child if parents are unavailable
- d. Child's physician contact information
- e. Hospital preference (if any)
- f. Health insurance information

Family Responsibility: Update contact information immediately when it changes. Outdated emergency contact information puts your child at risk.

### **9.2 Emergency Drills**

Sacred Roots conducts regular emergency drills to ensure children and staff are prepared:

- a. Fire Evacuation:
  - i. Conducted monthly
  - ii. Children practice safe and orderly evacuation
  - iii. Meeting location is established outside the building
  - iv. Children are accounted for using attendance roster
- b. Severe Weather/Tornado:
  - i. Conducted quarterly

- ii. Children practice moving to designated safe area

- iii. Children practice safe positioning

- c. Lockdown:

- i. Conducted at least twice per year

- ii. Staff practice securing the building and keeping children safe and calm

- iii. Age-appropriate explanations are provided to children

All drills are documented and reviewed for continuous improvement.

### **9.3 Emergency Response**

Sacred Roots has established procedures for various emergency situations:

- a. Fire:

- i. Evacuate immediately following posted evacuation route

- ii. Account for all children at designated meeting place

- iii. Call 911

- iv. Do not re-enter building until authorized by fire department

- b. Severe Weather:

- i. Monitor weather alerts

- ii. Move children to designated safe area if severe weather is imminent

- iii. Keep children in safe area until danger has passed

- iv. Follow guidance from emergency officials

- c. Lockdown:

- i. Secure all doors and windows

- ii. Move children away from doors and windows
- iii. Keep children calm and quiet
- iv. Remain in lockdown until all-clear is given by authorities
- d. Medical Emergency:
  - i. Administer first aid as trained
  - ii. Call 911 for serious injuries or illness
  - iii. Contact parents immediately
  - iv. Document incident thoroughly
- e. Missing Child:
  - i. Conduct immediate thorough search of premises and immediate vicinity
  - ii. Notify all staff
  - iii. Contact parents and emergency contacts
  - iv. Call law enforcement if child is not located within 10-15 minutes
  - v. Document incident and circumstances

#### **9.4 Evacuation and Relocation**

In the event the building must be evacuated for an extended period:

- a. Evacuation Site:

[Evacuation location TBD]

- b. Procedures:

- i. Staff will ensure all children are accounted for
- ii. Emergency supplies (first aid kit, emergency contact information, cell phone) will be taken

- iii. Children will be transported to evacuation site
  - iv. Families will be notified immediately of the situation and relocation site
  - v. Children will only be released to authorized persons at relocation site
- c. Reunification:
- i. Families will be notified of pick-up procedures
  - ii. Children will be released only to authorized persons with photo ID
  - iii. Staff will document release of each child

## **9.5 School Closures and Delays**

Sacred Roots may close or delay opening due to:

- a. Severe weather or hazardous road conditions
- b. Facility emergencies (power outage, water main break, heating failure)
- c. Public health emergencies
- d. Other safety-related circumstances

a. Notification Process:

Families will be notified of closures or delays by:

- i. Email sent to address on file
- ii. Text message (if phone numbers provided)
- iii. Posted announcement on website and social media
- iv. Local media announcements (in severe weather situations)

b. Tuition Policy:

Regular tuition remains due regardless of emergency closures. Tuition will not be prorated for individual missed days due to closures, but extended closures may be addressed on a case-by-case basis.

## **9.6 Emergency Supplies**

Sacred Roots maintains emergency supplies including:

- a. First aid kit with current supplies
- b. Emergency contact information for all children
- c. Emergency medications for children with health conditions
- d. Flashlights and batteries
- e. Battery-powered radio
- f. Emergency water and non-perishable food
- g. Blankets
- h. Age-appropriate comfort items

Emergency supplies are checked regularly and restocked as needed.

## **9.7 Emergency Authorization**

The enrollment form includes authorization for emergency medical treatment. In case of a medical emergency, Sacred Roots will:

- a. Call 911
- b. Administer first aid as trained
- c. Contact parents immediately
- d. Follow emergency medical instructions if provided by parents

e. Transport child to hospital if necessary

f. Stay with child until parent arrives

By enrolling your child, you authorize Sacred Roots staff to seek emergency medical treatment if parents cannot be reached immediately.

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## **10. Parent Responsibilities**

Families play an essential role in the success of Sacred Roots Early Learning. We ask that all families:

### **10.1 Communication**

- a. Keep all contact information current and accurate
- b. Read and respond to communications in a timely manner
- c. Inform staff of anything that might affect your child's day (changes at home, sleepless night, etc.)
- d. Share your child's interests, strengths, and needs
- e. Communicate concerns respectfully and directly
- f. Attend parent-teacher conferences and school events when possible

### **10.2 Daily Procedures**

- a. Arrive and pick up on time
- b. Sign children in and out each day
- c. Notify staff if someone different will be picking up your child
- d. Keep your child home when ill
- e. Send appropriate extra clothes and outdoor gear
- f. Label all personal items

### **10.3 Health and Safety**

- a. Ensure your child's immunizations are current
- b. Inform staff immediately of any changes in health status, medications, or allergies

- c. Provide required health documentation
- d. Follow illness policies
- e. Ensure your child is dressed appropriately for active play and weather

#### **10.4 Financial**

- a. Pay tuition on time
- b. Provide advance notice if withdrawing
- c. Communicate with Director if experiencing financial difficulty

#### **10.5 Partnership**

- a. Support school policies and procedures
  - b. Reinforce learning at home
  - c. Model respectful communication and behavior
  - d. Participate in your child's education
  - e. Treat staff and other families with respect
  - f. Support a positive school community
-

# 11. Acknowledgment of Receipt

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understood the Sacred Roots Early Learning Policy Handbook. I understand that I am responsible for complying with all policies and procedures outlined in this handbook and for ensuring that all persons authorized to pick up my child are also aware of relevant policies.

I understand that policies may be updated periodically to reflect changes in regulations, best practices, or program needs. I will be notified of significant changes and the most current version of this handbook is available upon request.

I understand that enrollment at Sacred Roots Early Learning is a privilege and that failure to comply with policies may result in termination of enrollment.

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Parent/Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Second Parent/Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 12. Contact Information

Sacred Roots Early Learning

Address: [TBD]

Email: sacredrootsearlylearning@gmail.com

Website: sacredrootsearlylearning.com

Founder: Sierra Hiner

Hours of Operation: 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Days of Operation: Monday – Friday

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*This handbook was last updated on December 20, 2025 and is subject to revision. Families will be notified in writing of significant policy changes. The current version is always available upon request.*

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Welcome to the Sacred Roots Early Learning community. We look forward to partnering with you in your child's growth and learning journey.