



## GUIDELINES FOR FAMILIES

*“The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right. “*

– United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child

*“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul.”*

– Friedrich Froebel

*“Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.”*

– Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

### **PHILOSOPHY:**

Children learn most through exploration of their environment. A multi-sensory environment rich in sights, sounds and textures, both soothing and stimulating, nurtures a child's creativity and sense of self-worth.

Seed Preschool achieves this environment by featuring:

Holistic, self-directed, project-based learning

A child and family centered approach to early learning – parents are always welcome to participate and observe

A multi-age group: 3.5 – 7 years – preschool to lower elementary/ homeschool

Peer mentoring

A teacher: child ratio of 1:5 (maximum of 10 children with a lead teacher and a parent volunteer)

Extensive outdoor exploration in all seasons

Farming and gardening activities including chicken and bee keeping

Yoga, movement and music activities

Life skills such as knitting, cooking, and woodworking

Toys and materials for learning, powered by children, made of natural materials, minimal plastic, minimal batteries

Recognizing that each child is an individual who experiences life in a unique way, Seed Preschool is guided by the wisdom of a variety of educational theories and principles:

\**Developmentally Appropriate Practices (NAEYC)* <http://www.naeyc.org/DAP>

\**Emergent Curriculum / Project Approach* [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergent\\_curriculum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergent_curriculum)

\**The Reggio Emilia Approach* [https://www.education.com/magazine/article/Reggio\\_Emilias/](https://www.education.com/magazine/article/Reggio_Emilias/)

\**Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piaget%27s\\_theory\\_of\\_cognitive\\_development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piaget%27s_theory_of_cognitive_development)

\**The theories of Maria Montessori* <http://www.montessori.edu/FAQ.html>

\**The theories of Rudolph Steiner / Waldorf Education* [https://waldorfeducation.org/waldorf\\_education](https://waldorfeducation.org/waldorf_education)

\**The teachings of Friedrich Froebel* <http://www.froebelweb.org/>

\**Relationship / Attachment based care* <http://www.childcaregroup.org/images/misc/rc3model.pdf>

\*The spirit of the *one room schoolhouse* – a classroom community of mentoring and cooperation

Our program will pursue accreditation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) – a lengthy process that begins with a period of self-study. NAEYC accreditation guidelines will help shape our program during this process: <http://www.naeyc.org/academy/primary/viewstandards>

All children are accepted at Seed Preschool without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national or ethnic origin, gender identity, or physical or emotional need. We will make every effort to meet the needs of all children enrolled in our program.

#### **DAILY ROUTINE:**

9:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Note that this is a *routine* rather than a *schedule* (that has specified times and durations for activities). We will follow the elements of this routine each school day in order to provide the comfort that many children receive from predictability. What this routine lacks is the strict structure often found in early childhood environments. If children are absorbed in an activity, stopping suddenly to move on to something unrelated can disrupt their learning process. The children may want to stay outdoors watching a butterfly emerge from a chrysalis; a child may take a long time painting a picture to get it “just right;” that is okay.

\* *Gathering*: in the mobile classroom – arrivals and greetings, stretching/ yoga, setting intentions for the day, reading, singing, sharing

\* *Classroom Exploration*: free choice activities – we offer a wide variety of materials in our classroom such as books, puzzles, games, Legos, wooden blocks, the kitchen/restaurant/farmers market, classroom animals, and many open-ended art materials.

\* *Outdoor Exploration*: may include trail hiking through the Nature Center; collecting, observation, documentation (with photos, drawings and writing as able); tending the Farm Garden and collecting the harvest; rolling, moving, piling, and lifting logs and stones

\* *Projects*: Our program is built around project based learning. These activities may happen inside or outside, and may involve both individual and collaborative projects. See the heading *Project Based Learning* for more details.

\* *Mealtime*: Food is an important ingredient in learning. We may have lunch and snacks inside or outside; the children will manage their own simple preparation of food brought from home; when there is food to harvest from the Farm Garden, we will share it together; we will discuss the colors and textures of the foods we have, what they are, how they grew and where they came from.

