

*Dear Parents and Friends,*

*We are very pleased to welcome you and your child to the City of Lakes Waldorf School Early Childhood Program!*

*This handbook gives you some basic information to get you started, and to help prepare your family for this transition. You will also receive a School Directory and Parent Handbook with general information about the school.*

*If you have additional questions about our program or your child's needs, please feel free to call the office to get in touch with your child's teacher. We look forward to our journey together.*

*Yours in warmth and joyful anticipation,*

*The Early Childhood Faculty*

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*Waldorf schools welcome families of all cultural, racial, social and religious backgrounds.*

## **Early Childhood Program Overview**

The Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten provide a time of quiet and joyful transition from early childhood to grade school. In a warm, home-like atmosphere, the child's inherent abilities can unfold with an education of painting, storytelling, music, poetry, handcrafts, walks, gardening, baking and free play. Waldorf education consciously builds a strong foundation during these years for later intellectual growth, but avoids the actual teaching of academic subjects in early childhood. We seek to nurture healthy and eager children who are prepared for their journey of academic and artistic learning through the grades.

At CLWS, we believe that the experience of rich, imaginative play in early childhood guides children toward becoming free, creative thinkers and decision makers through the remainder of their lives.

The Waldorf early childhood curriculum guides the young child through these avenues:

- The teachers are role models who engage in wholesome activities and work. Through IMITATION, children develop gross and fine motor skills, a sound basis for self confidence, and trust in the world.
- A sense of WONDER is cultivated through activities in nature and the celebration of seasonal festivals.

- IMAGINATION in play, dramatization, and pictorial artistic work is developed as the first step of a cognitive process that is furthered through the academic work of the grade school.
- Daily, weekly and yearly RHYTHMS are cultivated in the Early Childhood classrooms. Rhythm gives children security by allowing them to know what is coming next each day. Within the morning, there is a rhythm of activities that balances structured and unstructured time. This rhythm is only interrupted by special birthday celebration days. The children know the days of the week as baking day, painting day, soup making day, rice day and porridge day. Seasonal festivals mark the rhythm of the year.

Activities that support our curriculum include:

- Free or imaginative play, including dressing up, playing house, constructing play structures, role playing, making believe, etc. with natural materials. One of the premises of the Waldorf approach is that child's play is the most important part of the morning. It is their work. Through play, they learn about sharing, risk-taking and resolving conflict.

- Outdoor play contributes to the child’s overall health and development. In today’s busy world, children have fewer opportunities to move around outside. Children are transported everywhere and there are fewer spaces where they can move their bodies and take “risks”. Children this age like physical and social challenges according to their ability. Succeeding at challenges helps build their self-confidence and self-esteem. Children need to be aware of space and their bodies in space. Later, this ability will help them succeed with classroom behavior and academics. Children in the Early Childhood spend a large part of each day outside unless the weather is very inclement. If a child is dressed properly, he or she can play outside in all kinds of weather.
- Workbench activities: sawing, sanding, drilling
- Sewing, soft crafts
- Drawing and painting in watercolor
- Modeling in beeswax
- Singing games and finger plays
- Baking
- Story time and puppet shows
- Clean up and snack
- Gardening

### **Outdoor Play**

CLWS recognizes the importance of having a cohesive set of playground guidelines. The developmental differences between Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten children guide some of the distinctions in the guidelines for behavior. In the Waldorf early childhood curriculum, play provides the young children with a safe and acceptable arena in which to explore their relationship to the surrounding world with all its dragons, demons and wonders. Children need to imagine themselves in situations where they must exhibit mighty strength, perform great deeds and battle untold dangers. This imaginary play allows them to work through their own fears and to learn from their peers. Imaginary play also allows children to model the healthy images provided by adults in our work, in circle time, and (hopefully) in the world to which they are exposed. We sometimes see the unhealthy images also being worked through in aggressive play or pushing acceptable boundaries. It is critical that children are allowed to immerse themselves in such play without excessive adult involvement or direction. When the process of creative free play – which is a healthy venue for children's imagination - is available to children they are greatly assisted in their development.

