

# Wings Early Childhood Center



## Nature-Based Curriculum

*“Nature is a tool to get children to experience not just the wider world, but themselves.”*  
-Stephen Moss

*\*\*\*Updated in Summer of 2022\*\*\**

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## **Our Philosophy**

At Wings Early Childhood Center, we respect families as the child's first teachers and understand our primary role is to support each unique family. We care not only about the educational enrichment and daily needs of each child, but also the needs of individual families we serve. We understand the importance of early childhood education, and we have made it our goal to show our families the importance of education by allowing each child to openly create, explore, and discover their natural world.

We also understand that learning cannot take place without a loving and caring environment provided by both families and caregivers. All Wings employees make it their priority to provide loving bonds with children to start the learning process. It is also important to us that we form positive relationships with our families as we understand that parents are the expert of their child, and we are the experts of their education and development. We hope to work closely with all families to ensure their children are receiving the quality education they deserve.

## **Aims**

1. To produce helpful, earth-conscious citizens
2. To encourage social-emotional health of young children as they get older
3. To provide readiness skills to advance in education
4. To encourage the connection of positive relationships with others and their surroundings

## **Objectives**

Each teacher is expected to outline specific objectives for each student based on their skills and development. Students are given specific objectives and expectations for the year before they are able to move to the next classroom. For example, before a toddler moves to preschool, they should be potty-trained, they should be able to lie on their mats with little assistance for naptime, and so on. Although there are set objectives for children to move to new classrooms, there are also daily, weekly, and monthly objectives that are set by the teacher for the developmental success of each individual. Objectives often change based on the need of the student and the ability of the teacher(s). Every year is different, and every child is different, making goal-setting ever-changing!

Throughout the year, teachers use the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines (<https://earlylearningco.org/pdf/FINAL-ELDG-Guidelines-2020.pdf>) to highlight monthly and weekly goals for their classroom based on their observations of what children and their families need. For example, if the 1-2-year-olds are struggling to bond with their peers or with adults, then the wobbler teacher may set a goal for wobblers to work on their social-emotional development by singing songs together, offering hugs to friends and adults, and participating in group activities. More objective examples for each classroom are listed below.

### ***Objective Examples:***

<b>Wobs</b>	<b>Tods</b>	<b>Pre-k</b>
1. Build positive relationships with adults and peers.	1. To develop an understanding of social and physical environments through the senses.	1. Form lasting relationships with adults and peers.
2. To develop healthy habits and participate in daily routines.	2. To develop healthy habits and participate in daily routines.	2. Maintain their own physical well-being and understand the importance of health and routine.
3. To develop the ability to communicate verbally and nonverbally.	3. Verbally communicate their needs, feelings, and expectations.	3. Begin to show understanding of self-regulation and problem-solving skills.
4. To recognize emotional expressions and feelings.	4. To develop empathy by sharing in the emotional experiences of others and showing kindness.	4. Begin demonstrating interest in academic learning and cognitive development.

*\*\*\*Again, objectives change often and throughout the year based on individual needs of each child, ability of teachers, and the needs of the family.*

## **Content**

Curriculum content is what will be taught in the school. Our content includes:

- Following state regulations and child to teacher ratio
- Teaching safety in and out of the classroom by following our safety motto:
  - a. ***Keep ourselves safe, Keep our friends safe, and Keep our things safe.***
- How to interact with nature and how we can learn from the natural world
- Developmental skills: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, and language/literacy development
- Kindergarten readiness

## **Our Approach to Learning**

### ***Child-Led, Teacher-Directed***

At Wings, we believe that the learning that occurs should be presented by the students and nurtured by the teachers. It is important for children to develop their own interests and love for learning by openly exploring their environment. Children are often told what to do and how to do it, and instead, we present children with different materials and questions to allow them to discover their own interests. Children’s interests often change, and it is the goal of our teachers to change with them. It is also important to expose children to different ideas, materials, and learning to develop their innate curiosity.

