

Come Learn with us!

High Quality Childcare, with meaningful experiences and natural materials; just the way nature intended it.

Contact Us

Conveniently located near Benefis & Great Falls Clinic Hospital.

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Nature's Way
Early Learning

2024-2025

Parent Handbook



Nature's Way
Early Learning

Mission Statement

At Nature's Way Early Learning, your child's safety and excellent care is the priority. In partnering with you as a parent, we strive to meet the needs of our community by providing high-quality childcare for all ages.

Accommodating part time and rotating schedules enables us to allow families to sign up for the care they desire and achieve work/life balance.

Our facility will teach with a focus on meaningful and educational experiences alongside the use of natural materials. This philosophy will allow children to learn through play in a home-like environment while preventing overstimulation.

Children in our care will foster a love for learning; while building a strong sense of self-worth to encourage confidence in their capabilities for many years to come.

Handbook Acknowledgement & Understanding Sign Off

By signing below, you are agreeing that you have read and understand the operating policies in the parent handbook for Nature's Way Early Learning.

Please know that at any time you may reach out to Rebecca, owner and director with questions or clarification on the included policies or operating procedures.

Thank you for supporting our business, we look forward to having your family attend our center!

Please tear out and return this page to the office.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Parent Guardian Printed Name

Rebecca Mallo, Director/Owner

Date

Safe Sleep Policy/Practices

(Continued)

Sleeping While on Walks/Outdoors

If a baby falls asleep while on the center's playground, the baby should be moved indoors to a crib to finish the nap. If a baby falls asleep in a stroller while on a walk, the child can remain sleeping for the duration of the walk. If a baby falls asleep on a walk to a park or other destination, the child should be woken up upon arrival so the child may be placed in his/her crib.

Crib Safety

Crib mattresses should be in the highest position for young babies. The mattress is moved to a lower position once the infant can rollover, sit up or stand. Cribs are checked monthly, using the *Crib Inspection Log*, to confirm there are no loose or missing parts. If repairs are needed, only manufacturer parts will be used.

Children will never be placed in a crib for any other reason aside from sleep or safety. Children should promptly be removed from cribs once they wake up.

Cribs are not placed by window blinds, curtains or cords of any kind including baby monitor cords. Toys, including mobiles and other types of play equipment to be attached to any part of the crib should be kept away from the sleep environment.

Children over 12 Months Sleeping Policy

Once children reach 12 months age they will begin sleeping on cots. Children 12-18 months must have a signed release from parents before beginning the use of a cot. Additionally, the blankets used by children 12-18 months need to be lightweight.

If a child does not fall asleep during rest time, they will not remain on their cot longer than 45 Minutes. After the 45-minute rest period they will be given the option of quiet activities while the other children sleep. Once a child wakes from nap, they will immediately be acknowledged and invited to go potty and explore table activities/story time.

All age groups will have a rest period each day.

Music played during rest time should be at a reasonable volume.

Lighting within classrooms during rest time should allow for active supervision of all children.

Positive Guidance Policy

Young children are striving for understanding, independence, and self-control. Children learn by exploring, experimenting, and testing the limits of their environment and experiencing the consequences of their behavior. In this way, they begin to understand how the world works, their own limits, and appropriate assertiveness. Children learn self-control and how the world works in a relaxed, positive atmosphere of support and understanding. Adults should view discipline as an important aspect of teaching and learning. Through positive guidance of behavior and modeling, the staff helps children to feel good about themselves and to behave in responsible ways.

Nature's Way Early Learning establishes an environment that is conducive to providing positive guidance by requiring teachers to

- limit expectations to comply with what is realistic for the developmental level of each child. Teachers clarify expectations for children so that they understand what is expected of them.
- create a "yes" environment that encourages children's positive behavior
- model appropriate behavior
- use redirection by providing children with alternatives that enable them to turn destructive situations into constructive ones
- use natural and logical consequences to motivate and empower children to make responsible decisions about their behavior
- encourage behaviors such as cooperating, helping, negotiating, and problem-solving

Children will be always supervised by sight and sound, including when any positive guidance, corrective measures or discipline methods are being used.