### **Mixed-Age Play**

Originally, the Waldorf early childhood was designed for children 3-6 years of age. No distinctions were made between Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten. CLWS currently makes this distinction both because of

scheduling (many pre-kindergarten families wish to attend M/T or W/Th/F) and differences in the development of children entering school at the pre-kindergarten level. Despite the separation of the children by age in the classroom setting, CLWS feels that it is appropriate and healthy for children in this age group to have opportunities to play together.

The pre-kindergarten students start their year in the side play-space and transition to the playground later when they have had a chance to acclimate to their new surroundings and form bonds within their own class. The side play-space will also be available for use later in the day when the playground is being used by the Grades students.

### **Transition to School**

One of the effects of acclimating to a higher volume of peer (or social) interactions may be a social exhaustion. Parents and teacher working in concert can do much to remedy this situation. Children may need more quiet time in their afternoons at home, etc.

If a child is complaining about school or struggling with transitions, parents are encouraged to speak with their child's teacher. Some children have a more difficult time with transitions. Adjusting to fifteen new playmates can be challenging for even the most outgoing youngster.

Many children at some point during each school year will say they do not like school or that they do not want to go to school. It is not unusual for children to express complaints about school after school breaks and during the middle of the long winter season. A discussion between parent and teacher can often provide insight into the child's experience for both parent and teacher and CLWS appreciates parent perspectives in this area.

### **Behavior Challenges**

Positivity and encouragement are always the best path in response to behavior challenges young children. In general the Waldorf Early Childhood teacher provides guidance by modeling appropriate behavior with the children and with other adults. Positive redirection often works in areas where modeling does not. Much of the communication between teacher and student happens publicly, in front of the other children, so they all receive the same message. In cases of "bullying", the teacher works with *all* the students involved. The teacher may work with parents to create consistency between home and school. Time-outs are generally not given. Sometimes children just need to be held in the rocking chair for a bit or rest until they feel "like they are not so tired and can find their warm and gentle hands." Children are rarely sent to the office or home unless there is physical aggression such as biting or hitting.

Parents are sometimes asked to seek services outside of the school to help their child work through difficulties

they are experiencing in the school environment. There have been a handful of times in our school's history, when it has been determined that we cannot meet the needs of a specific child and a family has been asked to find an alternative for their child's education.

Currently, CLWS is working with Kim John Payne's ideas on social inclusion, which attempt to address all manner of disrespect--verbal, physical, etc.--clearly and without judgment.

## **Practical Matters**

### **Clothing and Supplies**

Clearly label all garments, particularly outerwear, with your child's name.

- We require a **labeled pair of indoor shoes with heels**. Slippers, ballet shoes, or simple cotton slippers will suffice. Shoes, flip-flops or clogs without heels are problematic because they fall off during movement. No ties on indoor shoes, please.
- Sandals, clogs, flip-flops or dress shoes that fall off inhibit the child's movement. Outdoor shoes should also have heels. No sandals, clogs or backless shoes, please.

- Please send a **labeled change of seasonably appropriate clothing** (socks, top, pants, underwear) that can be left at school.
- **A small, labeled bag or backpack** will help facilitate delivery of things (mittens, correspondence, treasures, etc.) that tend to evaporate on the route from school to home.
- No media themes on bags or clothing, please.
- What the child wears will influence his/her mood and play. They need simple, practical clothing that does not interfere with climbing and running. The children go outside daily, so please make sure they have **proper outdoor clothing** for the season. It is better to have several layers that can come off than not enough. When the weather is cool, legs must be covered for warmth. Rain boots are essential as mud is an irresistible play medium. (No umbrellas, please) **MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE CHILDREN NEED TO BE WARM**, especially their legs.
- Cold weather requirements include waterproof snow pants, boots, scarf, hat and mittens.
- Children should not wear watches, jewelry or nail polish to school.

## **Food and Drink**

Food is one of the best ways we have to direct the health, behavior and moods of our young children. Accordingly, we serve a healthy snack each day that is often made with the children. It is shared at our table with a blessing and good table manners. Please notify the teacher if your child has any food allergies.

If your child stays for the afternoon, please see information on lunches in the Afternoon Care section.