We acknowledge that both the teacher and the student have their own interests and are co-learners. Education should be valued by all who participate in the program. We also understand that not everyone learns the same way and that each individual has their own intelligences/skills to bring to the table. As one large family of parents, teachers, students, and community members, we want to work together to bring all aspects of a child's life and education full circle. We value all families regardless of their backgrounds, status, or ethnicities, and we encourage our families and teachers to develop a plan to best teach each child. All materials presented to the children must be developmentally and culturally appropriate to bring home life and school life together. It truly takes a village to raise a child!

### ***Relationship & Development-Based***

A large portion of the Wings curriculum includes a significant focus in relationship building and developmentally appropriate tools. We want each child to be mindful of their emotions/feelings, spiritual well-being, and connection to the physical and natural world. In every classroom during a portion of the daily routine, each student partakes in movement activities in which one of those movements includes yoga, meditation, and/or breathing exercises. This allows children to comfortably self-regulate and soothe.

This type of movement and exercise not only allows children to build understanding of their physical bodies and spirits, but it also helps teachers bring their classrooms back to center in a calm and positive manner. By practicing mindfulness in and out of the classroom, children and teachers can easily maintain a healthy mentality and cultivate their emotional growth while making strong connections with themselves and their friends/peers. It is vital that children develop strong connections to become positive, empathetic citizens who care about others and their surroundings.

Each child, along with their unique qualities and preferences, also have unique developmental stages that are reached at different times. Each teacher outlines specific developmental goals that help each child grow in an appropriate manner. The key developmental stages we focus on are:

- Social Development
- Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Cognitive Development
- Language and Literacy Development
- Approaches to Learning

### ***Nature & Theme-Based***

We believe that the outside world possesses everything children need to learn. Our students spend between 30%-50% of their time outside engaging with natural materials in all seasons (weather permitting). Our learning aligns with the four seasons: fall, winter, spring, and summer. Teachers make monthly/quarterly learning themes to follow the progression of the seasons by creating weekly lesson plans in which each day is dedicated to a traditional learning topic like math, science, literacy, art, and social studies. When making weekly lesson plans, teachers

provide a monthly learning topic, natural theme, and developmental focus. Below is an example lesson plan for one week.

**Example Lesson Plan:**



Classroom: Toddlers Month: October Theme: Fall/Harvest

<b>Developmental Focus:</b> <i>(please use the green binder in the teacher workspace to find a specific goal for the week/month)</i>					
Social-Emotional – the toddlers will be working on how to use gentle hands when playing with friends					
<i>Your daily activities should allow the kids to openly explore, discover, and create. Bring nature to your activities as much as possible!</i>					
	<b>Monday</b> (Math)	<b>Tuesday</b> (Lang. & Literacy)	<b>Wednesday</b> (Drama & Arts)	<b>Thursday</b> (Social Studies)	<b>Friday</b> (STEM)
Circle Time: Question and Book of the Day	Question: What is a pumpkin and where do they come from? Book: How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?	Question: What can you make out of a pumpkin? Book: Biggest Pumpkin Ever	Question: How do pumpkins grow? What do they need to live? Book: From Seed to Pumpkin	Question: Where can we find pumpkins? Where do we go? Book: Pumpkin Hunt	Question: What have we learned about pumpkins? Book: Pumpkins, Pumpkins Everywhere
Music & Movement <i>(please include sing-along songs)</i>	Song: Five Little Pumpkins Sitting on a Gate Movement: rolling, stretching, breathing	Song: Five Little Pumpkins Movement: hopping from 1-5, skipping in a circle	Song: How do You Know how Pumpkins Grow? Movement: grow like a pumpkin	Song: Pumpkin, Pumpkin Movement: lay on floor and imagine going to a pumpkin patch with your family	Song: This is the Way we Carve a Pumpkin Movement: stretching, dancing to a pumpkin song
Nature-Based Daily Activity <i>(allow for creation, exploration, and discovery)</i>	Introduce pumpkins. Let children explore and ask questions, find seeds, and count how many there are.	Pumpkin art collage – paint, papers, pumpkin guts	Dramatic Play: Going to the Pumpkin Patch – picking pumpkins, making pumpkin pie	Make a real pumpkin pie together. What are some things people eat for dessert?	Cut open a pumpkin to squish the insides for sensory play and take out the seeds to bake.
Outdoor Activity AM and PM <i>(Ex: nature walk, movement activities, scavenger hunt, etc.)</i>	-Pumpkin seed scavenger hunt -Manipulate and free discovery	-Hammer and nail pumpkin fine motor activity	-Going to the pumpkin patch (pretend play) - -Squash a large pumpkin together	Go on a nature walk- can we find any pumpkins where we live?	-Plant a pumpkin seed and see what happens! -Openly explore our own pumpkins