\* *Classroom Exploration*: free choice activities (as above)

\* *Gathering*: in the classroom – stretching/yoga, summary and discussion of our observations of the day, parents arrive – hugs and goodbyes



#### **CONTACT:**

Jennifer Stuart, Director 214-546-6214

[matilda@seedpreschool.org](mailto:matilda@seedpreschool.org)

Twelve Hills Nature Center (school location, not a mailing address)

817 Mary Cliff Rd.

Dallas, TX 75208

#### **SESSIONS/ CLOSINGS**

\* School hours are 9:30 AM to 1:30 PM on Tuesdays and Thursdays

\* Seed Preschool is in session from September through July

\* We will be closed for the following breaks:

Thanksgiving (full week of Thanksgiving holiday)

Winter (late December through early January following Dallas ISD calendar)

Spring (mid-March following Dallas ISD calendar)

Full month of August

\* We will follow Dallas ISD’s decisions to close for inclement weather. Please follow local media for announcements.

\* Because our classroom is in a vehicle that is subject to unexpected breakdowns, there is the possibility that we may sometimes have school without the mobile classroom. In this case, we will have outdoor exploration as usual, but may shorten the school day to accommodate rest and bathroom needs. We will notify all families by phone call or text if we find that this is necessary.

#### **ATTENDANCE:**

- \* Please notify us by phone call or text of any changes to your child's attendance such as absence, delayed arrival or early pick up. If you will be late picking up your child please let us know and make alternate arrangements if necessary.
- \* Your child will not be released to anyone without your written authorization. Alternate adults must be listed on your child's enrollment form and they must show photo identification on arrival. Please keep your list up to date and initial any changes. You may email a signed and dated letter of permission if you must send someone who is not on your list. If you plan to carpool, be sure all parents involved are listed on each other's forms.
- \* We are obligated by state law to release children to biological parents unless we have a copy of a court order stating otherwise.
- \* Your child will not be released to anyone under the age of eighteen.
- \* All children must re-enroll for each school year and all forms on file must be updated. Returning children and siblings will have advanced opportunity to enroll prior to enrollment being opened to the public.

#### **FINANCIAL:**

- \* *All tuition payments and fees are non-refundable.* While we are sympathetic to families' changes in circumstances, the school contracts with staff and incurs other costs and therefore must deem all tuition and fees earned when enrollment agreements are signed.
- \* A \$75 enrollment fee is due with your enrollment form and annually upon re-enrollment.
- \* Tuition payments are due on the 1st of each month.
- \* Any payment received after the 3rd will be assessed a late fee of \$30. If payment is not received by the 10<sup>th</sup>, an additional late fee of \$50 will be assessed.
- \* If payment is not received by the end of the month, your child's space in the program may be filled and return enrollment will be subject to space availability. Collection enforcement will be pursued for non-payment of tuition.
- \* Tuition payments may be made online at this link: <https://squareup.com/store/seedpreschool> or in person by card.
- \* For accounting purposes, checks and cash are not accepted for tuition payments. Square keeps it neat and tidy!
- \* Tuition is based on the school year and divided into eleven equal monthly payments. Each tuition payment is the same regardless of the number of days in the month. Tuition will not be reduced for months with school holidays.
- \* Tuition will not be reduced for days missed due to personal holidays, illness or inclement weather. If scheduling and enrollment space permits, these missed days may be made up.
- \* Tuition is not collected for the month of August. Enrollment fees for the coming school year are due by August 1<sup>st</sup>.

