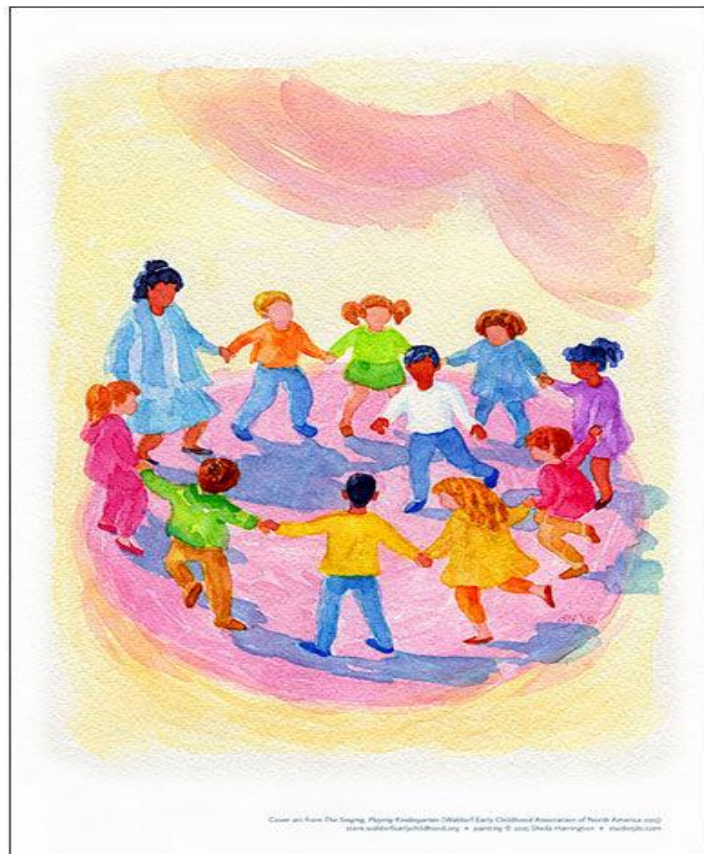


# Kindergarten Parent Handbook



*Revised August 2023*

 Halton Waldorf School

## Welcome

We strive to provide a safe, warm and nurturing environment to foster your child's development, working together with children, parents and teachers. This handbook is a summary of information about our school and unique aspects of our Waldorf Kindergarten program. Should you have questions or concerns regarding your child and their day-to-day life at school, please speak to your child's lead teacher.

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#### Part II: What makes early childhood education "Waldorf"?

Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf education, spoke on several occasions about essentials for the healthy development of the young child.

#### These include:

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Full article: What Children Need, The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood by Susan Howard



## Part I: Practical Items

### 1) Hours of Operation-Pick-Up and Drop-off Time

Pick-ups and drop-offs are outdoors. If for some reason you are late picking up your child, please notify the reception desk by calling our main number – 905-331-4387 or emailing: [reception@haltonwaldorf.com](mailto:reception@haltonwaldorf.com). Please be sure to **connect with one of the teachers at both drop-off and pick-up** ensuring the teachers are aware of each child's arrival and departure.

#### Daily Schedule

8:00	Supervision begins for early drop off in the playground (no fee for this service)
8:15	Drop off
8:30	School Day starts
12:00	<b>Half Day</b> pick up
12:00	Lunch
3:25	<b>Full Day</b> pick up
3:45 –6:00	After care program (additional fees apply)

### 2) Positive Relationships-Child Guidance & Discipline

It is important for a child's social and emotional development to build positive relationships with caring and trusting adults. 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 own unique ways of working with the children and discipline. Should 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 Preschool educator).

### 3) Food

**All food: snacks and lunches are provided by the school each day.** Healthy snacks are prepared and served during our morning and afternoon programs. Real Food for Real Kids serves all our full-day early childhood children a wholesome catered lunch each day. These lunches include well-balanced, nutritional, homemade, local foods, which can be fan favorites to even the most discerning children. We take pride in maintaining and being a waste conscience and environmentally friendly school.

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

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

**Please pack a water bottle for your child labelled with child's name.**

### 4) Health

Fostering your child's health and well-being is important to us. Children who are ill are required to stay at home. 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 by emailing [reception@haltonwaldorf.com](mailto:reception@haltonwaldorf.com) or calling 905-331-4387.**

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

### 5) Communication at the school

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

- The Website as well as our social media – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Online Calendar
- Weekly Parent e-Newsletters
- Annual General Meeting and March Meet and Mingle
- Parent Evenings
- Parent Teacher Conferences

More detailed information can be found in the school's [All Parent Handbook](#).

#### **Communication with Teachers**

At the beginning of the school year your child's 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 e-mail to inform parents of what is happening in the classroom. The teacher will be in touch to arrange a home visit for new students in August.

Any concerns that require longer conversations should be addressed in pre-arranged meetings. Long conversations are not possible when the teachers are with children.

### **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 directly in a productive and constructive manner. Please refer to the [All-Parent Handbook](#) for further details.

## **6) Parent Meetings**

Parent meetings are held once per term. These meetings may take place in person outside when weather permits, and your teacher will advise you with details via email communication. They are for adults only. Nursing infants are welcome. It is 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 January, there will be a meeting devoted to grade one readiness. All early childhood parents are very welcome to come and learn why it is important in Waldorf education that a child is ready in every way for stepping into the next phase of learning in the grades program. 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 meaningful.