Every lesson plan should make sequential sense to the teachers and students based on their theme. For example, if a teacher wants their student to be able to write, they first must provide materials for children to practice their fine motor skills. This could be digging for roots in a sensory bin or using tweezers to place an object from one bowl to another. Teachers can use their own creativity along with each child’s interests to develop appropriate lesson plans and activities that align with the nature-based themes.

**Positive Guidance and Discipline**

At Wings, we acknowledge that every adult who cares for children has a responsibility to guide, correct, and socialize children toward appropriate behaviors. Positive guidance and discipline are crucial because they promote children’s self-control, teach children responsibility, and help children make thoughtful choices.

Effective guidance and discipline focus on the development of the child. They also preserve the child's self-esteem and dignity. Actions that acknowledge the child's efforts and progress, no matter how slow or small, are likely to encourage healthy development.

Teaching children self-discipline through positive guidance is a demanding task. It requires patience, thoughtful attention, cooperation, and a good understanding of the child. It also requires knowledge of one's own strengths and struggles with disciplinary issues. It is also important to keep in mind that every child is unique and what works for one child may not work for another. Listed below are a few proactive strategies an adult can use to prevent child misbehavior.

### ***Proactive Strategies***

Child misbehavior is impossible to prevent completely. Children, usually curious and endlessly creative, are likely to do things parents and other caregivers have not expected. However, there are many positive steps adults can take to help prevent misbehavior.

- Set clear, consistent rules.
- Make certain the environment is safe and worry-free.
- Show interest in the child's activities.
- Provide appropriate and engaging materials.
- Encourage self-control by providing meaningful choices.
- Focus on the desired behavior, rather than the one to be avoided.
- Build children's images of themselves as trustworthy, responsible, and cooperative.
- Expect the best from the child.
- Give clear directions, one at a time.
- Say "Yes" whenever possible.
- Notice and pay attention to children when they do things right.
- Take action before a situation gets out of control.
- Encourage children often and generously.
- Set a good example/role model.
- Help children see how their actions affect others.

### ***Possible Reasons Children Misbehave***

If parents and caregivers understand why their children misbehave, they can be more successful at reducing behavior problems. Listed below are some of the possible reasons why children misbehave.

- They want to test whether caregivers will enforce rules.
- They experience different sets of expectations between school and home.
- They may not understand the rules or are held to expectations that are beyond their developmental levels.
- They want to assert themselves and their independence.
- They feel ill, bored, hungry, or sleepy.
- They have been previously "rewarded" for their misbehavior with adult attention.
- They copy the actions of their parents

## ***Positive Discipline Techniques***

True misbehavior occurs when a child chooses to behave inappropriately. Before taking action, ask the following questions:

- Is the child really doing something wrong?
- Is there a real problem, or are you just tired and out of patience?
- Is the child actually capable of following expectations?
- Did the child know at the time that she or he was doing something wrong?

If the behavior was an accident, like wetting their pants while sleeping, it was not a misbehavior. If the behavior was not an accident, ask the child to explain why they did what they did. If the child is old enough, ask them how they might solve the problem or correct the situation. By using a problem-solving approach, children can develop skills in thinking through a situation and developing possible solutions. It also helps the child to begin self-evaluating their actions and behaviors and understanding different consequences. (Resource Extension University of Missouri).

## ***Redirection and Self-Reflection***

At Wings, we value each child’s potential to self-reflect and self-regulate. However, we also understand that every child needs to be given the right guidance when dealing with their several growing emotions.

