



KINDERGARTEN PARENT HANDBOOK

Welcome to the Halton Waldorf School kindergarten program, below you will find information about our about our school and unique aspects of Waldorf kindergarten programs. Please always feel free to get in touch with your teacher if you have any questions regarding your child and their day-to-day life at the school. Note that this handbook covers Kindergarten, there is a separate preschool handbook. Your teacher will share with you any details that are unique to your child's class.

Part I: Practical items:

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Part II: What makes Waldorf early childhood education “Waldorf”?

Rudolf Steiner, the creator of Waldorf education, spoke on a number of occasions about the experiences that are essential for the healthy development of the young child.

These include:

14. [Love and Warmth](#)
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16. [Creative and Artistic Experiences and Rhythm](#)

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(full article [What Children Need, The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood](#) by Susan Howard)

Part I: Practical Items

1) Pick-Up and Drop-off Time

Pick-ups and drop-offs are usually outdoors unless you are otherwise advised. If for some reason you are late in picking up your child, please advise the office. Please be sure to **connect with one of the teachers at both drop-off and pick-up** so the teachers are aware of each child's arrival and departure.

Daily Schedule

8:00 Playground supervision begins (no fee for this service)
8:30 the school day starts
12:30 **Half Day** pick up
12:30 Lunch
3:30 **Full Day** pick up
3:30 – 6:00 After School Care (STARTING at 4pm there is fee for this service)

2) Discipline

Discipline in a Waldorf classroom is multifaceted, complex, subtle and wonderfully compassionate. The subtle nuances can be easy to miss and it is very important for you as parents to learn what your child's teachers are trying to effect. Waldorf discipline is a process not an instant act. Here is an [article](#) that may be helpful in your research, noting that the article gives some examples, your teachers will have their unique ways of working with the children and discipline, if you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask your teacher.

“The young child instinctively expects guidance. Without the certainty of his parents and teachers, he loses his security... Constantly being asked what he wants creates bewilderment in his mind... Instead we must develop consciousness and consciously meet the child's paramount needs. They are easily stated: security and an awareness of growth, love and a certain amount of protection ... The conscientious and conscious parent will have to play an active and positive role in the education, the leading forth of his child ... Lead the child by conveying firmness permeated with love.” (Margret Meyerkort, internationally respected kindergarten educator).

3) Food

The school provides all food during the day including snacks and lunches. Healthy snacks are prepared and served during the morning and afternoon programs and Real Food for Real Kids serves all our early childhood full day children a catered lunch each day. These lunches include well-balanced, nutritional, homemade, local foods, which happen to be fan favorites of even the most discerning children. This will

also help tremendously with maintaining the waste conscience and environmentally friendly school that we take pride in being a part of.

In addition, Real Food for Real Kids catered lunches will:

- take the stress out of making lunch each day
- save you from washing the lunch containers
- introduce new and fun foods to your child's repertoire
- promote healthier nutrition habits and change the way children eat and understand food
- support Ontario growers, farmers, merchants, and businesses

No food or drinks from home are required.

4) Health

Children are to stay at home when they are ill. In the case of fever, which can be lower in the morning and rise later in the day, a 24 hour period of normal temperature assures that the fever has passed.

Coughs and colds run through the class very easily. As a matter of courtesy and respect, please let the teacher know of any contagious illnesses. **Please notify the school of all absenteeism.**

Please notify the school and your teacher of all **ALLERGIES**.

5) Communication at the school

(note that detailed information can be found in the school's Parent Handbook)

Halton Waldorf School has created many ways to learn about the school community they including:

- The Web Site and other social media
- The calendar
- Parent mailings
- The Annual General Meeting
- Parent Evenings
- Parent Teacher Conferences

Communication with Teachers

At the beginning of the school year your teacher will inform you of when and where they can be reached. In addition to the class meetings held three times per year, teachers provide written communications via letter or e-mail to inform parents of what is happening in the classroom. The teacher will be in touch to arrange a home visit.

Any concerns that require longer conversations should be addressed in pre-arranged meetings. Long conversations are not possible before or after school.

Parent Questions and Concerns

We value healthy communication in all aspects of the school's life that model a civil society and learning community for our students. It is natural for concerns to arise within any school system, and we ask that such concerns be communicated in a productive and constructive manner. Please refer to the Parent Handbook for all of the details.

