



Parent Handbook
2013

Welcome

Welcome to The Children's Garden. We welcome you as a family to our preschool community and look forward to a strong partnership with you. This handbook will be your guide to our Program, its policies, procedures and its philosophy of education. It contains our suggestions for making your family's experience here a warm and successful one. We are pleased that you have chosen to send your child to our program. We encourage you to read this booklet completely. We hope it will be the beginning of a rich and rewarding relationship with The Children's Garden for your whole family.

Purpose & Mission

The Children's Garden is committed to educating the whole child – head (thinking), heart (feeling), hands (doing). Our goal is to provide a safe, nourishing and nurturing environment in which children are guided in exploring their intellectual, emotional, social and creative capacities.

Our mission is to meet the young child in their place of wonder; to honor each child's sense of self and to help them foster their confidence in the world; to cultivate understanding, cooperation and communication by way of the learning through living approach.

Philosophy

As a holistic learning environment, our program fosters natural learning through living in creative play, singing, movement, story, joyful work, outside play and nature walks. The magic and wonder of childhood is honored through an approach that nurtures the young child's healthy physical, emotional and intellectual development. We believe children naturally learn about themselves and the world around them through their observation and imitation of the surrounding adults and their environment. Our staff holds this awareness and models the behavior we wish to foster in the children (ie: kindness, compassion, confidence and respect).

The flow of our rhythms and the warm natural environment allow the children to feel security throughout their experience. We preserve the gifts of childhood

while preparing children to meet life's challenges with joy, enthusiasm and confidence. We encourage children to satisfy their natural curiosity and immersion into lifelong learning and discovery.

Teachers provide environments that allow children to feel the warmth and connection of a small community. **Teaching is from the heart**, and emphasizes a nurturing, nourishing, multi-sensory learning environment. The stimulation of the child's imagination and creativity is a high priority. Daily, weekly and seasonal rhythms help provide consistent structure to the developmental processes. Multiple learning modalities are integrated into daily rhythms to create a learning atmosphere that is supportive, challenging and meaningful to each child. One of the most important aspects of each child's experience in our program is to provide him or her space and time to discover, create and just be.

Preschool Program

The Children's Garden is a tax exempt, not-for-profit preschool serving children and their families in the Grant Park and Ormewood Park neighborhoods, throughout southeast Atlanta and surrounding communities. We employ a highly experienced, professional team of teachers dedicated to holistic early child learning and nurture. Since its inception, The Children's Garden has continued to meet the needs of families of all backgrounds, beliefs and traditions.

Our program commences each year on the Tuesday following the Labor Day holiday and finishes on the second Friday in May each year. Children come to school 2, 3 or 4 days per week, depending on which level of the program they are enrolled. Children ranging in age from 19 months to 5 years may be enrolled in our program. Admission to The Children's Garden is open to children regardless of race, creed, color or national origin.

The preschool opens at 9:25am each day. Children may come to their classrooms at 9:30am. The school day ends at 1:30pm and the office remains open until 2pm daily.

Fees & Payments

Application Fee: The *non-refundable* Application fee of \$100 per child is due when submitting the Annual Enrollment Application Form. *However, this fee is waived for currently enrolled families.*

Enrollment Fee: The *non-refundable* Enrollment fee is equivalent to one month's full tuition and must be received by the due date to guarantee enrollment for the following preschool year. If this fee is not received by the due date, the class space will be forfeited and made available to families participating in open enrollment and/or on the waiting list.

Program Fee: The *non-refundable* Program fee of \$200 per child is dedicated to supplies and materials.

Service Alternative Fee: All families are required to volunteer 6 hours on preschool committee/s, event/s, workday/s, etc., or pay a \$150 *non-refundable* Service Alternative fee by November each year.

Tuition Policy

Payments may be mailed to the preschool, placed in the secure drop box in the office or delivered in the mail slot in the door of the school (mail is checked twice daily). Please make your check payable to The Children's Garden Preschool. Our mailing address is:

The Children's Garden Preschool
486 Park Avenue, SE
Atlanta, Georgia 30312

We follow a tuition schedule that goes from August to April each school year.