The following discipline methods are **prohibited**:

- subjecting children to cruel, severe, or frightening punishment such as shaming, humiliation, threats, derogatory remarks, verbal or physical abuse, neglect, or abusive treatment including any forcible restraining, hitting inflicted in any manner upon the body, shaking, jerking, squeezing, spanking, yelling, choking
- labeling ("bad" girl or boy) or otherwise implying that the child is the problem, instead of the behavior
- using bribes, false threats, or false choices
- depriving children of outdoor time, unrelated activities such as special events
- depriving children of meals or snacks; force feeding children or otherwise making them eat against their will, or in any way using food consequently. Neither will food be used as a reward to a get child to behave in a certain way.
- retaliating or doing to the child what he or she did to someone else
- imposing punishment for soiling, wetting, or not using the toilet; forcing a child to remain in soiled clothing or to remain on the toilet, or using any other unusual or excessive practices for toileting
- confining a child to a highchair, crib, or any other piece of equipment for an extended period in lieu of supervision or as punishment

Tuition Payment Expectations

Payment Options

All tuition payments must be paid in advance. Cash or Check is the preferred payment method. Card or ACH may be used both online or in office but will have a 5% fee added to total amount charged. We also work with Dependent Care Payment Plans and accept the Best Beginnings Scholarship. **Monthly payments are preferred. However, alternate plans can be made on an individual basis as needed.**

Best Beginnings Scholarship and Childcare Aware of America Expectations

Your co-payment (determined by family connections) is due by the 15th of each month. If you are awaiting approval by either program, you will be required to pay the weekly rate of tuition until subsidy is confirmed. This prevents a large balance from accruing for both parents and provider.

Your child's hours of attendance are input to the programs portal after the close of each month, resulting in payment the following month. If your child misses additional days throughout the month that are not covered with excused absence hours, you will be responsible for covering the remaining amount. If you are unable to pay the remaining amount due, additional arrangement can be made on a case-by-case basis with center management. CCA Families must sign attendance sheets monthly before sending.

Unexpected/COVID Closure Reimbursement Policy

In the event of our center needing to close (individual classroom or whole center) due to weather or COVID-19 your following month's tuition will receive a 50% credit/reimbursement for the number of days closed. This allows us to continue to pay & retain staff during the event of such closures and ensure we can continue to operate year-round.

COVID Closure Communication Plan

In the event of our center needing to close (individual classroom or whole center) due to COVID you will be called individually to explain the plan for your child and required quarantine based on CCHD. Additionally, a letter will be given out/posted center wide to alert all families that we have encountered a positive case.

Unexpected Closure/Evacuation/Emergency Protection Communication Plan

In the event of our center needing to close, evacuate, or enter lockdown or shelter in place you will be notified via Tadpole's notification system. When an emergency alert is sent you will receive it through text, email and through the app regardless of your preferences set on your phone. In the description of the alert, you will be notified of specific details of the alert, our reunification plan, and how you can contact center management.

Transportation

We do not currently provide transportation for any children in our care.

Child Illness Policy

(Continued)

General Return Requirements: Children need to remain home for 24 hours without symptoms before returning to the program (or longer, as may be specifically required by this policy). In the case of a disease, rash, or continuing symptoms, a note from the child's medical provider may be required before the child can return. For all reportable communicable diseases, a note from the child's medical provider stating that the child is no longer contagious and may return is required.

- They are free of vomiting and diarrhea for a full 24 hours.
- After diarrhea, when diapered children have their stool contained by the diaper (even if stools remain loose) and when toilet-trained children do not have toileting accidents.
- They have been treated with an antibiotic for a full 24 hours.
- They can participate comfortably in all usual program activities, including outdoor time.
- They are free of open, oozing skin conditions and drooling (not related to teething) unless
 - the child's medical provider signs a note stating that the child's condition is not contagious, and
 - the involved areas can be covered by a bandage without seepage or drainage through the bandage.