6) Parent Meetings

Parent meetings will be held once per term. They are for adults only. Nursing infants are welcome. It is **very important that at least one parent per family** is represented at these meetings so that you are fully informed about class activities and developments. Parent meetings will include opportunities for you to learn together about your children, a chance to participate in activities that will deepen your understanding of the young child's development and an opportunity to build your class community, strengthen relationships with each other and the teacher. In the spring, there will be a meeting devoted to Grade One Readiness. All early childhood parents are very welcome to come and learn why Waldorf feels it is important that a child is ready in every way for stepping into the next phase of learning in the grades. Please speak with your child's teacher if you have any topics that you would like us to explore at parent meetings. We strive together with you to make these meetings wonderful.

7) Class Parents

Each class at the Halton Waldorf School has "class parents" which have the title Parent Association (PA) Reps. Class parents are there to help other parents in the class with questions that they may have about school activities. They also play a big part in organizing parents' tasks in school fairs (which happen twice per year). Class parents will share information and 'action items' from the Parent Association meetings. Class parents can also take initiative, in counsel with the teacher and PA, to fund-raise for special expenses that may come up in a class.

8) Building a Relationship between Home and School

As Waldorf teachers, we strive to create a safe and healthy environment for your child to unfold. We have planned a healthy rhythm for the young child, and through years of experience, we know how important your support at home is for your child to be successful at school. Parents can support their child's Kindergarten experience in the following ways:

- Eliminate TV, video viewing and computer activities. During your interview we will have talked about technology and it's effects on the young child. At that time we suggested that you do research on this topic; if you are looking for more resources you will find some listed in the Recommended Reading section at the end of the handbook. The best way to see how technology effects your child is to observe them – what do you observe after they have been exposed to it and what do you observe when it is not in their lives, how does it change the way they engage with the world around them? ([an article to get you started](#)) See more articles and resources in the Recommended Reading section below.
- Have your child in bed between 7 and 8 p.m., so that they are well rested. A well-rested child will be content in the rhythm of the day. Each of you needs to determine the best bedtime for your child. It may need to be earlier for those that need to awake early to get to school. You will find that your well-rested child wakes up on their own in the morning, ready and willing to meet the day. ([Click here for more information about sleep and the young child](#))
- Rest time is such a vital part of the day in a Waldorf kindergarten classroom. It is a part of the daily rhythm for the young child and we strongly support giving children a time to rest and digest in the afternoon every day. A great deal happens throughout a morning at school and the children are also required to be social at the same time. A rest gives the children an opportunity to digest the morning, to be alone with themselves for a short period of time, to have an

opportunity to be quiet, to lay down and quite possibly letting go for sleep. If your child rests in the afternoon at home too, they know that a rest is as honoured at home as it is at school. You might find health benefits for having a little rest yourself!

- Sitting at the table as a family at mealtimes teaches the child that they can sit with their friends and enjoy a meal too.
- Involve your children in simple [daily household chores](#).
- Be aware of the rhythm between activity and rest; be sure to have both aspects in your day. Bring rhythm into home life - active time, quiet or focused time, active time, quiet or focused time and so on through the day. You will find the day goes much smoother for you as well.
- Being on time for drop-off and pick-up
 - **Drop-off:** Children often arrive and enter play together very early on in the morning; it can be difficult for a child who comes late to enter into the play once it has started. Arriving on time allows your child to engage and to experience the health benefits of the rhythm of the Kindergarten.
 - **Pick-up:** Some children may have difficulties with leaving at the end of a wonderful day at school, remind them that they will be back soon and that now it is time to go. Remember it is a wonderful sign that they love to be at school.
- Please always feel free to contact your child's teacher if there is a concern or question as soon as it arises.
- Attend all parent meetings – this is one way to strengthen your partnership with your child's teacher and your community.
- Familiarize yourself with Waldorf Education through reading, participating in learning opportunities at the school and beyond. Keep an eye on the newsletter to learn about upcoming learning opportunities and see the Recommended Reading section and links in the handbook.

9) How we Work with Separation Anxiety

Children are naturally unsure of a new environment with new people caring for them. From time to time, children will experience separation anxiety, tears or even tantrums.

During drop-off, this anxiety can be heightened. One of the most important aspects that will support your child in this transition is your confidence in the teacher, the environment and the school. It is important for your child that you are able to pass the child to the teacher in trust, and with the knowledge that you will be contacted if the child is not coping well. The tears will pass within a few minutes and the child will realign themselves with their new surroundings. As teachers, we use distraction, song and warmth to reassure your child until the unrest passes.

Although as parents, separation anxiety looks and feels traumatic, please understand that this process builds resilience and adaptability in your child. Our care of your child is grounded in love, and respect for what your child is experiencing.

10) The Importance of Clothing Warmth

A warm child is free to grow and take part in the day.