## **Media**

In the early childhood program, we request that children not watch or be exposed to any form of electronic media. This includes television, movies, videos, video games, computers or computer games. It is inevitably a destructive influence upon creative playtime and brain development. Significant research on this phenomenon is well documented and readily available. Our school handbook states: *The developing child is simply too young to cope with the physical effects of the medium, not to mention the narcotic impact on the child's own imaginative faculties, its inappropriate models for imitative learning and the substitution of electronic for human interaction.* We are happy to assist you with ideas for limiting media in your home.

## **Toys**

Please have your child keep his or her own toys at home. This will avoid heartbreak over lost or damaged toys. We also prefer to have children use the classroom toys that reflect our philosophy of using simple, natural materials to encourage and stimulate imaginative play. The school toys, likewise, should remain at school.

## **Illness**

The best and really only place where your child can be properly nursed through an illness is at home. Classrooms are busy, sometimes noisy places and not the right environment for a sick child. If your child has a fever, deep cough, rash, diarrhea or any infectious condition, please call the school office in the morning and do not send him or her back to school until the child has been symptom free for 24 hours. If your child becomes sick at school, you will be contacted through the information you provided on the Emergency Authorization Card. Your child will be kept in a quiet place until you arrive. Emergency Authorization Cards are completed when you register. It is important that you keep the card up to date by calling the office with any changes.

## **Absence**

Please call the office if, for any reason, your child is unable to attend school. The office will inform the teacher.

### **Arriving Each Day**

The morning starts promptly at 8:30 a.m. and the teachers are ready to accept the children into the classroom at 8:20 a.m. Please be sure your child arrives on time each morning. If your child is late, it is more difficult for him/her to enter into the group in the best possible way.

When you bring your child to the classroom each morning, we ask that you say your farewells at the door. We will be aware of *receiving* each child to ease the transition. It is easier for the children to have fewer (though well-meaning) adults in their space, so morning arrival time is not a good time to speak at length with the teacher. The teachers are always willing to arrange another time to talk.

### **Separation Anxiety**

As the children begin the school year, and possibly the new experience of school, some may experience difficulty with separating from parents at arrival time. Here are some suggestions:

1.) Demonstrate trust in the teacher and in the decision you have made on your child's behalf. Parents may inadvertently give their children a double message. The teacher says everything is fine and safe while the parent may be supporting the child's apprehension and fear by staying at school. While the child is seeking comfort and feeling anxious about the parent's inevitable departure, she is not free to have her experience of school, playmates, and activities. Until the child receives a

positive message from both parent and teacher, the child can remain confused, and the adjustment period can be prolonged. Show your child that you have confidence in his ability to be part of this new experience.

2.) Make partings brief. Each child will approach good-byes in a different way. Some seem to handle the situation fairly well, some show signs of distress and settle down shortly, and others are extremely upset with parting. Separation anxiety is actually a positive sign of the child's love for the parent and her feelings of attachment. It can vary with the child's age, her ability to deal with change in general, and with stresses in her life outside of school. In any case, this shift from home to school cannot occur fully without this parting. During the period of transition and adjustment, the parent may want to acknowledge and accept the child's feelings. Her sadness at "losing" the parent is very real, and she should be allowed to admit these feelings. At the same time, it is important for the teacher and parent to remain positive about the situation. Show understanding and support for the child's feelings, assure her that you will return, and leave her with a hug and a confident smile. Prolonging the parting prolongs the adjustment and the accompanying crying or tantrums.

### **Dismissal**

The Early Childhood morning ends at 12:00. The children will be dismissed at the classroom door at that time. If any different pick-up or car pool arrangements are made, it is important that the office be informed. It also helps to inform the teacher directly. Please be on time for pick-up. The teachers take some children to the bus and others enter afternoon care.

### **Afternoon Care**

The teachers will facilitate transitions from the morning program to the afternoon program.

The afternoon program is structured more loosely than the morning program. The children gather for lunch, followed by free time, story, rest time and snack. The kindergarten children often go outside again after resting. Children enrolled in the Afternoon Care should bring a simple blanket for rest time that can stay at school for the year. **Please be sure that all items are clearly labeled.**

For your child's lunch, please include whole grains, adequate protein, fresh fruit and vegetables. Please include an extra snack in your child's lunch for after rest time. Water or milk is preferable to juice drinks. Candy, soda/pop and gum are not allowed at school. Include an ice pack for cold serving. Refrigeration is not available. Lunch bags/boxes should also include a labeled cloth napkin to be used as a place mat. Please remember to send lunch boxes without media themes.