The illnesses below may require medical clearance (and in some cases clearance by the local department of health) and also must meet the following return criteria:

- Diarrhea: watery stools or decreased form of stool not associated with change of diet; stool not contained in the diaper; child unable to reach the toilet; or stool frequency that exceeds 2 or more stools above normal for that child.
- Blood or mucus in the stools not explained by dietary change, medication, or hard stools.
- Vomiting more than 2 times in the previous 24 hours (unless the vomiting is determined to be caused by a non-communicable condition and the child is not in danger of dehydration).
- Abdominal pain that continues for more than 2 hours; intermittent abdominal pain associated with fever, dehydration, or other signs of illness.
- Skin sores weeping fluid and on an exposed area that cannot be covered.
- Head lice or nits, until free of Nits. Child will be checked by center management prior to returning to group care.

**** Please communicate all confirmed illnesses to center leadership to allow for appropriate preventative cleaning/disinfecting and the ability to communicate with necessary families. Your child's return plan will be discussed individually as needed****

Schedule Change/Dis-Enrollment Policy

Rotating Schedules

Rotating schedules will be accommodated to the best of our ability. Requested schedules will need to be submitted by 20th of each month for following month to allow for accurate staffing and coordinating. Schedules being accommodated will be on a first come first serve basis. Children enrolled 5 Days/week do not need to submit a schedule; please communicate any days you know your child will be absent or arriving after 9am to center leadership.

Adding/Removing Days

30 Days' Notice is required for the addition or deletion of your originally signed up for days. If your request can be adjusted sooner, center leadership will alert you. Additionally, we understand that emergencies and sudden changes can happen. We will always do our best to work with you and find a solution to any changes that may need to happen. 30 Days' notice allows us to adjust staff schedules, and ensure communication is effective.

Dis-Enrollment/Withdrawing from Care

30 Days' Notice in writing is required when dis-enrolling from our care. Once a family has given notice and if they prefer, we will attempt to fill the spot before the 30 days are up allowing them to end care sooner.

Photo/Video Consent Policy

Each classroom has an iPad with the teacher version of the Tadpoles app installed. Throughout the day for fun and to document each child's learning and development pictures and videos will be taken. These images will be shared to children's profiles on Tadpoles making them visible to parents through their app. If the photo/video includes other children, it is not savable through the app. If it is of your individual child, you can choose to download directly from the app.

Additionally, there may be times photos are used from classroom iPads for marketing on our website, on documentation panels throughout our facility, and on social media.

Please mark all that apply below and return with your signed handbook acknowledgment & Understanding.

- ☐ I give consent for my child's photo to be used in all the way's listed above.
- ☐ I give consent for my child's photo to be used in all ways listed above, however I do not want my child's face visible if shared on the website or social media.
- ☐ I give consent for my child's photo to be taken however I do not want them pictured on the website or social media.
- ☐ I give consent for my child's photo to be taken however I don't want their face visible if they are in a group picture shared through the tadpoles app to other parents.
- ☐ I give consent for my child's photo to be taken however I don't want them in group photos sent through tadpoles.
- ☐ I only give consent for my child's photos to be individually taken for their tadpoles profile/learning documentation.
- ☐ I do not want my child's photo taken at all
- ☐ Other, please explain: _____

Child Illness Policy

NOTE: During the COVID-19 pandemic period, our Health Check & Illness Policy (both COVID and Non-COVID provisions) applies to all staff, children, and their household members. The final decision on whether to exclude an individual from the program due to illness will be made by the childcare center.

For your child's comfort, and to reduce the risk of contagion, we ask that children be picked up within 1 hour of notification. Until then, your child will be kept comfortable and will continue to be observed for symptoms.

DAILY HEALTH CHECK:

All staff, families, children, and their household members must conduct a daily health check via the Tadpoles App **before** coming into the center. Should you or any household member have any of the following COVID-19-like symptoms during the **preceding 72 hours****, we ask you to remain out of the center and notify the center.

- Cough
- Sore Throat
- Muscle Aches
- Difficulty Breathing
- New Loss of Taste or Smell
- Fever at or above the threshold temperature of **100.4° F*** (or would have, but for the use of fever-reducing medicine).

SYMPTOMS—RETURNING AFTER EXCLUSION:

If your child is determined to have symptoms, your child will need to either be seen by a physician who determines there is an alternate diagnosis/no need for COVID Testing or be tested for COVID-19 via PCR Swab with negative results.

The alternate diagnosis may still require exclusion. Please follow physician guidance.

