



Fern Gully Forest School

Nature-based Early Childhood Education

Policies and Parent Handbook

We provide outdoor early childhood education in a nature setting with small class sizes and an open-air environment for children to learn and interact in a fun and healthy way during the most important time of their development. We have a focus on social-emotional learning, environmental education, imaginative play, and exploration. We bring awareness to the cycles and seasons of the Earth and help children develop life-long relationships to the natural world.

Our structure follows the Olympia School District schedule for breaks, start, and end times.

We are committed to helping families raise happy, healthy, and capable children. We offer a home away from home with a close connection to nature and other children, providing them with friends of all ages, to play, socialize, and learn from. Our goal in providing quality care for your child is to provide:

- ☺ A safe and nurturing environment
- ☺ A learning environment... learning includes traditional outdoor education, such as plant identification, as well as the ABC's and 123's as well as the learning of values and social/emotional awareness. We teach honesty, respect, self-reliance and potential, self-regulation and emotional moderation, the values of being honest, dependable, loving, sensitive to others, kindness, friendliness and fairness.
- ☺ A gentle approach to discipline. Since children occasionally need discipline, it is important that you and I share a similar philosophy, so that your child is not too confused as to where the boundaries are and what is expected of him/her. Children are taught our "5 agreements" to 1) keep each other safe, 2) listen, 3) be kind, 4) let the little things go, and 5) have fun. We regularly talk about what the agreements mean, and specifically which behaviors are inappropriate, and why, and give alternatives that are acceptable. We primarily use the "connect and redirect" method (from *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D). In this way, the behavior is being changed, without the need for "discipline" or making the child feel "bad" or unloved. This helps develop their self-esteem and teaches them how to handle difficult situations themselves in the future. We state our expectations and show your child how to make amends. We give choices, and in extreme situations or tantrums a child may be asked to take a break in the "calm down space"; because at times a child may need a couple of minutes to calm down, identify their emotions, learn to self-regulate and think about their choices. ***No physical discipline is ever used.***
- ☺ And to foster unconditional love that nurtures a child's sense of security, self-esteem, and confidence.

Communication is key to success. The parent and provider need to have a good working relationship so they can communicate and work together. Parent and provider need to exchange pertinent information in the child's life such as changes in routine, special events, or activities, as well as changes such as death, divorce, separation, moving, visitors, etc. All this information can be important in understanding the child's feelings, behavior, and well being.

I invite you to share with me in writing, by telephone, or schedule an appointment to talk about any concerns in-person.

Typical Activities

Group Play: Singing, dancing, play acting, games, reading, listening (story and music), circle time

Free Play: Children have a choice of – mud kitchen toys, digging tools, bug boxes and identification, science toys, magnifying glasses, pull/push toys, balance bikes, art materials, and outdoor activities

Language: Nursery rhymes, songs, puppets, reading books and storytelling.



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Dramatic play: Dress up, role playing, puppetry, dancing, singing, music-making, etc.

Outdoor play: (all-weather) Swinging, climbing, balancing, bouncing, riding toys, running, ball playing, gardening, dancing, games, toys, trucks, mud kitchen, etc. *(please remember to dress your child appropriately for the weather, if in doubt, dress in layers and bring extra clothes)*

Typical Daily Routines

9 AM Arrival and Greeting
9:30 Circle time (including name games, our 5 agreements, songs, warm-ups, dancing, etc.)
9:45 Nature Exploration
10:15 Bathroom and hand washing
10:30 Snack time
11:00 Outdoor play or other learning activities
11:15 Bathroom and hand washing
11:30 Lunch and clean up
12:00 Activity: Art, yoga, dance, books, story time, small animal care, etc.
12:45 Clean up time
1:00 Parents arrive to pick up children
(Your child is released to your care as soon as you walk in at pick up time)

Note: Bathroom times vary to meet the child's needs. This is a general schedule and is determined mostly by the children's needs and feelings each day.

Policies and Procedures

If teacher illness or other emergencies should arise during school hours every attempt will be made to have a substitute teacher care for your child so that we can remain open. If a substitute is not available, you will receive a phone call to pick up your child.

Holidays follow the Olympia School District Schedule.

For your convenience, we follow the Olympia School District schedule for closures and holidays and every attempt will be made to minimize any changes in this schedule.

I do reserve the right to close for any reason in which I cannot operate in a safe manner. i.e. loss of electricity, water, heat or in extreme circumstances, medical epidemics. Tuition and fees are paid for any of these occurrences.

Gross Misconduct:

I will communicate to you if your child is frequently and deliberately causing harm to others and/or is frequently and deliberately destructive. Violent and destructive behavior is unsafe and will not be allowed – immediate termination will ensue if the behavior persists.

Child's Health

Your child cannot be admitted with symptoms of illness as specified below; unless written documentation from a licensed physician states the child has been diagnosed and poses no serious health risk to the child or to other children.

