Family Handbook

2022-2023



**Early Learning At The Gardens**

Philosophy

At *The Gardens*, we believe that children are natural, curious explorers who are capable of constructing and guiding their own learning. We follow an emergent curriculum and plan our day based on the interests of the children. We support an environment of tolerance and acceptance of diversity, where kindness and community come first. Rooted in a culture of peace, we provide an inclusive and democratic space for children where their voices are valued, and differences respected. Teachers support the community of learners to form meaningful connections recognizing each other’s strengths, perspectives, and contributions to evoke pride in oneself, in one’s family and culture, and support positive social identities. Our strength-based, relationship-driven practices reflect the value we place on fostering and nurturing the connections between family, educators, land, and community.

Our learning environment is set up with purpose and thought towards what we value and promote as teachers and community members. We provide open-ended toys and materials, which allow children to manipulate and engage with them in a manner that reflects their own unique interests and views. We respect that children need time for group engagement, both large and small, time to be loud and move fast, as well as quiet time away from a larger group. Our preschool is designed to support all of these moments.

We recognize that each child arrives with her/his own set of knowledge, skills and ways of seeing the world. As teachers, we strive to get to know each child by accessing their funds of knowledge through connecting to the individual child and their family. We consistently observe the children to get a better understanding of their strengths and learning styles and tailor activities and materials to support their needs. In doing so, we can better honor each child’s unique perspective and in turn, create an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for all.

Schedule

*Early Learning At The Gardens* is a program for children ages 3-5. It is operational for ten months of the year, from Monday to Friday, 8:15-3:30pm. We are closed for:

* All Canadian statutory holidays
* Two weeks over Christmas holidays, according to the Whitehorse school calendar
* Two weeks in March, according to the Whitehorse school calendar
* Eight weeks over the summer
* Up to four PD days per year. We will inform families of PD days with a minimum of one month’s notice.
* Up to seven emergency closures (please see section on illness for more information)

The Daily Routine

8:15-9:00 **Welcome**: We begin each day greeting the children and their families as they arrive, encouraging the children to get ready for their day by hanging up their own outdoor clothes and putting their lunch and snacks away.

9-11:00 **Play**: As teachers, we set the stage for the children’s free play engagement. Open-ended materials are provided and the environment prepared to reflect the children’s needs and interests. We recognize the importance of children being provided ample time to explore what they are interested in without unnecessary disruption. For this reason we allow at least 2 hours of free play with a short break for a group snack.

11:00-12:00 **Circle time and group work**: We begin each circle by following our Mind Up routine, practicing deep breathing and meditation. During circle we often introduce various curriculum ideas that we are working on. We also use this time to work on specific skill development that we have identified as a need within the group. We close with movement and story.

12:00-12:30 **Outdoor play**: We take an opportunity each day to get outside and enjoy the great outdoors. We encourage families to dress their child in appropriate clothing in order to ensure that we can all enjoy outdoor physical activity throughout the various weather conditions

12:30-1:15 **Lunch**: This is a time that provides great opportunity for group engagement as we sit and eat together.

1:15-1:45 **Quiet time**: We provide mats and storybooks to the children during quiet time to encourage a thirty-minute “wind down”. During this time, soft music is played and the children are reminded to take this time to rest and relax their bodies. Quiet time is an important time for children to sit with their thoughts and engage in quiet reflection. It is an important skill for self-regulation and healthy emotional development. Please note, if your child falls asleep, we will allow him/her to continue to rest until the 30 minutes is up, at which time we will wake them if you like, or let them rest a little longer if possible. We will not stop children from sleeping, as we feel that if a child is falling asleep at preschool then they likely need the rest.

1:45-2:45 **Closing circle and yoga**: We come together as a large group to close out our day inside the preschool. We begin by gently “waking up our bodies” through a yoga routine. We then allow the children to choose two or three large group movement songs and end with a recall time. Our recall includes reflecting on our day, discussing favorite parts of it, connections that were made and setting intentions for the following day.