- Monthly tuition is due the first of each month. Annual and monthly payment plans have due dates falling on the first of each scheduled month per parent agreement with the school.
- Invoices will be sent via email at approximately 14 days prior to the due date.
- A late fee of \$25 will be applied to tuition payments received after the 5th of each month.
- Accounts more than 14 days in arrears are subject to the standard late fee and an additional \$50 fee.

Withdrawal Policy

Parents must advise The Children's Garden, in writing, one month (30 days) prior to withdrawing from the program or be obligated to pay the next month's tuition due.

Tuition that has been paid in advance (once annually) is only eligible for a pro-rated refund if parent of child withdrawing from the program has notified the school as specified above.

Enrollment Fees and Program Fees are strictly non-refundable and are NOT part of annual tuition.

Arrival & Departure Policy

Our day begins at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 1:30p.m (begins at 9:25am and ends at 1:45pm for the Pre-K class). We open the doors on Sydney Street at 9:25 each morning. Families are welcome to come inside and make their way to the cubbie area of your child's class to begin the transition to school and greeting the day. Teachers are ready to accept children into classrooms at 9:30am. Children must be brought to their classroom teachers.

It is very important that children arrive ON TIME to start the day and that they be picked up PROMPTLY when the school day is over.

If your child is to be picked up by anyone other than his/her parent/caregiver, **The Children's Garden must be notified in advance.** Parents must indicate on their Child/Parent Information Forms who is authorized other than you to pick up your child. Emails or written notes to the office when there are changes to your list of those authorized to pick up your child are acceptable. Please call **404.624.8591 or your child's teacher directly (mobile number)**, if you are running late or have an emergency requiring someone else pick up your child. Be aware that we take this policy very seriously. Even if we "know" the person picking up, if there is no communication from you that a particular individual is to pick up, we WILL NOT release your child to that person. Current photo ID will be asked for when someone your child's teacher does not know is picking up your child.

Our recommendation to avoid any confusion: update your emergency contacts/permission to pick up list on file in the office when you want to add/change this information. Please remember, this is your responsibility. The

authorized adult doing pick up in the afternoon is required to “sign-out” (initial) next to the child’s name on the class sign-out sheet. These sheets are kept on a clipboard in the classroom or by the door.

Parking Policy & Strollers

Street parking is available along Park Avenue and Sydney Street for morning drop off and afternoon pick up.

Please **use marked crosswalks** on Park Avenue, if your vehicle is on the park-side of the street. There are 2 crosswalks for safe, easy access to the sidewalk near the preschool entrance.

Vehicles parked on Sydney Street MUST be parked in the same direction as traffic flow. Please do not park in the opposite direction of the flow. This request is in accordance with city traffic law, good neighbor relations and above all, it helps to maintain safety and flow for drop-off and pick-up.

Strollers should be parked in the main hallway of the preschool. For safety and practical reasons, strollers may not be taken into the classroom hallways or Community Room (we use this space for Sparrows & Owls classroom access).

Health & Illness Policy

We request that your children be well when you bring them to preschool.

We always appreciate a call from you when your child must stay home due to illness. Please call the preschool office **404.624.8591** or notify your child's teacher directly.

Your child should **not** come to school when he/she:

- Has a fever (children **must be fever-free for at least 24 hours**, before returning to preschool).
- Is in the first three (3) days of a cold.
- Has nasal or eye discharge (white or any shade of green).
- Has a rash or hives.
- Has **had a loose bowel movement within the last 24 hours.**
- Has been awake for a long period of time during the night.

- Has **vomited within the last 24 hours.**

First-aid will be administered for all minor injuries and parents will be notified. Our teachers are CPR-certified and have basic knowledge of first-aid. Teachers carry their own cell phones for safety and direct means of contact.

More serious contagions and school communications: Please **immediately notify the preschool** about cases of H1N1, Rubella, Pertussis, Mumps, Varicella, Pin worms, Ring worm, Head lice, Strep, any easily contagious virus or **any** other communicable disease.

Our policy is to communicate with classroom families and at times, the whole-school community. In our effort to accurately disseminate information affecting preschool families, we follow a protocol involving communication with the family reporting the illness and await a clinical diagnosis before sharing information with the school community. Should there ever be a time when this kind of information must be shared with you, we shall respond immediately.