“Warmth is probably one of the greatest gifts we can give our children. Not only the warmth of our love but also keeping their physical bodies warm. Children are developing their bodies especially during the first 7 years of their lives. An infant and a young child will always feel warm unless they are on the verge of hypothermia because they have an accelerated metabolic rate. If we don't provide them with the layers of cotton, silk, and wool to insulate their bodies, then they must use some of their potential "growth" energy to heat their bodies. This same energy would be better utilized to further develop their brains, hearts, livers, lungs etc. In addition, being cold decreases immunity. We are all more susceptible to the germs and viruses that are always around us when we are wet and cold. When our body has to expend extra energy to keep warm then less energy is available to "fight" off infections. (Full article by Dr. Susan Johnson can be found here: [Warmth, an article by Dr. Susan R. Johnson](#))

When we are outside, the ideal is that your child is warm enough, able to move freely, dry, protected from the sun and clean enough to go inside later. We are able to change clothes if necessary.

11) Clothing for Your Young Child at School

As noted above, it is crucial that the children are dressed for any weather. We will begin our day outside everyday and the only weather that stops us is high winds and thunder storms. The children need to have waterproof coats and pants, rubber boots, closed shoes, long pants and long sleeves (in warmer weather this provides protection from mosquitoes). Hats must be worn at all times. When colder weather comes, the children need snowsuits and mittens. Wool hats, mittens and socks are the best for warmth and allow for moisture transference in a way that synthetics do not. Undershirts and wool sweaters or vests can be layered and removed if necessary – dressing in layers helps accommodate for fluctuating temperatures. **We highly recommend at least 3 layers on the top and two layers on the bottom once the temperatures begins to drop in the fall until the warmth has penetrated the ground in the spring (young children spend a great deal of time on the ground).** The warmth of the body of a young child is very important for the development of the organs. We have extra clothes at school if the weather changes dramatically through the day.

We ask that your **children do not wear clothing with cartoons, slogans or writing at school** to free the children of external influences during their day. This allows your child as well as other children the opportunity to find their own ideas and thoughts as the source of inspiration for play.

12) What to Bring

Please remember that all items used for school including clothing, shoes, backpacks etc. are to be free of game or media inspired characters, cartoons, slogans or writing. All clothing needs to be suitable for free movement during play and circle games.

- **Hat every day**, suitable to the season. Hats - we ask that your child has a hat on at all times when outside. We carry extra hats in case you have forgotten, most children prefer their own....
- **Extra clothing in a spare bag** – include two pairs of socks, one pair of underwear, one pair of pants, one long sleeve shirt, one sweater.

- **Fair weather splash pants** - we ask that the children wear splash pants at all times to protect their clothing and our carpet inside. We try to keep the dew, mud, and sand in the yard! Please be sure to have a very thin pair of splash pants for fair, warm weather. In very warm weather we make exceptions.
- **Rain suit** - a one piece rain suit is the best but rain coats and pants are great too – see clothing resources below.
- **Indoor shoes** - the children need clean shoes or slippers that fit securely with good support. We request that shoes have no lights or noises, which cause distraction.
- **Boots to start every day** – rubber boots unlined in the warm weather and lined for when the weather turns colder and it is still wet. (Winter boots tend to get wet and stay wet) Even in fine weather, most days start with wet grass from the dew and wet shoes stay wet all day. You may keep outdoor shoes in the cloakroom for later if the day is fine and the dew is gone.
- **Winter Boots** - check to see that the boot is rated for -30 or -40 C. Be sure there is a removable liner and check them regularly to see that they are dry – boots that do not have a removable liner are impossible to dry before it's time to go outside again!
- **Snow suit** - one piece snow suits or two piece with overall style pants to ensure that no snow goes in between
- **Long underwear** - wool is the very best. For the sensitive child, silk wool blend is ideal. The children spend a lot of time on the ground and on the floor at school. Keeping them warm and comfortable is our task
- **Scarves** - in colder weather, a scarf, neck warmer or balaclava is necessary for everyone
- **Sun protection** - the number one protection from the sun is clothing (hats and long sleeves). Sunblock is our second choice. Please apply sunblock before school if you feel it is needed in the morning.
- **The following are companies that carry good quality, long lasting outdoor clothing, outerwear and boots for children:**
 - [Mountain Equipment Coop](#) for seasonal outdoor gear
 - [Sail](#) – for seasonal outdoor gear
 - [Warmth and Weather](#) – for organic woollens and wool/silk (**sold through school fundraisers**)
 - [Puddlegear](#) for rain wear

13) What Not to Bring

We request your help in choosing clothing for school that does not display media characters and slogans. Commercial nature of mass media characters can inhibit the development of a healthy imagination and play. We strive to create an environment where the child can express and play out of his or her own experience.