NON-COVID ILLNESSES: Please also exclude your child from care when:

Healthy Participation: To keep all children, staff and families healthy while in attendance at our center, any child with an illness or symptoms described below should not attend until meeting the specified return criteria. A child should not have a (n):

- Illness that prevents the child from participating comfortably in program activities, such as going outdoors.
- Illness that results in a greater need for care than our staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children.
- Illness that poses a risk of spread of harmful disease to others.
- Severely ill appearance.

Infants Safe Sleep Policy/Practices

This policy follows the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) recommendations aimed at reducing the chance of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), suffocation, entrapment and strangulation.

Infant Sleep Position

All infants should be placed on their backs in a crib on a firm infant crib mattress with a tight-fitting sheet. After being placed in a crib properly, children may adopt whatever position they prefer. If a child is developmentally capable of rolling over from his/her back to front, there is no need to reposition. * Infants who arrive in a car seat or who fall asleep outside of a crib should be placed in/returned to their cribs immediately and placed properly on their backs.

Pacifiers with a stuffed animal attached are not allowed in the crib.

Infants 12 months and older can begin to sleep on a cot once a parent release is signed.

Soft Products Prohibited

No soft products or other items of any kind may be placed in a crib in an infant room. Blankets are allowed on mats and cots for children older than one year of age if allowed by state licensing. A child's face and head, as well as the crib itself, may not be covered with bedding or blankets.

Exception: A device **used under a crib mattress**, such as a wedge, is allowed **only** with a State of MT health care plan signed by both the child's physician and parents/guardians. * The device is provided by parents/guardians and rolled towels or blankets may not be used in lieu of the device.

Sleep Clothing and Swaddling

A "sleeper," "sleep sack," or other sleep clothing provided by the parents/guardians **IS PERMITTED** as an alternative to blankets, so long as the infant's head is always uncovered. However, a Baby Merlin's Magic Sleep Suit or other weighted sleep clothing are **PROHIBITED**. Swaddling IS ONLY PERMITTED for children under 3 months of age and must be accompanied by a doctor's note. After 3 months of age, the sleep-sack provided must not have any capabilities that allow swaddling.

Supervision of Sleeping Infants

When infants are sleeping, **staff** should position themselves so that all children are continuously supervised by sight and sound. The nap area should be light enough for staff to see all sleeping children clearly. Sleeping infants are checked individually and in proximity at least 3 times each hour (every 20 minutes) * to ensure the infant is not overheated (temperature in the sleep area should be between 68°-75°) or in distress. Sleep checks will be completed via the Tadpoles Teacher App on the I-pad. These checks may be more frequent if necessary (i.e., a child is ill or suffers from reflux).

Child Abuse & Neglect

It is law and my staff and I's responsibility as childcare providers/mandated reporters to report all witnessed or suspected abuse and neglect to a child. Therefore, I will notify Children's Protective Services and the Police when it appears that a child in the care of Nature's Way Early Learning is or is suspected of being abused physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited.

Allergy Management Policy

Nature's Way Early Learning will manage food allergies, intolerances, and preferences by utilizing color coded dishes and easy to view charts in eating areas. Additionally, we will be a Tree Nut free facility.

Parents/guardians are responsible for notifying the center/school of any documented or suspected allergy affecting their child. This policy relates to all **allergies** (except those to medication), whether 1) diagnosed by a physician or 2) suspected by a family.

Allergies Documented by a Physician

Allergies (except those to medication) which are documented/managed by a physician require a **State of MT Special Needs Health Care Plan (available on our facility and DPHHS website)**, so that the center/school can respond appropriately and administer the prescribed medication. **A new plan is required annually**, or more often if changes occur during the year including changes to the condition, treatment, or elimination of the allergy entirely.

The plan must be signed by the physician.

Medication

Any **medication** required by the plan must:

- be provided by the parent/guardian.
- not be past its expiration date.
- be labeled with the child's full name
- indicate the applicable dosage.

Allergies Identified, Suspected, or Preferred Foods by a Parent/Guardian

Parents/guardians may suspect that a child is allergic to certain items due to experience or a family history or may be concerned about a first exposure to a common allergen. **If the allergy is possible or suspected, families must complete a Suspected Allergy/Food Intolerance or Preference Form.** For suspected allergies, over-the-counter medication may be administered consistent with the State of MT Medication Administration Policy.