#### **HEALTH/ ILLNESS / INJURY:**

- \* Please keep all health information up to date in your child's file, including chronic conditions and their treatments and known food or seasonal allergies. Please also include symptoms that might occur in an allergic reaction and physician's instructions for treatment.
- \* If your child appears ill or is severely injured while at school, you will be notified immediately. Please arrange for your child to be picked up as soon as possible after receiving our call. If neither parent can be reached, an emergency contact will be notified; please keep this contact information up to date.
- \* Teachers and staff members are certified in CPR and First Aid. Parent volunteers are encouraged to obtain certification.
- \* Teachers or staff members will treat minor injuries such as cuts and bruises with all natural first aid products.
- \* Because there are bees and other stinging insects on Nature Center property, we will keep on hand the Homeopathic remedy *Apis Mellifica*, a sublingual tablet which quickly reduces swelling and allergic reaction. You may indicate permission on your child's enrollment form for us to treat your child for minor injuries and insect stings.
- \* In a life threatening emergency situation, the child will be transported by emergency vehicle to the nearest emergency facility, accompanied by a staff member or parent volunteer.
- \* If your child has incurred any injury away from school, please let us know and explain any necessary treatment.

\* If it is possible that your child has been exposed to a communicable disease, please let us know so that we may be alert to symptoms and notify the other families. Likewise, if exposure has occurred at school, all families will be notified.

\* Symptoms such as runny nose and cough are not present in a well child. If your child has *any* of the following, she may not attend school:

- thick or heavy nasal discharge
- persistent or hacking cough
- vomiting or diarrhea within past 24 hours
- fever within past 24 hours

Your child must be free of these symptoms *without the use of medications* in order to return to school. Most cold medications merely mask symptoms and the illness is still present in your child.

\* Please make extra efforts to keep your family healthy. Eat plenty of fresh wholesome foods, avoid processed and artificial foods, drink lots of water, get plenty of sleep and wash hands frequently.

\* Please abide by the above guidelines and keep sick children at home. Bringing them to school serves only to expose the other children and teachers to illness and prolongs your child's illness through exposure to possible further infection and over exertion while in a compromised immune state.

\* *No medications will be administered at school.* Exceptions may be made for chronic conditions under long-term treatment or emergency treatments such as Epi-Pens. These will be managed as appropriate to the individual situation.

### **MEALS AND SNACKS:**

\* Mealtime is an integral and fun part of the school day and diet can have a profound effect on learning and growing. Please supply a healthful lunch, snacks and water (in a reusable /non-disposable bottle) from home each day following the guidelines below.

\* In keeping with Seed Preschool's and Twelve Hills Nature Center's environmental consciousness, please use washable, reusable serving /packing materials and cloth napkins to minimize waste.

\* Food scraps will be composted for use in the farm garden. We will recycle or reuse paper, aluminum, glass and plastic containers as is appropriate.

\* Please make us aware of any food allergies, limitations or dietary preferences your child has. If necessary, other families will be notified not to bring foods containing potentially dangerous ingredients.

\* Remember to start the day with a nutritious breakfast containing some protein, fruit and carbohydrates to fuel your child's day.

\* We do not have kitchen facilities and cannot refrigerate nor reheat lunches. Please use ice packs and insulated containers as appropriate.

\* Please do not send sweets and overly processed "convenience" foods such as *Lunchables*, "fruit" snacks and sugary yogurts. Artificial ingredients in these foods can cause irritability, behavior changes and illness in children.

\* Read labels to avoid sending foods with additives such as artificial colors or flavors, artificial sweeteners (*Aspartame*, *Splenda*, etc.), dairy products with antibiotics or RBGH, and high fructose corn syrup.

\* Sodas and beverages containing caffeine are not allowed. You may send water, milk, fruit juice, herbal tea and similar. We have a limited supply of fresh drinking water available.

\* Organic fruits and vegetables, whole grains and whole dairy foods are encouraged.

\* Lunch leftovers will be sent home so that you can monitor what your child has eaten.

\* These guidelines should also be followed when bringing any snacks or treats for family gatherings. For these events, we ask that foods are labeled to indicate vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, dairy free and so on.

### **OUTDOOR EXPLORATION:**


\* Today's children spend far less time outdoors than generations before them. Greenspaces are rapidly succumbing to urban and suburban development. Seed Preschool offers children a rare opportunity for nature immersion.

\* Children will spend extended periods of time exploring outdoors. We are grateful to share nature's playground. We have access to a half mile nature trail on five acres with hills, a creek, and multiple species of trees, native plants and birds.