Should your child have signs or symptoms requiring exclusion, he/she will be isolated and the parent/guardian or other



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authorized person by the parent will be notified immediately to pick up your child. There can be no exceptions since illness spreads quickly among children.

Please make other arrangements if your child is sick and respect my decision if I feel your child is too sick. I am sympathetic to the difficulties of taking time off, so discretion will be used.

The symptoms of illness for possible exclusion shall include, but are not limited to any of the following...

- A. The illness prevents your child from participating comfortably in the outdoor education environment,
- B. The illness results in a greater need for care than I can provide with out compromising the health and safety of the other children in my care, or
- C. The child has any of the following conditions:
 - Temperature: Oral temperature 100 degrees F or greater; accompanied by behavior changes or other signs or symptoms of illness.
 - Symptoms and signs of possible severe illness (such as unusual lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, irritability, persistent crying, difficult breathing, wheezing, or other unusual signs)- until medical evaluation allows inclusion;
 - Uncontrolled diarrhea, that is, increased number of stools, increased stool water - until diarrhea stops;
 - Vomiting illness (two or more episodes of vomiting in the previous 24 hours) until vomiting resolves or until a health care provider determines the illness to be non-communicable, and the child is not in danger of dehydration;
 - Purulent conjunctivitis (defined as pink or red conjunctiva with white or yellow eye discharge), until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated;
 - viii. Scabies, head lice, or other infestation, until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated;
 - Tuberculosis, until a health care provider or health official states that the child can attend child care;
 - Impetigo, until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated;
 - Strep throat or other streptococcal infection, until 24 hours after initial antibiotic treatment and cessation of fever;
 - Chicken pox, until at least 6 days after onset of rash or until all sores have dried and crusted;
 - Pertussis, until 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment (currently; erythromycin) to prevent an infection have been completed and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return;
 - Mumps, until 9 days after onset of parotid gland swelling and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return;
 - Hepatitis A virus, until 1 week after onset of illness or as directed by the health department when passive immunoprophylaxis (currently, immune serum globulin) has been administered to appropriate children and staff and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return;
 - Measles, until 6 days after onset of rash and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return;
 - Rubella, until 6 days after onset of rash and a licensed physician states in writing the child may return;

Injuries: We supervise your child closely in an attempt to prevent injuries, but accidents resulting in injury do occur. All teachers have been trained in first aid and CPR and will follow training. If the injury is minor (requiring only a band-aid or ice), we will tell you about it when you pick up your child or via text/email/phone later if in-person is not possible. If it is serious, we will call you and may even suggest that you take your child to the doctor or emergency room. If an injury is very severe, we will call 911 for assistance. If we cannot reach you, we will call the emergency contacts listed on your enrollment form (please remember to keep this up to date).

Child's Medication:



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1. We cannot give medication to any child without written and signed consent from the parent or guardian. Explicit directions and a “medication log” **must** accompany all over the counter medicine.
2. Prescription medicine **must**:
 - a. be dated within the past 30 days
 - b. have child’s name printed clearly on the label
 - c. have a doctor’s note with dosage amount and times
3. Prescription medicine must also be accompanied by a “medication log” which **must include**:
 - a. Date
 - b. Child’s name
 - c. Doctor’s name and phone number
 - d. Name of medication
 - e. Dosage amounts and times to be administered
 - f. Route of medication, i.e. oral, eye, etc.
 - g. Date medication is to end
 - h. Special directions, i.e. take before eating, etc.
 - i. Parent’s signature and written consent

Days/Hours of Operation:

Mondays through Fridays 9am-1pm except for holidays and closings as referred to in this handbook.

Late Drop Off and Pick Up:

Please understand that the contracted drop-off time is important because we plan our day around the collective time frame of each child as well as each phase of our morning routine. Please call me if you will be more than 15 minutes late dropping your child off. It is very important to me and the other children to be able to work as a team, know our schedule and when we can move along from one activity to another.

I’m sure you agree, personal time is precious; accordingly, it becomes extremely difficult and stress full to have an appointment or other plans scheduled if I cannot depend on the mutually agreed pick up time. I do understand that there may be an occasion of major traffic congestion or bad weather conditions causing a delay in your travel – please call me and perhaps we can work out a contingency plan. Consistent tardiness could be cause for termination.

Following the first 10-minute grace period, a \$5 late fee for each additional 5 minutes past our agreed pick-up time is due.

Nutrition:

The parent/guardians must provide a water bottle, a sack lunch and snacks. Please include plenty of protein and nutritious food. Additional snacks may also be served as needed. Cakes, cookies, and other “not so nutritious food” may be served during special events like birthday parties and holidays.