Teachers work with every student in re-directing their behavior and allow students the opportunity to self-regulate. Parents and caregivers can teach children how to self-regulate by giving them the language they need to effectively communicate their feelings or frustrations. Below are the methods teachers and parents can use when offering redirection:

<b>Coaching</b>	<b>Exposure</b>	<b>Self-Reflection</b>
1. <u>Observation</u> : I see you are frustrated.	1. If you know there is something that brings stress to a child’s life, expose a new skill through books, visuals, and conversation.	1. The goal of self-reflection is to train the brain to essentially hit the “reset” button and allow yourself to respond logically rather than emotionally.
2. <u>Walking through the Steps</u> : Let’s take a deep breath, squeeze our hands, and calm our bodies.	2. Introduce a new topic or skill in a calm environment.	2. <u>Breathing Exercises</u> : balloon breath, drain breath, pretzel breath, star breath, etc.
3. <u>Offer Support/Love</u> : Would you like a hug?	3. During tough transitions, talk to the child(ren) about the upcoming transition and what is coming next.	3. <u>Mindfulness Activities</u> : “dreaming”, listen to the sound, breathing buddies, find your center, etc.

4. Moving Forward: What is the problem, and how can I help you with your problem?

**Example Scenario:** If a child wants to read a book but is screaming and kicking to get what they want, we follow the coaching steps:

1. Notice their behavior: “Johnny, I see you kicking and screaming which is not safe. Let’s walk over to the cozy corner together and calm down.”
2. Ask them to calm their bodies and take a deep breath.
3. After they are calm, have the child explain their problem, acknowledge the problem, and ask the child if what they were doing was okay. “Oh, you wanted to read a book? Do you think it is okay to scream and kick to get a book?”
4. Explain clear rules and give them the appropriate language to use. “We do not scream and kick when we want something. If you would like to read a book, then you need to ask, ‘can I read a book?’ **instead** of kicking and screaming.”
5. If the child understands what is expected, offer the opportunity for them to try again.

When a child understands what is expected, they are often capable of trying again and following the expectations set by the teacher. When the child tries again and behaves accordingly, it is important to offer praise by acknowledging the desired behavior. “Johnny, you calmed your body and voice and asked nicely instead of screaming! Now you get to pick a book.”

Most misbehavior occurs when children feel overstimulated by peers, activities, noises, visuals, and other senses. By offering a comfortable and safe space where children can escape from overstimulation, we are creating opportunities for children to learn how to self-regulate. A child who chooses to go to the safe space shows understanding of self-reflection and self-regulation.

Not every child has the ability to self-regulate, in fact, some adults do not know how to self-regulate when overwhelmed with feelings and emotions. It is our job as caregivers and parents to practice self-reflection and to help children recognize when they need space away from peers, teachers, or activities. Allowing children time to self-reflect helps them better understand their emotions in order to take care of their mental health as they get older.

## **Learning Activities**

Each teacher is provided with a lesson planning template that outlines their daily activities, monthly learning theme, weekly development learning theme, and individual learning goals for every child (example lesson plan shown on page 5). Each day, teachers are expected to incorporate traditional subjects (such as math, reading, science, art, and social studies) that mix with nature-based activities and learning. Learning activities are based primarily on natural themes and follow the seasons. Teachers and children alike have the freedom to choose their own activities and themes based on interests as long as they reflect the school’s philosophy, approaches to learning, and positive guidance.



## Assessment

Wings has several different ways to assess child progress and development. Our assessments span from written documentation and learning assessments through our Brightwheel system, using Ages & Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) to observe development growth, and the Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines to create individualized learning and development goals. We understand that children progress and grow in many different ways. Teachers are given the tools they need to appropriately monitor, observe, and assess each student to prepare them for success in their future education. To learn more about each system, please visit the following sites:

- ASQ: <https://agesandstages.com/products-pricing/asq3/>.
- Brightwheel Learning: <https://mybrightwheel.com/features/learning/>
- Colorado Early Learning and Development Guidelines: <https://earlylearningco.org/pdf/FINAL-ELDG-Guidelines-2020.pdf>

## Change

The Wings curriculum is designed to allow for change. We understand that every year and every child is different and with that we understand that standards could change. Every teacher, parent, and active member of Wings will be updated of any curriculum changes as soon as they occur.