\* We will use binoculars and magnifying glasses to discover birds and other wildlife. Children will be encouraged to quietly observe what they find and keep documentations with photos, drawings, and writing as able. Each child will create a nature journal to carry outdoors; photos will be shared with families and displayed in the classroom.

\* In the Farm Garden, we will grow edible crops in a small but productive space. Children will learn about seed starting, planting times, soil health and pollination. They will carry water, dig holes, prune and harvest.

\* For lack of suitable space for proper chicken facilities, we will raise chicks and host visiting chickens as space allows.

\* We will maintain a native bee and insect house that the children will help to build. 

\* While exploring outdoors, children will each carry a small backpack with their journal, pencils, water and a snack. Please provide a manageable backpack that can remain at school and bring a reusable water bottle with fresh water each school day. The children will make their nature journals at the beginning of each season to be taken home when filled.

\* We will carry simple first aid supplies with us at all times while exploring outdoors. Two or more adults will be present so that children may be brought back inside to the toilet or for other reasons that may come up. We will follow all safety rules as established by Twelve Hills Nature Center. Special rules that pertain to the children will be discussed frequently; in fact, the children will help to create these rules and will be charged with reminding each other of safe behavior. Official trail rules are below.

### **PROJECT BASED LEARNING:**

\* Our program is built around project based learning. Projects may be collaborative or individual and activities will happen both indoors and outdoors. The inspiration for projects ideally comes from the children. The teacher will plant seeds of ideas by offering selected books and materials and guiding discussion amongst the children. Children are encouraged to *discover* what they want to know more about and find ways to learn it. Children experience a deeper, more comprehensive level of learning when allowed to become fully immersed in a project they have interest in and ownership of. Projects may continue only for a day or as long as many weeks. Other projects may develop before the first is finished, attention may come and go, and projects might merge.

\* A past group of children once found an over-abundance of tomatoes on the plants in their garden. This led to a discussion of what we would do with them. Suggestions included soup, salsa and pizza sauce. The children created a “restaurant” in the classroom that served things made from tomatoes. They created “money” that held the value of one tomato, five tomatoes and so on. They harvested and tasted the tomatoes. They gave some green ones to the mail carrier who said she wanted to make fried green tomatoes. This spontaneous project required these children to use many learning skills: sorting, counting, classifying, reasoning, collaborating, socializing, researching, fine and gross motor skills and more.

### **DISCIPLINE / BEHAVIOR:**

*We demonstrate and expect Loving Kindness towards all others – human and animal. We will always show respect for others’ space. We will be aware of the needs and limitations of others. There will be no squishing, poking, dropping, throwing, grabbing, pushing, hitting, abusive language or action towards humans, or animals.*

\* Discipline is an ongoing process, not a means of punishment. Often when children “misbehave,” it is the adult’s expectations that need adjusting, rather than the child needing to be “managed.” At Seed Preschool, independence and self-discipline are encouraged by setting reasonable limits and expectations on behavior. Kind and appropriate behavior is modeled and reinforced. Undesirable behavior is redirected: alternative actions are suggested and when necessary, the behavior is discussed with the child. When quarrels break out between children, the children are encouraged to talk over their feelings as able and work out a solution. The teacher will mediate as needed to suggest words the children may use to label their feelings and to guide them through the situation.

\* The concept of “time-out” as it applies to children was originally intended for the same purposes as it is used in team sports – taking a few moments to re-think and re-group. Unfortunately, it has in many schools degenerated into the archaic punishment of sitting in the corner. We will employ this concept as an option only in a non-punitive way when a child or children need a break from the action to collect their thoughts, talk things over, calm down from a difficult situation and decide what comes next. A child may choose to “walk away,” or “go elsewhere” briefly until ready to return. We allow the child to decide on his own when he is settled and ready to return to the group.

\* In no case will any form of physical discipline or humiliation be employed, nor tolerated from staff or volunteers.