Children in Aftercare should be picked up at 3:05 at the classroom door. Kindergarten children may enroll in Extended Day until 4:15 or 5:15 p.m. Please contact the office for registration information.

### **Birthdays**

Birthdays are very special in the Early Childhood. Parents are invited to join the class for a birthday story and snack. Contact your teacher for more specific information. For birthday parties outside of school, please mail invitations to individual children to avoid hurt feelings. Children are very sensitive about being included in birthday parties.

### **Classroom Festivals**

The seasonal festivals that are celebrated in the classrooms are outlined in your Early Childhood Calendar. You may read more about these in the School Directory and Handbook. Parents are invited to many of the festivals, while others will be just for the children. You will receive more information on festivals from your child's teacher.

## **Parent Involvement**

Parent participation in the life of the school takes many different forms and is essential to the school's success. Parent involvement often begins through participation in parent coffees, book studies and in direct support of classroom activities such as painting, cooking and other craft activities. Parents at CLWS serve on the Board of Trustees, the Parent Association and on various important school committees. They also serve as class reps and field trip chaperones. At the Early Childhood level Parents are invited into the classroom for birthdays and other special events.

In general, however, CLWS is mindful of the adult to child ratio. One of the goals of the Early Childhood program is to create a safe space for children to begin to explore peer relationships, experience their independence, and play. The quality of the children's play changes when more grown-ups are present. This is also the reason that a teacher playing with the children is the exception to the rule.

### **Parent Meetings**

The Early Childhood has three to four parent meetings during the school year, usually in conjunction with the All-School Meetings. These are important evenings for sharing information and learning more about the curriculum. Specific topics and activities are chosen for each evening. Examples include rhythm, creative play,

nutrition, the festivals, media and painting. Attendance is strongly encouraged.

### **Parent/Teacher Conferences**

School-wide conferences are scheduled twice a year. The October conferences are small group meetings where parents and teachers may share specific topics or concerns. The February conferences are private conversations between the teacher and parent(s). Additional individual conferences may be arranged as needed.

### **The Parent Association**

The Parent Association consists of all school parents. It seeks to promote a sense of community within the school, while supporting one another and all of our children. The Parent Association, represented on the Board of Trustees, embraces all City of Lakes Waldorf school families and encourages families to take an active role in our school and the education of our children.

Class "Reps" are parents who have volunteered to help teachers with communication and organization throughout the school year. This can include creating phone trees or class newsletters, recruiting chaperones for field trips, and organizing class gatherings. Class Reps also act as liaisons with the Parent Association.

## **Tuesday Update**

The Tuesday Update, the school newsletter, is published weekly and sent home with the children during the school year. Please read your Update carefully each week. It contains vital information about school events, schedule changes, volunteer opportunities and general school news.

## **Looking Ahead**

### **First Grade Readiness Policy**

In the past, the school has required that children turn 6 before July 1st to enter First Grade. Children born on or after July 1<sup>st</sup> have, in all but the rarest exceptions, remained in the Kindergarten for another year. After many discussions with the Early Childhood teachers and the educational support staff, CLWS has changed the First Grade readiness policy. Although the birth date requirement for children entering First Grade will remain July 1<sup>st</sup>, CLWS will assess children born in May and June on an individual basis to determine their eligibility.

A child with a birth date before April 30, who would be six years or older upon entering First Grade, will be eligible for First Grade. Children who would be six years old on July 1 or after will not be eligible for First Grade. Children born between May 1 and June 30 will be assessed for First Grade readiness on a case-by-case basis. CLWS will inform parents of May and June children of First Grade eligibility by May 15<sup>th</sup>.

CLWS reserves the right to determine whether or not a particular child is developmentally ready for First Grade, even if he/she meets the birth date requirement.

This policy shift recognizes the importance of the developmental readiness of children about to enter First Grade. Furthermore, it attempts to recognize individual differences between children on the cusp of our birth date requirement.