## **7) Class Parent Representatives**

Each class at the Halton Waldorf School has "class reps" and are members of the Parent Association (PA). Class reps are there to help the class teacher with practical items such as school trips as well as 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 aim to create a safe and healthy environment for your child to develop and grow. 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:

- Spending more time in nature as much as possible and reducing exposure to screens. During your interview we will have an opportunity to share views on technology and its affects on the young child. We suggest some 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 affects your child is to observe them: when they have been exposed to it and when they are not exposed to it. 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.

- A well-rested child will be content in the rhythm of the day. As you will determine the best bedtime for your child, it may be earlier for those who need an early start for school the next morning. You will find that your well-rested child wakes up on their own in the morning, ready and willing to meet the day. To ensure your child is getting enough sleep and is well rested, preparation for bedtime between 7 and 8 p.m. is helpful. [Click here for more information about sleep and the young child](#))
- Rest time is a vital part of the daily rhythm in a Waldorf Kindergarten classroom. When young children can have a short rest and process the many social interactions and busy activities from the morning, the opportunity to have some alone time, be quiet by themselves for a short period, laying down and if possibly letting go for sleep, can be refreshing for them in the afternoon. 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.
- Encouraging the family to sit together at mealtimes can support your child to sit with their friends at school and share a meal together.
- Involve your children in simple [daily household chores](#).
- It is beneficial to consider rhythm between activity and rest during the day and be sure to include both aspects in your child's day. Bring rhythm into the home life - active time, quiet or focused time, active time, quiet or focused time and so on throughout 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 the play once it has started. Arriving on time allows your child to engage and to experience the healthy benefits of the rhythm and activities in the Preschool.
  - **Pick-up:** Some children may have difficulties with leaving at the end of a wonderful day at school. Remind them they will be back soon and now it is time to go. Remember it is a wonderful sign that they love to be at school.
- Please feel free to contact your child's teacher as soon as a concern or question arises. Each teacher will provide a time when they are usually available.
- It is beneficial to 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.
  - [WECAN | Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America](#)

## 9) How We Work with Separation Anxiety

Children are naturally attached to their parents and families. Experiencing a new environment with new people caring for them, children may experience separation anxiety, tears or even have tantrums. At this time our patience and loving care may help to ease the transition.

During drop-off, this anxiety can be heightened. One of the most important aspects that will support your child through this transition is your confidence in the teacher, the environment, and the school. It is important for your child that you can 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 eventually subside over a period



and the child will realign themselves with their new surroundings. As teachers, we practice gentleness using songs and surround them with loving warmth to reassure them until the unrest passes.

For parents, child's separation anxiety may look and feel traumatic. We assure you that when you are confident, your child will be confident and that this time of transition will ease gradually as your child builds resilience and adaptability. The care we provide to the children is grounded in love and respect for what your child is experiencing.

**Parents are to drop off the children at the outdoor entrance to the kindergarten playgrounds.**

## 10) The Importance of Warmth

The early childhood children will be outdoors for some of their time at school, as it is the ideal, health-giving place for them to be. Working together, we will be extra diligent about how the children are dressed. 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.*

<http://www.youandyourchildshealth.org/articles/warmth.html>

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 can change their clothes, if necessary, be sure to ensure there are spare clothes in the cloth bags the children will keep at school.

## 11) Clothing 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 only extreme weather stops us, such as high winds, extreme cold and thunderstorms. The children need to have waterproof jackets and pants, rubber boots, closed shoes, long pants and long sleeves (in warmer weather this provides protection from mosquitoes). **Hats must be always worn outdoors.**

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 begin to drop in the fall and 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 their organs. We have extra clothes at school if the weather changes dramatically through the day.

Dressing your **child in clothing without cartoons, slogans or writing** during school time, frees them of the influences of external media during their day. This allows your child, as well as other children, the

opportunity to develop their own imagination using creative ideas and thoughts as the source of inspiration for their 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. We ask that your child always has a hat on outside. We usually have extra hats; however, most children prefer their own.
- **Extra clothing is kept in a spare bag in the classroom** – 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 always wear splash pants to protect their clothing and the carpets 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 raincoats and pants are great too – see clothing resources below.
- **Indoor shoes** - the children will 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. 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 and fit suitably– boots that do not have a removable liner may not be 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 important.
- **Neck warmers** - in colder weather, a neck warmer or balaclava is necessary for everyone
- **Sun protection & bug repellent** - the number one protection from the sun is clothing (hats and long sleeves). Sunblock is our second choice. Please apply sunblock or bug repellent before school if you feel it is needed.
- **The following are companies that carry good quality, long lasting outdoor clothing, outerwear and boots for children:**
  - Mountain Equipment Co-op for seasonal outdoor gear
  - Sail – for seasonal outdoor gear
  - Warmth and Weather – for organic woollens and wool/silk as well as ethical rainwear (also **sold through school fundraisers**)
  - Puddlegear for rain wear

## 13) What Not to Bring



- **Children's toys and personal items** should be kept at home. 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 - Susan Howard-WECAN**

#### **1) 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 Early Childhood 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.

#### **2) 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 so as not to 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, feelings 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, and intentions that are expressed through the outer furnishings and materials of the classroom. (The Child at Work and Play)

### **3) 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. Therefore, 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 into 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, playing and being social all day is tiring for anyone.

Within the Kindergarten daily rhythm, there is provision for free play and for group activity. At free play time the child may choose to involve themselves 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, pinecones 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 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 Preschool and Kindergarten.

#### **4) 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.

#### **4) 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 way 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 life of thoughts, intentions, and imaginations held by the teachers.

**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.

Nature 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.

#### **6) 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](#))

## **7) 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 work in Waldorf education](#)

## **8) 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!

## **9) 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.