- **Toys and personal items** should not be brought to school. Items from home are very distracting and create challenges with sharing. We have plenty of materials in the classrooms. If they do make it to school, the teacher will store the items until going home time.
- We further request that children do not wear **nail polish, hair dyes or 'tattoos'**. These are a form of adornment suited to an older stage of life and distract the child and their friends from finding their own imaginative and creative play. It becomes the focus of their time together.

Part II

Essential aspects of Waldorf early childhood and how they are working in our classrooms with your children.

14) Love and Warmth

“Children who live in an atmosphere of love and warmth, and who have around them truly good examples to imitate, are living in their proper element.” —Rudolf Steiner, The Education of the Child

Our teachers strive to provide an environment of love and emotional warmth, which in turn creates the basis for the child’s healthy development. These qualities are striven for between the teacher and the child, in the children’s behaviour toward one another, and among the adults in the school.

We also feel that the children are served if this love and warmth exist in the relationships between the teachers and the parents, between the early childhood teachers and the rest of the school, and in the surrounding community.

15) The Classroom Environment and Nourishing the Senses

The Waldorf classroom environment is a warm and supportive place where the child feels secure in the feeling that they are loved. Physically, it is simple, beautiful and harmonious to the eye in an attempt to not over stimulate the child and to encourage their creativity and imagination.

Learning in the early years is profoundly connected to the child’s physical and sensory experience, therefore the physical surroundings of our classrooms, indoors and out, have been created to provide a nourishing environment and diverse opportunities for a child’s active self-education. By integrating diverse elements and bringing them into meaningful, understandable and harmonious order, the teachers provide an environment that is accessible to the young child’s understanding, feeling and active will. These surroundings provide the basis for the development of a sense of coherence for the young child. The child unconsciously experiences the love, care, intentions and consciousness expressed through the outer furnishings and materials of the classroom. ([The Child at Work and Play](#))

16) Creative and Artistic Experiences and Rhythm

In our early childhood classrooms, the art of education is the art of living. The teacher is an artist in how they perceive and relate to the children and how they relate to the activities of daily life. The teacher orchestrates and choreographs the rhythms of each day, each week, and each season in such a way that the children can breathe freely in a living structure.

Young children respond strongly to rhythm and are tremendously supported when they have rhythm every day. This is why the daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms are so strong in Waldorf early childhood classrooms. “When there is rhythm, life can actually begin to become freer. Children are more relaxed, more secure, less anxious and stress-filled, because they know that the adult they trust is guiding the flow of the day. Young children relax into this security and are often less clingy and demanding,” Susan Weber of Sophia’s Hearth article on Rhythm.

It also takes time to find rhythm. Give it time; it can take up to 40 days for a rhythm to settle in to our lives, especially if rhythm is new to you and your child. As your child settles into the rhythm of their class please be aware that your child will be tired at the beginning of the school year and know that they will struggle in the social realm at first, which is the way children learn.

Within the kindergarten daily rhythm, there is provision for free play and also for group activity. At free play time the child may choose to involve him or herself with a group of others or play alone in the variety of centres within the room. There are many natural materials available like wool, shells, rocks, pine cones and driftwood, as well as handmade toys that leave much to the child's imagination, calling forth the child's natural creativity. At this time of the day the child may also decide to join one of the many tasks in which the teacher is involved, such as watering the plants, sewing, dusting, preparing the table for snack, sweeping, digging, finger-knitting, gardening, mixing and kneading the dough for bread, and chopping vegetables for soup, to name a few. Snack time, circle time, story time or puppet shows are examples of group activities where the whole class participates. The day is set up to move between times of free play and times of group or formed activity. This is called the in and out breathing of each day. When the day is structured this way it actually supports healthy breathing in the child, creating a health giving education.

In addition, the teacher offers the children opportunities for artistic experiences in singing and music, in movement and gesture—through rhythmic games—and in creative speech and language—through verses, poetry, and stories. The children may model with beeswax, draw, and do watercolor painting. Puppet shows put on by the teacher are an important element in the life of the kindergarten.

17) Imitation and the Young Child

The teacher is aware that imitation is one of the child's main learning tools at this age and the teacher takes care to be worthy of imitation. Each action, if done with quiet and loving reverence, will be imitated by the child so that the qualities of wonder and reverence will grow within them, feeding those soul qualities that are so important – reverence towards all living things, respect, consideration and tolerance towards our fellow human beings. To read more about imitation [see the following article](#) from Susan Weber.