2:45-pick up **Outdoor play**, pick up happens from the back yard

Curriculum

At *The Gardens*, the teachers form a multi-disciplinary team, with training in early childhood education, elementary education, outdoor experiential learning, family support and inclusion. In the field of early childhood education, we use aspects of Reggio Emilia, Waldorf and Montessori pedagogies. We refer to evidence-based curriculums in the promotion of social and emotional development as well as kindergarten readiness. We engage in a large-scale, on-going, ever-changing collaboration to implement a dynamic curriculum with tools designed specifically for the children in our group. We implement a daily schedule, incorporating free play, art, sensory exploration, circle time activities, mindfulness activities, music, yoga, baking and outdoor exploration. This is a child-led program, meaning that each child’s interests are explored and incorporated in every aspect of our daily routine. For more information about some of the specific programs we draw from to create our own unique *At The Gardens* curriculum, please refer to our website at [www.earlylearningatthegardens.com](http://www.earlylearningatthegardens.com) . These programs include Mind Up, The Zones of Regulation, We Thinkers and more.

Registration

Registration for new families will begin with an open house tour of our learning centre. During the tour, you will be to free ask any questions you may have about your child’s care and our program. We will also ask questions with the goal of becoming more familiar with your child and family. Enrolment will be offered to families based on various factors that may be considered:

* Returning students
* Siblings of returning or previous students
* Balance of age and needs in the classroom
* Balance of needs for extra support
* Commitment to full school year
* Date that family went on the wait list
* Date that enrolment package and deposit were submitted.

Registration will occur during specified time frames. During this time, a $285 non-refundable deposit will be required, along with a completed registration package. Enrolment will be confirmed once this has been received.

**Please Note: We do not have the facilities for diapering, therefore we are unable to accommodate children who are not fully toilet trained.**

\**The Gardens* maintains a waiting list of prospective students. Should a spot in our program become available during the school year families with children on our wait list may be contacted at that time.

Withdrawals

Sometimes unforeseen circumstances lead to changes and occasionally a family will need to withdraw from the program. We require written notice of withdrawal before the first day prior to the month that the child will no longer be attending our program. If notice is given after the first day of the month prior, the tuition due on the first day of the month that the child will no longer be attending will be owed. For example, if a family provides notice on January 6th that they will be withdrawing effective February 1, then tuition for February will still be due. If notice is given January 1st, then tuition for February will not be due.

*The Gardens* reserves the same right to give one month’s notice to a family if circumstances suggest that on-going attendance is not in the child’s or the learning centre’s best interest. Circumstances may include, but are not limited to, a child whose needs cannot be met in our program due to a lack of appropriate resources, chronically late payments or a month without payment. *The Gardens* will make reasonable attempts to communicate and problem-solve in every circumstance and giving notice is considered a last resort.

Tuition

Tuition for the school year is $9850. Note that The Gardens is a participant in the Yukon Early Learning and Child Care funding program, which means that $700 of your monthly tuition will be paid on your behalf by Yukon Government. The parent fees will be the remaining $285 per month. Tuition may be paid in full on or before September 1st, or by 10 equal installments as follows:

* $285 non-refundable deposit upon enrolment (month’s fees)
* $285 due by the first of each month from October to June.

Invoices will be emailed every month for the following month. Payments are to be sent before the first day of the month via email transfer to earlylearningatthegardens@gmail.com. No password is needed.

When a child is enrolled in our program later in the school year, the tuition costs will be prorated and the first payment for the child’s first month of attendance must be received upon confirmation of enrolment.

Preschool Community

## Family Involvement

*The Gardens* is a family-based program. We know that every child’s potential is so much greater when families and teachers work together to provide consistent care. We really want your insights about your child and encourage you to share your observations, concerns and goals.

During the first month of preschool, we ask that parents make quick drop-offs, saying goodbye in the boot room and allow us to welcome your child into the preschool and help your child adjust to our program and to each other. After this initial period of adjustment, parents will be encouraged to attend or participate in group activities as available. Family events will occur over the course of the year, to which you will be provided an invitation with plenty of notice.