Communications regarding any serious contagion shall always come straight from the director.

Separation

We expect and understand that young children may have a hard time separating from their parents (and vice-versa). We will help make this transition as easy as possible for both child and parent. We request that parents say a short, friendly goodbye at the classroom door to help children make an easier separation. If you have any concerns about separation, please feel free to discuss them with us at any time.

Clothing

Please dress your child in clothing that is comfortable, uncomplicated and easy for the children to manage at bathroom time – a great confidence booster. This applies to the littlest children too, who may still be in pull ups at the beginning of the year. Clothing and shoes (closed heel) should be able to stand up to rugged outdoor play. Expect mud. Also, we request that parents avoid dressing children any media-inspired clothing or clothing with distracting images. The children are so open and imitative that the whole group may be caught in that image rather than allowing more constructive and imaginative play to emerge. Please try to bring your child to school in as simple clothing as possible. Whenever a child is

wearing something that catches attention, that is the first thing the other children will recognize and focus on- rather than the child himself. Our wish is for each child to be fully seen and received by the other children.

It is important that the children have the opportunity to experience nature in her many moods, that they discover the play possibilities of wind, snow and puddles. We therefore go out in all but the most inclement weather and it is important that the children be dressed accordingly. For rainy days, please send your child in a raincoat with hood or hat and rubber boots. On cold days, please dress your child for a long stretch of outdoor play. Layering is suggested and a warm hat, warm mittens, warm boots, scarf, and an undershirt are essential. For hot, sunny days, please apply sunscreen before leaving home.

Remember to label all clothing with your child's name. Each child will have a personal cubby space for her/his items.

Food

Daily, please send your child with a nutritious lunch in a lunch box/bag or basket. We kindly request the lunch carrier be character/media-influence free (same reasoning as the clothing above). We love to see healthy, protein-packed, low or no sugar nutritious lunches for their energy and staying power. Refined carbs, even breads and crackers, are really too fast burning. Those proteins and fats provide all-day-long energy! Sugary drinks, milk, cookies and cake are best left for home. Please refrain from any kind of pre-packaged items including "squeezable" fruits, veggies and yogurts. To foster each child's autonomy, capability and self-confidence, we encourage children to do as much as they can, independently. Of course, we'll lend assistance if needed. And especially, we are aware that the littlest children need more. But so much happens for the child who's given the chance to learn to open containers or jars of food. Choosing lunch containers or jars instead of convenience design items, pays ten-fold! Please include a water bottle in your child's lunch - it should come to school already filled for the day; and if it needs refilling, we have filtered water in the classrooms. Also, be sure to provide eating utensils for your child (IE: spoon for yogurt) – we'll supply cloth napkins for snack and lunch. Label all containers, including the lunch bag/box/basket.

A nutritious communal snack is served each day in your child's class. Children are usually involved in the preparation of their snack. This involvement results in a deeper connection and interest in the food served for snack! Teachers send home snack lists about three times a year. Each family is assigned a snack ingredient to contribute to your child's class snack. Teachers develop class snack plans that reflect the seasons, while at the same time respecting dietary choices and/or food allergies/sensitivities in each classroom.

What to Bring

Each teaching team requests a change of clothes be brought prior to the children's first day. Be sure to label your child's clothing items. A change of clothes should be seasonal and changed accordingly, as the year progresses.

Children may be asked to bring in child-collected flowers, leaves, etc., upon teacher's request for the class nature table or a birthday celebration. Check with your child's teacher and monthly class newsletters about any special items requested. **Toys and candy should not come to school. Please leave these items at home.**

Your Child's Birthday

Teachers shall provide information at the beginning of the year, as to how birthdays are observed in the individual classroom. Thought and consideration is given to child development and the specific needs of the class. Teachers plan simple ways to honor and celebrate the child whose birthday it is.

What Your Child Will Bring Home

All children in our program bake weekly, watercolor paint and work on crafts throughout the year. We value the process-oriented approach to all handwork and therefore understand the importance of each experience and the time given to create.

On baking days, teachers send home bread, with each family taking a turn twice per year. A small loaf of bread for the child to share with his/her family is a wonderful and special experience. Crafts and watercolor painting will come home from time to time – most teachers prefer to send home watercolor paintings once or twice a year. Paintings arrive tied in a package or in a folder. Drawing paper and beeswax crayons are provided in each classroom too – occasionally, coloring may come home.