\* It is Seed Preschool’s philosophy that children learn from exploring and observing the environment around them. We strive to offer them a positive and encouraging environment. You can help in this effort by providing a similar environment at home. Knowing that young children are highly impressionable, we suggest that you restrict television programs, videos, computer games and toys that encourage solving problems through violence or aggression. Instead

spend time with your child talking, reading and exploring activities that promote problem solving through empathy and cooperation.

\* Please let us know if your child is experiencing any major changes at home such as a move, divorce or new sibling. Big events (even seemingly happy ones) can be highly stressful to children. Being aware of these life-altering changes can help us to understand behavior changes that we see in your child.

\* Help us get to know your child by telling us about unique family interests, recent vacations or adventures, other languages spoken at home, names and types of pets, special names for grandparents, substitute words for things, anything at all to help us know and understand your child better.

\* If any dangerous behaviors such as biting or hitting do not cease after age appropriate guidance from the teacher, you may be asked to pick up your child from school for the day. Recurring behavior problems in the classroom will be discussed with parents and guidance offered for at home solutions. While we consider it a last resort, repeated occurrences may eventually lead to your family being asked to leave the program permanently.

\* Feel free to come to us with any discipline or behavior concerns, either at home or at school, at any time. We will be most successful in solving any problems if we work together and apply consistency between home and school.

#### **PERSONAL BELONGINGS:**

\* Each child will be provided space for storing personal belongings in a bag brought from home.

\* Children should dress in seasonally appropriate, comfortable, washable clothing that is free from violent or disrespectful images and commercialized characters (this applies to bags, backpacks and lunchboxes as well).

\* Sand, dirt, paint and crayons are basic ingredients of childhood and are likely to get on clothing and skin. Please remember that getting messy is a part of exploring and learning and that a messy child had fun at school! Both the children and their clothing are washable.

\* The children will go outside every school day including in rainy, windy, hot and cold weather. Your child should be dressed appropriately for the day's weather. Please invest in a good quality fully waterproof rain jacket with a hood and sturdy waterproof boots that are both comfortable and easy to walk in.

\* Children should not bring umbrellas as they create hazards when walking as a group on trails.

\* On dry days, sturdy closed toed shoes, or closed toed sandals with wide straps are acceptable. Bare sandals and flip flops are not safe for trail walking and should not be worn to school.

\* Children should wear clothing that is easy for them to get on and off independently for using the toilet and changing when wet or muddy.

\* All children should have a stock of seasonally appropriate extra outfits (including socks, underwear, and shoes) that are kept at school and replenished as used or outgrown.

\* Please provide a reusable water resistant cloth or nylon laundry bag to take home soiled clothing. The bag should be returned on the next school day. Do not bring plastic grocery bags; they are harmful to wildlife and the environment when thrown away.

\* Children may *occasionally* bring items from home to share with the class. These may include books, small simple toys or items found in nature that your child would like to talk about and share with friends. Comfort objects (favorite bear, blankie, etc.) are always welcomed and we will help the other children to respect the meaning of these special things. No toys or books depicting violence or commercialized characters are permitted. This includes all action figures, war toys and weapons of any kind.

\* ***It is essential that your child's name is on everything that is brought to school.*** Personal items are easily mixed up and we cannot be responsible for recognizing each child's belongings. Please use permanent marker, fabric marker, sew in or stick on labels to identify *all* clothing items, boots, bags, backpacks, books, etc. Particularly in the wintertime, label all coats, hats, gloves and scarves if you wish the same ones that you came with to return home with you at the end of the day.

\* You may purchase high quality, colorful, permanent labels, as well as bags, tags and more from *Stuck on You*.

<https://www.stuckonyou.us/fundraising/seedpreschool> We will receive a commission from your purchase when you enter our code SEEDPRESCHOOL at checkout.

#### **CELEBRATIONS:**

\* Out of respect for the diversity of cultures and faiths we may find amongst our families, our school celebrations will emphasize seasonal changes – Summer and Winter Solstice, Vernal and Autumnal Equinox – over religious holidays. To promote cultural awareness, we invite you to share your family's non-religious holiday and seasonal/ cultural traditions with the class in simple, age appropriate ways. Check with us to make arrangements.