## Communication

We send out weekly emails to provide you with information about inquiries the children have been engaged in, curriculums we are working on as well as any necessary updates. With this email, we send photos of the children from throughout the week. It is our hope that families will take the time over the weekend to look at the pictures with their preschooler to evoke stories and experiences from their time here at preschool. We also send periodic newsletters or individual observations to share learning journeys we have been on. Finally, we keep our Instagram and Facebook pages and website up to date with information about the program.

## Open House

Early in the fall (if covid allows) we invite parents to an open house at *The Gardens*. This is an opportunity for your child to show you around the preschool and share their experiences and work thus far.

## Parent Meetings

**Parents are asked to attend a mandatory information session before the first day of preschool, where the handbook will be discussed in detail and any questions can be answered.** Additionally, we are happy to book meetings with families throughout the year to discuss your child’s progress. We enjoy this opportunity to share information with you about your child at preschool, but also for us to hear feedback and gather information about your child in their family life.

## Attendance

Your child will benefit the most from this program if they arrive on time. This will allow them to participate in all activities and to become a strong member of the group. While recognizing that appointments or unforeseen circumstances come up, we ask that families make every effort to adhere to the daily schedule.

*Drop-off time* is between 8:15 and 9:15. Please arrive on time. If you need to be late because of an appointment, please let us know. We strongly discourage later arrivals and will not accept arrivals later than 10 (except for scheduled appointments), as this is disruptive to the whole group.

*Pick-up time* is between 2:45 and 3:30. If you want to check in with the teachers about your child’s day, please arrive before 3:30 as *The Gardens* closes promptly at 3:30, with teachers leaving to pick up their own children. Please ensure you are here on time. Late pickups will result in phone calls to alternative caregivers as well as additional fees ($1 per minute – that’s $60/hour).

Only parents or guardians listed in your Pick Up Authorization Form will be allowed to pick up your child. No child will be allowed to leave with anyone else unless specific permission has been given.

If your child will not be attending due to illness, travel or any other reason, please let us know by phone, text or email. If your child is not attending due to a communicable illness, please let us know immediately.

## Birthdays

Birthdays are a big deal to preschool children and we are happy to celebrate with them. Families are welcome to send their child with a treat to share with the whole group and we will happily sing and celebrate alongside your child during snack time or lunchtime. We ask that families remember food allergies and send only snacks that can be enjoyed by all the children.

We welcome the distribution of birthday invitations for parties if the whole group is being invited. We know this is a LOT to facilitate and many families prefer celebrations to be more low-key. If you are inviting just a few friends from the group, we ask that you make these arrangements away from the preschool. This is easy to do, as you will have each other’s contact information (if you’ve given permission to do so). This will prevent a lot of sad feelings! Thank you for your help with this.

Adventurous play

Current research clearly supports the importance of children engaging in adventurous play. Adventurous play not only promotes children’s gross motor development such as balance and coordination, it also supports the healthy development of self-confidence, risk assessment, resilience and much more. At *The Gardens*, we provide children with opportunities to engage in adventurous play in the following (thought not limited to) ways:

* climbing rocks
* climbing trees
* climbing and sliding on steep hills (no sleds)
* jumping
* balancing on fallen logs
* bushwhacking
* building and playing in tree forts
* pond play
* cold/wet weather

In addition to our regularly scheduled outdoor time, we also engage in small group forest walks. Your child will head out at least once per week for an extended outdoor time where the trails beyond the preschool will be explored. Through this time spent outdoors, we foster a connection to the land and gratitude to the keepers of the land who came before us.

Illness

## Sick Children

If your child is sick, please do not bring them to preschool. We offer a rich program and a sick child will find it difficult to join in. We do not have the staff to care for a sick child while also running an active group. Finally, a sick child at preschool almost always infects other children and staff, making it difficult for other families and, occasionally leading to preschool closures due to lack of available teachers. If your child becomes sick during the day, you will be contacted and asked to pick up your child. If you cannot be reached, your listed emergency contact will be contacted.

The children play outside daily and must be well enough to do so. The illness policy is in the best interests of all families and will be strictly enforced.