Potty Training:

Potty training shouldn’t be rushed; it is important that your child is psychologically and physically ready for training. Your child must be potty trained prior to coming to Fern Gully School. This is when your child maintains at least 2 continuous weeks of bladder/bowel control and **can communicate their need to go to the bathroom**; of course, it is okay if your child still needs assistance with the bathroom. If your child regresses, we will work with you and assess the next step.

Release of Children:

It is important that I protect your child by ensuring that your child does not leave with a person you have not authorized to pick up your child. Also please tell me when someone else that you have authorized will be picking up your child. I will need



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the person's name and a description of what he or she looks like if I have not met them yet. The person picking up your child will have to show me a picture ID before I will release your child from my care.

I must assume that both parents have the right to pick up your child, unless you give me a copy of a court order stating otherwise. We will need to discuss how I should handle the non-custodial parent who arrives to pick up your child. Without a copy of the court order, I cannot refuse a parent. If I have a court order and a noncustodial parent tries to pick up the child, I will immediately call the custodial parent. If the non-custodial parent leaves with the child, I will immediately call the police and report the situation. I will not place the other children at risk in a confrontation with the non-custodial parent.

Supplies:

To eliminate the daily bundle of items to carry you may bring a package of items and extra clothes. I will notify you if items are running low. All items need to be marked with the child's name.

IMPORTANT: Please provide a change of clothes with a variety of layers in a backpack on a daily basis or keep a change of clothes with us – replacing as needed.

Fee Payment Guidelines:

Tuition is paid in advance monthly. Payment obligation is based on the days agreed, not on actual attendance. There is no change in fee due to your child's absences. If your child is absent or I am closed on the Friday **before** the week begins or the last scheduled day of attendance for the week, you are responsible to make payment as agreed. In the case of your vacation or absence, please postdate your check for the up coming date due and make payment before you leave.

Late payments – A \$25 late payment fee (per child) applies for any payment not received by the fifth of the month unless a payment plan has been worked out in advance. If payment is not received by the 10th of the month, an additional \$10.00 fee per day will be charged. Your child will not be permitted to return until both the payment and the late fee are paid in full.

A personal check, cash or Paypal transfer will be accepted for payment, however if a check is returned for any reason and I incur any bank charges from the return of your check, those charges will be added to the following months tuition fee and because I will be unable to use these funds my late fee for payment also applies. After 2 check returns, all further payments must be made in cash. Non-payment or consistent late payments is cause for termination immediately with out 2 weeks notice. A two week notice of any increase in tuition or fees will be posted.

Early drop off

Any care needed prior to my normal opening time will need be scheduled at least by the Friday prior to the week care is needed. There is a charge of \$5.00 per 15 minutes of care prior to normal opening time. This fee is non-refundable. This includes if you decide not to bring the child early.

Covid-19 Guidelines

We are devoted to keeping our community safe and children happy and healthy. We want to provide a safe environment for Fern Gully's teachers, parents, and students. We follow recommended guidelines from the CDC and the WA State Department of Health for childcare, youth development, day camps, and outdoor programs.

It is important to state that much is unknown about COVID-19. It is up to you to weigh the risks and benefits of enrolling your child in this program, and you do so at your own risk. We believe being outdoors is the safest way to keep our kids healthy. In fact, studies show that the beneficial microbes in forest soils can directly boost immune systems. Your health, your child's health, and the health of our staff are first and foremost on our minds.



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Before Arrival: If you or your child is sick, stay home. This applies to all signs of illness, especially early on. If it has been at least 5 days since the start of symptoms, but there is a lingering cough please let us know and show proof of a negative covid test or bring a doctor's note if possible before bringing your child to school. Please take all signs and symptoms of illness seriously and err on the side of caution. Please wash your hands before leaving your home. *For more information, please refer to the current policies on our website www.ferngullyschool.com.*

It is of the utmost importance to keep your child home if they have shown any symptoms within the last 24 hours associated with COVID-19, including.

- Fever (Over 100° F) or chills, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, unusual fatigue, muscle or body aches, headache, the recent loss of taste or smell, congestion or runny nose, sore throat, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea.

Termination:

Parent/Guardian must give 30 days written notice, and full payment to terminate your child's enrollment regardless as to whether your child is present. If 30 days notice is given, you may receive the refund of the enrollment deposit.

A Few Final Thoughts:

As a parent in Fern Gully School, please...

- ☺ Take an interest in your child's activities here, and share your child's habits, fears, and concerns with us or any changes in their life or routines that may be important for us to know.
- ☺ Read all correspondence given to you, and those posted. Promptly sign and return those forms needing to be signed.
- ☺ Remember that you are responsible for your child while you are on my premises so, please remain in complete contact with your child during that time.
- ☺ Call me! Your concerns and feed back are important to me.

Kind regards,

Charissa Waters

Founder and Director
Fern Gully Forest School

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