Songs, stories and circles will often come home through your child's sharing of his experience at school!

Child Guidance & Limit Setting

The Children's Garden's kind and firm approach to guidance and conflict resolution is grounded in a respect for children. Development of self-esteem and the building of problem-solving skills is primary. In this warm, nurturing environment, we are using affirmative language, modeling appropriate behavior, and guiding positively. Doing this, we help children develop appropriate behavior. Our understanding that the young child is ever so impressionable, that she/he imitates the world around them and that we adults are their strongest example and greatest reference, allows us to fully meet and support children.

If intervention becomes necessary in the classroom, it is always focused on helping children understand. The children are reminded of acceptable alternatives and through redirection (IE: "walking our strong feet" and "running is for outside"; or "we use gentle hands for gentle touches" and "our strong hands are for work"). Shame and blame serve no purpose and are damaging to a child in a number of ways. Our approach employs use of very simple, constructive language to allow a child to imitate that language and to develop care and concern for others. The goal is to help children build self-control and develop autonomy. We see this working beautifully in our school, particularly as older children begin to self-correct and know when they need help after initiating problem-solving. There is such a sense of freedom in the child being capable, knowing *how* to do something and *when* or *how* to ask for help. It is important and respectful to give children an opportunity to start problem-solving on their own. By jumping in too soon with the solution, adults teach children to rely more on adult authority than their own resourcefulness. When attentive adults stand with children as their advocates, giving them space, time and help (certainly if/when needed), we see this support yield amazing growth in capability and confidence for the young child.

We guide children in recognizing each other's feelings and needs, cultivating empathy and compassion. Eventually, as they age, we see children in our school developing the skills to be successful social negotiators and relying on non-violent means of resolving their conflicts.

Role of the Parents

We believe in a harmonious relationship between school community and home life. When each is in sync with the other, the child's whole development will flourish.

The children engage in purposeful work through life skills, play and creative experiences at school with their class. A mutually supportive relationship at school and home best serves a child when we provide consistent, nurturing, affirmative environments that echo one another. This helps to foster a particularly strong confidence in the child's social and emotional development. This lays the groundwork for children to flourish in many other situations.

We kindly request that parents join us in:

- Establishing simple, predictable routines at home with healthy rhythms
- Establishing clear, developmentally appropriate limits and expectations at home
- The use of affirmative language, voice and temperament at home
- Communicating regularly (participating in parent/teacher meetings and parent & teacher conferences, keeping up-to-date on classroom happenings through class newsletters and emails)
- Honoring and following the rhythms of the classroom (daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal)
- Honoring the school's policies in the Parent Handbook

Parent Volunteering

As a condition of enrollment, **our families are required to give a minimum of six service hours each year** (per family) to help with the upkeep, beautification and operation of our school. Parents are able to assist us in any of several ways as mentioned below or in offering pro-bono services.

- The Children's Garden holds a Holiday Faire and Artisan Market in December as well as an Annual Benefit Auction and Gala in mid-Spring –

helpful hands are needed to bring both to completion. Each family may participate in a variety of ways: small volunteer roles, donations, publicity, set and clean up and playing a role on the fund raising committee planning the events.

- Teacher appreciation committee hosts a few small events in support of the school staff each year.
- Buildings and Grounds Committee organizes our community workdays. Volunteers are organized to tackle projects, repairs and improvements – all overseen by our Workday Coordinator. While most of this work occurs on the scheduled workdays, other times may be arranged for certain projects to be done. If you have particular skills or talents that would be helpful to complete task lists, please let our coordinator know. She will communicate via email to the whole school community when needs arise or a workday is being planned.
- If you'd like to help out by participating in special projects (outside of regularly scheduled community workdays) or other aspects of our program, please talk with your child's teachers or the preschool director about other opportunities.

If you are interested in assisting with any of these committees or special events taking place at the school this year, please let us know as soon as possible.

Communication: Daily

Contact with Teachers

At both morning drop off and afternoon pick up you will see your child's teachers. This brief time to say a good morning hello or to quietly pass along news, events or information in your child's life with his/her teacher is a daily opportunity to connect.