* If your child has a severe cough or runny nose that is in the contagious phase or impacts their ability to participate in the program, we ask that you keep them home
* If your child has been vomiting or has had diarrhea, we ask that they remain at home for a minimum of 24 hours, symptom free, before returning to preschool.
* If your child has a fever, we ask that they stay home until the fever has broken (children with fevers do not have the energy to keep up with our program).
* If your child has a contagious or spreadable condition (e.g. impetigo, strep throat, scabies, worms, lice), we ask that your child stay home until the condition has been medically cleared as no longer contagious/spreadable.

This list is meant to cover some of the more commonly experienced preschool illnesses but is certainly not exhaustive. We will keep all families up to date with health issues impacting our program.

## Sick Staff

*The Gardens* is a small business. We will make reasonable efforts to hire substitute teachers in the event that regular staff are unavailable, due to emergencies or sickness. It is not always possible to guarantee substitute teachers and preschool may close for up to seven days during the course of one year without financial reimbursement. Every attempt to contact you in advance will be made in the event of such a closure. Keeping sick children at home will help limit the number of days we are closed due to illness.

## Prescription Medication

If your child needs to take prescription medication during preschool hours, a medical consent form must be completed by a parent or guardian. The medication must be handed directly to one of the teachers. All medications must be provided in its original box or bottle, and be clearly identified with your child’s name and dosage. The teacher will administer the dosage that is indicated on the prescription label. Please note that the first dose must have been administered at home, to ensure that there is no allergic reaction.

## Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, injury or illness, the preschool will not hesitate to seek proper care for a child. It is imperative that emergency contact information be kept up to date. If there are any changes during the year, please inform the preschool teachers immediately. In the case of an emergency, the child’s parents will be informed as soon as possible. If the parents are not reachable, the emergency contact person will be called.

In the case of an evacuation, we will take the children to All Paws Veterinary Clinic (9 Metropolit Lane). Parents will be contacted and asked to pick up their child at this location if necessary.

## Cold Weather Policy

We continue to enjoy outdoor playtime every day. We will use our discretion about going out in extreme weather depending on how protected the yard is. In extremely cold weather, we may only head out for a few minutes for a quick runaround, and we stick close by the preschool so that children can head inside as they get chilly or if their faces become red.

What to Bring

## Lunch and Snack

Please ensure that your child brings a machine washable water bottle and a healthy snack and lunch each day, preferably in reusable packaging to limit garbage. Snacks, lunches and bottles should be labeled. Meals must contain foods from the four food groups, as set out in the Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating (at least two food groups in a snack). Please keep juice boxes, processed foods and food containing high sugar content at home. *The Gardens* will supplement meals when needed, and will contact families to plan for future meals.

#### Allergies

At the beginning of each preschool year, the teachers will advise families of any severe allergies that are experienced by any of *The Gardens* children or staff. We do ask that you avoid sending any foods containing any indicated allergens to preschool.

## Clothing

Please send your child to preschool in clothes that are play appropriate: comfortable, non-restrictive and washable, as we do participate in messy play. Each child needs

* One pair of indoor shoes or slippers (labeled and should stay at preschool)
* Labeled outdoor clothing (be prepared for changing weather as we get outside every day).
* A cloth bag with one change of clothes (labeled and should stay at preschool)

## Comfort Item

Your child may bring ONE comfort toy to use at quiet time, if wanted (e.g. a blanket, stuffed animal).

#### Toys

We ask parents to please explain to their child that toys are to stay in their car or at home. Children are not allowed to bring toys into the preschool. However, books or other educational material that may be of interest to all of the students are welcome in the preschool. Please ensure such items are labeled with your child’s name.

Guidance: Working with Big Feelings

At *The Gardens*, we recognize that preschool aged children can easily be overwhelmed by big feelings, such as excitement, anxiety or anger. Developing skills to handle these feelings in a productive way can be complex, even for adults. As such, we endeavor to understand every child’s emotional life – to attune deeply to what he/she may be experiencing so that we can offer both *empathy* and *guidance*.