18) Free Imaginative Play, Inside and Out:

Little children learn through play. They approach play in an entirely individual way out of their own unique configuration of soul and spirit, and out of their unique experiences of the world in which they live. The manner in which a child plays may offer a picture of how he will take up his destiny as an adult.

The kindergarten teachers create an environment that supports the possibility of healthy play. This environment includes the physical surroundings, furnishings, and play materials; the social environment of activities and social interactions; and the inner/spiritual environment of thoughts, intentions, and imaginations held by the adults.

Outdoor Play: The emphasis on outdoor play is an integral part of the Waldorf kindergarten curriculum. Its benefits for the young child are wide reaching, from supporting physical health to connecting with our natural surroundings.

The children start their day outside playing on the climbing structures, digging in the sandbox, swinging high into the air or helping their teachers with a task such as raking leaves, shovelling snow or gardening in the spring and fall.

We are fortunate to have several community paths through the forest and we may "take the scenic route" to enter the school by walking through the forest. There are many things to see along the path, a whiskey frisky, a mushroom, and many other treasures. These walks give the children a chance to experience seasonal changes as well; the new buds of spring are always noticed as well as the changes of the leaves and the first frosty puddle.

Some days the children will hike to The Pond to visit the ducks and watch sticks float away from shore. On other days the children emerge from the forest at Stoney Park. Two large rocks challenge the children's will as they work hard to get to the top. They are often perplexed as to why their teachers don't just lift them onto the rock but nothing can replace the sense of accomplishment after climbing up all by themselves.

Daily outdoor play, in all sorts of weather, allows the children to develop their senses of balance, movement, touch and well being. It gives opportunity to come into relationship with themselves, their peers and the world around them. Our time outside is as good for the body as it is for the soul.

19) Protection of the Forces of Childhood

The lively, awake yet dreamy way of the little child's consciousness is encouraged to thrive in the early childhood classrooms. This means that the teacher works to avoid a lot of verbal instruction. Instead, their gestures and actions provide a model for the child to imitate. Each day is filled with familiar daily rhythms and activities which provide a context where the need for verbal instruction is greatly reduced and simple, imagery in stories, songs, and games provides experiences that the children can internalize but that do not require intellectual or critical reflection or explanation. ([for more on this subject click here](#)) or ([Non-Verbal Education](#))

20) Gratitude Reverence and Wonder

"Gratitude grows naturally in children through witnessing the gratitude the adults feel as they receive what is freely given by others, and in how they express this gratitude. If a child says "thank you" very naturally—not in response to the urging of others, but simply through imitating— something has been done that will greatly benefit the child's whole life. Out of this an all-embracing gratitude will develop toward the whole world. This cultivation of gratitude is of paramount importance." —Rudolf Steiner, The Child's Changing Consciousness

“Out of experiences of gratitude, the first tender capacity for love, which is deeply embedded in each and every child, begins to sprout in earthly life. If, during this first period of life, we strive to create an atmosphere of gratitude around the children, then out of this gratitude toward our everyday world, toward the greater universe, and also out of thankfulness for being able to be a part of this world, a profound and warm sense of devotion will arise . . . upright, honest, and true.” —Rudolf Steiner, *The Child’s Changing Consciousness*

Throughout each day, in our classrooms, a sense of gratitude, reverence and wonder is fostered with the children and this is the basis for what will become a capacity for deep, love and commitment in later life, for dedication and loyalty, for true admiration of others, for fervent spiritual devotion, and for placing oneself wholeheartedly in the service of the world. ([Read more about how gratitude, reverence and wonder works in Waldorf education](#))

21) Joy, Humour and Happiness

The teacher’s earnestness about their work and their serious striving is balanced with humour and a demeanour that bespeaks happiness. There are moments of humour and delight in the classroom every day, even when the days are difficult!

22) Adult Caregivers on a Path of Inner Development

Waldorf educators recognize that their thoughts, attitudes, and imaginations are as real and as much alive in the adult who cares for the children as their actions. The invisible realm that lies behind the outer actions of the teacher has a profound influence on the child’s development. This is true for parents as well as teachers.

Teachers see the child as a threefold being—of body, soul, and spirit. This recognition provides a foundation for the daily activities in the classroom, and for the relationship between adult and child. This is a realm that is largely hidden, and difficult to observe directly. Yet ultimately this realm may affect the development of the children most profoundly. It is not merely our outer activity that influence the growing child. What lies behind and is expressed through this outer activity is also crucial. Ultimately, the most profound influence on the child is who we are as human beings—and who we are becoming and how.