\* Birthdays are a joyful occasion and we will honor the birthday child on the school day closest to the actual birthday. You are encouraged to help us create this school celebration by providing a simple, healthy snack to share. Please do not bring heavily frosted cakes and cupcakes, candy, juice boxes and other sugary items. It is appropriate to bring fruit, cheese, crackers, simple cookies or muffins. Check with us for any food allergies in the class.

\* You are also encouraged to share special moments in your child's young life through words or pictures by creating a simple handmade poster, small book or timeline of the history of the birthday child.

\* Please do not bring elaborate decorations or balloons. Balloons may frighten children when popped and cause a negative impact on the environment when disposed of.

\* If you wish to pass out invitations to a party outside of school hours, we ask that all children are included so as to avoid hurt feelings. If your child only wishes to invite part of the class, please make these arrangements with the other families away from school.

#### **PARENT COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT:**

\* Please keep all your contact information up to date in your child's file and notify us if your phone number or email address changes. Please add [matilda@seedpreschool.org](mailto:matilda@seedpreschool.org) to your address book to ensure delivery of all school emails.

\* Please conclude all phone and text conversations prior to entering the classroom. Your child deserves your full attention during drop off and pick up times and the teacher may want to share information with you about your child. Time in the classroom is for the children, not for attending to business or social plans.

\* All families are asked to contribute time assisting the class. Through volunteering, parents are able to be intimately involved with their children's experiences, and school concepts can be brought into the home. Further, we are able to ensure that our maximum adult to child ratio of 1:5 is achieved or surpassed and are assured of adequate supervision for outdoor exploration. Current enrollment numbers will dictate the frequency of your volunteer shifts. We respect that some parents have more or less time available than others. Once or twice per month is suggested, but we are happy to have you as often as you'd like. Please sign up for the shifts you can take as soon as you know you are available. We would like to be fully scheduled for each month prior to the start of the month. If you are unable to attend your scheduled volunteer shift, please let us know as soon as possible. We would appreciate it if you can make arrangements with another parent to take your shift.

\* Sign Up Genius link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/5080848abab2ba2f49-parent1>

\* Parents are encouraged to serve as classroom mentors. You may share knowledge of specialized hobbies and skills providing unique opportunities that might not otherwise be had. Let us know if you would like to share something with the class.

\* All parents are welcome at any time to spend all or part of the school day interacting with or simply observing their child's explorations.

#### **CLEANLINESS:**

\* Children will assist in cleaning and tidying of the classroom space.

\* Only non-toxic and environmentally safe cleaning products are used.

\* Towels and rugs are regularly washed in fragrance free detergent without bleach or fabric softeners.

\* A cleaning service comes occasionally after hours; staff are responsible for daily classroom cleaning.

\* To keep the floor and rugs as clean as possible, please remove shoes before entering the classroom.

#### **ABOUT TWELVE HILLS NATURE CENTER:**

\* The mission of the Twelve Hills Nature Center is to promote positive interaction between diverse community groups surrounding the nature center by facilitating and encouraging participation in the ecological stewardship of the land for the purposes of education, observation, and recreation.

\* Twelve Hills proper has a trail around the edges of the five-acre nature center and returns to the entrance. There are many native wildflowers and trees in the mix that has grown up. If you're observant, you'll see some of the wildlife that make their home here.

\* The Nature Center's uniqueness is in its rolling terrain that sets it apart from most of the much more flat land surrounding it. Particularly, when one walks the site, one feels the up and down hilly terrain. Its topography lends itself to multiple uses. The property also has a small creek, Coombs Creek, in the southwest corner that allows for habitat enhancement.

\* Learn more: <http://twelvehills.org/>

**TRAIL RULES:**

Please enjoy the nature center and maintain it so that others can enjoy it too!

Leave nothing behind except your footprints.

- \* No smoking or fires.
- \* No loitering.
- \* No littering.
- \* Closed at night.
- \* Prevent trail erosion-do not ride bikes through Twelve Hills.
- \* Dogs must be on leash and picked up after.

**TRAIL MAP:**