*Empathy* requires connected relationships to each child so that big feelings are met with compassion and non-judgmental inquiry. Every child’s feelings are considered valid and informative. We seek information about their feelings in order to better understand the child’s emotional experience. With that understanding, we may provide optimal guidance when necessary, so that all feelings can be expressed in non-harmful ways.

We provide daily *guidance* on how to handle uncomfortable feelings through our curriculum. We establish a language that clearly identifies different emotional states, recognizes the universality of emotion and teaches non-harmful ways to handle uncomfortable feelings as they arise. We teach this daily, during circle, when everyone is calm and attentive. We can only implement non-harmful strategies during big feelings if we have had previous learning.

We strive to create an environment that supports self-regulation. Beyond curriculum, there are many strategies we use during the day to establish a calm environment, with nooks for the children to engage in an activity, make contact with a teacher (e.g. have a hug) or maintain some personal space.

When a child is behaving in a way that is disruptive, teachers will first ensure the safety of that child, the group and the preschool environment. We generally have enough teachers on board to offer one-on-one assistance during these times, always staying in close proximity with the child until he/she is ready to reconnect with the teacher and then with the group. We value team collaboration when children are struggling with regulating big emotions. Through collaboration we develop understanding compassion and clear strategies for working with each individual child.

Confidentiality

At *The Gardens*, we respect the privacy of the families we work with. We recognize the importance of providing a service to families in a respectful and supportive manner and strive to ensure that communications between home and preschool are kept in confidence and handled with sensitivity. However, if we feel a child is at risk of harm, we must take appropriate steps as mandated by law. We are required by law to report suspected or disclosed abuse and will do so according to the Child Care Act. Under Part 7, section 37, “Any person providing a child care program or a person employed by a person providing a child care program, who has reasonable grounds to believe that a child enrolled in the program may be a child who is abused, neglected or otherwise in need of protection within the meaning of the *Children’s Act* shall immediately report the information on which they base their belief to the director, an agent of the director, or a peace officer.” (Childcare Act, 2002, p. 18)

Our Commitment to our Students

At *The Gardens*, we commit to providing a space for children where their voice will be heard. We value children not just for their potential as they grow, but for whom they are right now, citizens in their own right. Our program provides a democratic space where each child’s thoughts and feelings are recognized as valid and important. We teach our students to be mindful of themselves and of others, recognizing that when children understand the mind-body connection they are better able to regulate emotions and understand the perspective of others. We commit to ensuring that each child that walks through our doors feels that this is their space, that they have a say in what and how we learn, and that they feel safe, secure and valued for their individual skills, knowledge and unique perspectives.

Working with Early Childhood Educators

*The Gardens* is a learning centre not only for young children, but also for pre-service early childhood educators. Each year we have college and university students come in to *The Gardens* for observation visits and field placements, and some of our teaching team also teach classes at Yukon University’s Early Learning and Child Care program.

Consent to Share Photos

As a learning centre, we often use photos and/or videos of the children for educational purposes at Yukon University as well as for workshops or other professional development opportunities we offer. We also post photos of children and/or environments on social media in hopes of collaborating and inspiring with other early learning centres. Finally, we send photos of children home to our registered families each Friday in hopes that they will support our children in sharing stories of their week with their families. Please see the photo consent form and do let us know if you have any questions.

Early Learning At The Gardens Website

For more information about the curriculums and pedagogies we use, please see our website at [www.earlylearningatthegardens.com](http://www.earlylearningatthegardens.com) .

School Calendar for 2021/2022

**First day of preschool**: Monday, August 22nd

**Last day of preschool**: Tuesday, June 20th

**Preschool Closures**

Labor Day: September 5th

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation September 30

Thanksgiving: October 10th

Remembrance Day: November 11th

Christmas Holidays: December 19th – January 2rd inclusive

Heritage Day: February 24th

March Break: March 13th – 24th inclusive

Good Friday: April 7th

Easter Monday: April 10th

Victoria Day: May 22nd

Aboriginal Day: June 21st

**Professional Development Days**:

To be determined