

Westside Waldorf School
Parent-Toddler Program

Intention

We are seeking to create with you a warm, secure and joyful place for young children to play, discover and gradually unfold. Your child will have the opportunity to play with other children, to participate in simple circle games, hear age appropriate stories, and share healthy snacks. Parent-toddler classes are also a venue for parents to come together to observe, study and contribute to this wondrous process.

While providing for the needs of young children, this program is an equally valuable occasion for parenting discussions. For many families, this will also be their first experience with Waldorf Education. The class will introduce the educational philosophy on both the practical and theoretical level.

Rhythm

At the core of the Waldorf parent-toddler experience is the notion that rhythm is key to a healthy childhood. Rhythm in waking, sleeping and eating sets the tone for safe, secure and healthy play and exploration. The class emphasizes two elements of rhythm: in-breath and out-breath. "An out-breath is any activity in which the child is the initiator. In-breath, then is any activity which requires the child to draw his attention outward."

Rhythm of the Day

Arrival and outside play

Circle

Free play and bread-making

Clean up

Wash hands

Snack

Story

Goodbye

Arrival and Outside Play

Try to arrive early enough that your child has ample opportunity to play and make use of this out-breath. This is also a good time for parents to chat and spend a few minutes observing their child interact with natural elements such as sand and water. Make sure to bring a change of clothes in case the children get wet.

When the time comes, the teacher will open the door and lead the children in with a song. Without talking, parents should lead their children in, help them remove their shoes and put them on the shoe rack. It is best to protect your child's soft feet with non-slip socks or to bring a pair of slippers that they can wear inside. Please leave coats and bags in the front lobby or on the coat hooks.

Circle

Circle time is an opportunity for parents to learn songs, rhymes, and interactive games to incorporate into their home. The most important aspect of the circle is that parents are fully engaged-singing and imitating all of the hand and body movements of the teacher as closely as possible. Each gesture in the circle is significant to the cognitive and motor development of your child as well as to the evolution of their future learning skills. The circle activities will reflect a variety of gestures and sounds. Children will exercise their gross and fine motor skills, engage in quiet as well as energetic movements, and use their quiet and loud voices.

Children have varying responses to the circle. Some are engaged and imitate the motions while others prefer only to watch and listen. Some young ones find it overwhelming or an interruption to their play. Some even wander away from the group. The children need not participate, but the parents must. Whatever the reaction, most children do take the circle in deeply and will bring up or request the songs and games in their own homes. Songs and verses will be handed out on the second week of class so that parents have the chance to experience what the children do when they are presented with something new.

Free Play

Playtime is an out-breath. It is a venue for children to connect with the classroom, the toys, and each other. The room is a safe, receptive haven for the children. They are welcome to play with all of the carefully chosen and placed objects in the room. They will also have the opportunity to work with dough and to engage in the work of making bread. The teacher will be present in the room, working, tidying, singing, and facilitating safe play.

During the first few weeks, children enter the room tentative and reserved. They choose to stay close to their parent, often playing with a chosen toy while sitting on Mom or Dad's lap. At some point, once they feel settled with the rhythm and the environment, they move towards the materials and begin to truly explore. Keep in mind, that even for a settled child, a difficult day can bring them right back to the comfort of their parent. Disturbed night sleep, an impending illness or a recovering illness, a change in routine, all of these can affect the play experience.

Parents should station themselves on the peripheries of the room. Their role during this time is to provide a vessel for the children's safe play and exploration with a minimum amount of intervention. This is achieved in two ways: through meaningful work, and through observation. While the children engage in their meaningful work which is play, parents are encouraged to participate in small tasks such as ironing napkins, folding cloths, or mending for example. The teacher will also provide materials for simple crafts such as knitting or beeswax modeling. It is important for children to see their parents engaged in true work.

All of the tasks are simple enough that they can be put aside to attend to a child's need, which are the first priority. Children at this age are still developing attachment and are at a stage of dependence not independence. They often want to engage and involve their parent in their play. Developing a balance between direct interaction and parallel activity is a significant factor of good rhythm.