Holiday Celebration Preference Questionnaire

Please complete this survey and turn in with your parent handbook acknowledgment.

How does your family celebrate holidays/special occasions?

Would you like your child to celebrate holidays in childcare? Are there any holidays you don't want your child to celebrate?

Do you have any concerns about holiday's being celebrated in our facility? _____

If your family does not participate in holidays, how can we ensure our facility is inclusive to your family's culture? _____

Medical Emergencies/First Aid

Minor bumps and scrapes are inevitable during a child's day when filled with play and adventure. However, our facility will make every effort to keep your child safe through active supervision, staff engagement, developmentally appropriate practice, preventative measures, and childproofing.

If your child receives a minor injury while in our care, we will fill out an accident report to inform you at pick up. This will detail what happened, who was present, how we treated your child's injury, and what, if necessary, we will do to prevent the accident from occurring again in the future. You will be asked to sign this upon arrival and receive a copy of the report as well.

If your child receives an injury to their face or head an accident report will be filled out and a phone call or email from center management will be provided to alert you.

If your child receives a significant injury that requires basic first aid skills and possible medical attention you will immediately be contacted. If you are unreachable, we will contact emergency contacts on your child's State of MT Emergency Contact Form.

If your child received a serious injury that requires immediate medical attention, we will take action to stabilize your child based on our first aid training, call 911, and then contact you or the emergency contacts listed on your child's form.

If your child is suspected to have ingested something toxic or poisonous, we will immediately contact the Poison Control Center and Emergency services (if needed), and you/emergency contacts listed on your child's form.

Biting Policy

This policy applies to toddlers and 2-year old's who are prone to biting behavior during this stage of development when language skills are not fully developed and when children are teething. If children over the age of 3 begin biting; it will be addressed in a case-by-case situation. Even though occasional biting at this age is expected, chronic biting can indicate either the environment can be improved, or the child is experiencing another issue that may require outside resources to alleviate the issue; center management will discuss an action plan with the family when needed.

When a bite occurs, parents/guardians of the children involved are notified via Occurrence Reports, keeping each child's identity confidential.

Leadership is responsible for determining if a call to a family is appropriate (in addition to the Occurrence Report). If a bite breaks the skin, parents/guardians should be called and advised to consult with their physician, when appropriate.

If a child has bitten others more than once or has been bitten more than once, leadership should meet with the family to discuss how the situation is being addressed.

Outdoor Play & Clothing Reminders

Clothing Reminders

Children who attend Nature's Way Early Learning learn through play and hands on experiences!

While we will always do our best to preserve clothing with the use of smocks and bibs, please send your child to school in clothes that are in play condition. If you have an event after school hours, please feel free to communicate that to Rebecca or staff and send an event specific outfit to be changed into shortly before your arrival. It's not our intention to ruin clothing, but accidents and learning experiences can happen.

Outdoor Play

Classrooms Mobile—K-Prep go outside each day unless it is determined to be unsafe per our weather chart guidelines, air quality, windchill, or center leaderships judgment. Please be sure your child has the appropriate gear each day for outdoor play. During warm weather, children are allowed to take their shoes off to play in the sandbox. **Please Label all items, many people shop at the same stores.**

Winter

- o Long Sleeves, Pants, Socks
- o Snow boots (slippers or other shoes can be kept in cubby for indoor play)
- o Snow Pants
- o Weather-Proof Gloves
- o Heavy, Waterproof Coat

Spring

- o Weather Appropriate Clothing
- o Closed Toed Shoes/Rain Boots, feet may get wet and muddy/sandy Outside.
- o Mid-Lightweight, Waterproof Coat

Summer

- o Weather Appropriate Clothing
- o Closed Toed Shoes, or Sandals with a strap. Children may take their shoes off to play in sandbox.
- o For Water Play: Swimsuit, Towel, Water shoes/Sandals with Strap.

Autumn

- o Weather Appropriate Clothing
- o Closed Toed Shoes. Children may take their shoes off to play in sandbox on warm enough days.
- o Light Jacket, Wind/Waterproof.

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- ☐ Other, please explain: _____

Parent Signature

Name

Date