We ask parents to keep teachers updated about changes in development throughout the year or other events likely to affect your child (ie: relatives visiting, travel, restless sleep, recovering from an illness, etc.). **Please communicate about your child's development in as surreptitious a manner as possible.**

We recommend phone or email communications, outside of school and not in the presence of your child, as a better choice of time for discussing developments or concerns.

Teachers provide parents with their direct email address and cell phone information at the beginning of the year.

Communication:

Parent / Teacher Conferences

We hold parent/teacher conferences in mid-fall and late winter each year for all families to have one-on-one time with class teachers. These conferences are an excellent time of connection for parents and teachers regarding the child's growth and development. Classroom environments ask something very unique of the young child - different challenges and a far more complex social setting than home life. Your child's teacher will share what has been observed in the class setting and she will let you know how we are supporting your child and what we plan to do to help your child reach his/her capabilities. Teachers will ask how things are going at home and check in to see if you have in depth questions or concerns to share. Teachers can be a sound, helpful resource for family support.

Other Needs and Referrals

At times, additional support may be needed requiring more meetings with teachers and/or the director. Parents are welcome to ask the director for referrals for outside professional services. If it appears a family is in need of further information, the school may suggest referrals for outside professional services.

The Children's Garden maintains a referral list of professionals who provide services for children (compiled through other preschool families who have used and shared these resources with us).

Teachers, parents or the director may request a meeting anytime to discuss special needs or concerns. To fully serve the needs of each child, the school may request further information from the parents (through outside professional services).

Whole School Community

Community and communication are two important words derived from the same root. In fact, they are so intimately related that one cannot exist without the other. Although our primary goal is to nurture and educate our children, a very important companion goal is the fostering of our school community and the support and exchange of positive ideals for living our lives. We believe that a community is a group of individuals who choose to work together to further common goals. Recognizing and providing opportunities for clear communication are central to creating a strong community.

- Preschool community workdays – families and staff work together to beautify and improve the preschool space and the play garden
- Preschool summer newsletter – a whole school communication resource, information sharing and updates on events taking place
- Preschool media resource sharing – lending library for parents and teachers
- Suggested reading and other resources for parents – recommended reading and articles for parent support, sharing supplies resources for supplementing the home environment, outside professional resources referrals for families in need of further support
- The Children’s Garden School Store – a special and inviting place where parents can see the simplicity model in a play setting, as well as shop for silks, beeswax crayons, story lights, lunch containers, stories, and more
- Whole school events – families join staff for special celebrations, festivals and activities building connection and community (Fall Lantern Walk, Holiday Faire, Winter Sing-A-Long, Spring Festival, etc.).
- Volunteer Opportunities are boundless for all members of our community – please share with us what your special talents are!

Green School Commitment / Policy

As good stewards of mother Earth, The Children's Garden community embraces and practices green school approaches to living.

Children and staff use personal cloth towels & napkins (laundered each week), natural soap for hand washing; also, we recycle plastic, paper and metal and work very hard to be as paperless with school communications as we can be; the school uses only natural, non-toxic, environmentally responsible cleaning products and cloth rags for cleaning. We request that our families be as conscientious as possible too, by packing lunches in lunch boxes/bags/baskets with 100% reusable containers. Also, we ask everyone to refrain from using pre-packaged items (IE: "squeezable" fruit, veggies, yogurt, plastic bags, plastic yogurt cups, etc.) to reduce our carbon footprint.

A sizable portion of the annual Supply Fee (per child) parents pay each year is used to cover the cost of the cloth towels, cloth napkins, natural soap, classroom cleaning products, aprons and Kleenex/toilet tissue from recycled paper products. We buy these items in bulk, which in and of itself, reduces waste. Also, families find this convenient so that purchasing these items for the classroom is not their responsibility.

Inclement Weather Policy

The Children's Garden will operate generally following the traditional school year calendar. Each year, the preschool program commences on the first Tuesday following Labor Day and end by mid-May. Refer to the annual calendar for more details.

The preschool follows the City of Atlanta Schools inclement weather closings. Tune in to local television or radio stations for announcements. Call **404.624.8591** if you have questions about inclement weather preschool closings.