As they work, parents are free to watch their children at play, to see how they engage the toys, their playmates, and other adults. Developing the skills to observe how our children they move and develop in their interactions is key to effective parenting. By observing our children we can learn what they need from us in order to help them unfold gracefully.

Clean Up

Clean up time is an important transition between the in-breath and the out-breath. The process works best through imitation. It is important for the parents to sing and do. Avoid using words or telling the children to put things away. There is no need to announce that it is clean up time, for as the weeks pass, children need only to hear the song before they begin to put away the toys and participate in the process. It is equally important to pay attention to the gestures of cleaning. Taking your time to put objects back in their homes rather than hurriedly throwing them on shelves and baskets, expresses a healthy attitude towards work. Look at clean up as an extension of play and let the children tidy at their own pace without interference. It might be helpful to observe where each toy makes its home so that you can fully engage the clean up gestures.

Snack

Following a quick in-breath with hand washing, children take an out-breath with a snack. After a quiet moment and a blessing, children are served fresh baked bread. Once in a while, they may also have some fruit. Please let us know of any dietary restrictions or food allergies. Most of the children are quite hungry by snack and truly savor the bread. While the children are focused on their food, parents have the opportunity for quiet discussion and conversation.

Story Time

A simple puppet show brings the class towards its end. Story time is the process of developing a muscle which enables the child to sit down quietly and listen. The mood is one of quiet reverence. The story itself is short, and simple. It is a puppet story about nature.

While many children are deeply engaged in the story, some are unable to sit and often are ready to go home for a nap or quiet rest. It is important to honor their needs and to take them when they express a readiness. As the weeks progress, many of these children will be able to stay longer. In the mean while, it is best for

all if these children go home. Disruptions prevent the children who are ready to experience the story from fully engaging.

Goodbye

To end the class with calm and peace, parents have the opportunity to engage their children in a few simple touch games and massages. It is a way of bringing the children back to their parents as they prepare to go off towards their homes and their naps. A final goodbye song brings the class to completion. Keep in mind that parents should not feel obligated to stay until the very end if their child needs to go. Upon hearing the goodbye song, some children are hesitant to leave and in the first few weeks some are even teary and upset. As the class becomes a part of their rhythm, these children leave happily and willingly knowing that they will be back.

Timeliness

It is extremely important to be on time for the class so as not to disturb the child's rhythm. A child who arrives with only a few minutes of outside time or who arrives once the class has started remains disturbed and tentative, often unable to find the security of the rhythm which fosters the most invested play. If you find that you are going to be significantly late, it is best to have a quiet day at home rather than an uncomfortable day in class.

Discipline and safety

We all need to watch for the safety and well-being of all of the children. Guidance should be gentle. Sometimes, if given the chance, children can work situations out for themselves. The teacher will be in the room to help the children as they learn to interact.

Parents and children need to feel that they are coming to a safe place to learn and grow peacefully. Therefore, we should all make a conscious effort not to judge each other harshly for our parenting choices or our child's behavior. When differences of opinion arise, as they inevitably will, mutual respect and consideration are expected and deserved.

Illness and Absence

Children with symptoms such as fever, more than a mild cough, vomiting, diarrhea, or a severely runny nose within the previous 24 hours should stay home. On the occasion that a child becomes ill in class or shows signs of not feeling well such as unusually irritable or aggressive behavior, or inconsolable crying, the parent and teacher may decide that the child needs to go and rest in the comfort of their own home.

If you know that you and your child will be absent due to illness or travel, please email or call the campus to let us know before the day of class.

Parent Enrichment

We will hold a parent night once each month as a forum for discussion and further exploration of our classroom and parenting experiences. Families enrolled in the Parent-Toddler program are also encouraged to attend and participate in school-wide events, festivals, and lectures.

Teacher Information

At some point during the session we will contact each parent to touch base about your child and your experiences. Meanwhile, for questions or concerns, feel free to contact us.