



Early Learning  
at **THE GARDENS**

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Cultivating Wonder, Joy and Discover in the Early Years

Family Handbook

2024 - 2025

## Philosophy

At The Gardens, we embrace the boundless curiosity and innate potential of every child. Our curriculum is thoughtfully designed to align with their interests, guiding our daily activities with their development in mind. Our learning environment is set up specifically to meet the developmental needs of the children. We offer open-ended toys and materials that encourage children to explore and interact in ways that align with their individual interests and perspectives. We understand the importance of providing opportunities for both large and small group activities, energetic play, and quiet moments away from larger groups. Our preschool is carefully crafted to accommodate and support each of these experiences.

Central to our philosophy is the cultivation of kindness and a strong sense of community, where respect for all individuals is fundamental. 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.

We are dedicated to creating a peaceful atmosphere that warmly welcomes children, where their voices are heard. Our teachers are committed to building a cohesive community, celebrating each child's unique strengths and contributions while promoting self-esteem, familial bonds, and cultural heritage. We prioritize nurturing connections among families, educators, and the broader community, believing these relationships are integral to a child's holistic growth. Above all, our mission is to instill a profound love for learning in every child, ensuring they embark on their journey of discovery with confidence and joy.

## Schedule

Early Learning at the Gardens offers a program for children ages 3-5 that runs continuously from August-June, Monday to Friday, 8:15-3:30 pm. We also offer an optional summer program for the remaining months. We are closed for:

- All Canadian statutory holidays
- Two weeks over the Christmas holidays, according to the Whitehorse school calendar.
- The first week of March break which is the same as the school calendar (we only close for one week).
- We will provide up to four PD days per year. We will inform families of PD days with at least one month's notice.
- Up to seven emergency closures (please see section on illness for more information).

## The Daily Routine

- 8:15-8:45 **Welcome:** We begin each day by greeting the children and their families as they arrive, encouraging them to get ready by hanging up their outdoor clothes and putting their lunch and snacks away.
- 8:45-11:00 **Play:** As teachers, we set the stage for the children's free play engagement. Open-ended materials are provided, and the environment is prepared to reflect the children's needs and interests. We recognize the importance of giving children ample time to explore their interests without unnecessary disruption. During this time, children are encouraged to take breaks to have snacks.
- 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 the 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.
- 12:00-12:45 **Lunch:** This is an excellent time for group engagement as we sit and eat together.
- 12:45-2:00 **Outdoor play:** We take a chance each day to enjoy the great outdoors. We encourage families to dress their children appropriately to ensure that we enjoy outdoor physical activities.
- 2:00- 3:00 **Quiet Play:** During this time, children will engage in quiet activities. They can eat snacks, rest their bodies, or engage in arts and other activities. We provide mats and storybooks to the children during quiet time to encourage a thirty-minute "wind down." Soft music is played during this time, and the children are reminded to rest and relax their bodies. Different activities will also be provided if the child just likes to relax.
- 3:00-3:20 **Closing circle and Dismissal:** We come together as a large group to close our day inside the preschool. We gently "wake up our bodies" through a mindful routine. We then allow the children to choose two or three significant group movement songs and end with a recall time. Our recall includes reflecting on our day, discussing favorite parts, making connections, and setting intentions for the following day.

**Snack and Lunch** During snack time, children can choose what and when they eat. There is no specific snack time, and they are allowed to eat in the morning between 8:45 and 10:30 and in the evening between 2 and 3. The teacher encourages them to eat if they feel the child needs a snack. During lunch, we like to eat together as a big group, so we encourage you to pack healthy food and be aware of the allergies in the classroom.

**Nap and Toileting** We do not encourage everyone to sleep, but if you think your child would benefit from a nap, please mention it so we can accommodate as much as possible. We

do not have a diaper station, so diapering would not be possible. We will help your child in the bathroom if they need extra assistance.

**Dismissal** Our center closes at 3:30 p.m. Families are encouraged to pick up their child between 3:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.

## Curriculum

At *The Gardens*, the teachers form a multi-disciplinary team. In 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, ongoing, 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, baking and outdoor exploration. This is a child-led program, meaning each child's interests are explored and incorporated into every aspect of our daily routine. For more information about some of the specific programs we draw from to create our unique 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 in March/April. We will host an open house in March where the children can see the space and get to know their teachers. Enrollment 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 the whole school year

Registration will occur within specified time frames. A non-refundable deposit of \$315, which will be considered the first month's fee, along with the completed registration package will be required for enrollment.

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 waitlist may be contacted at that time.

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

## Withdrawals

Sometimes, unforeseen circumstances lead to changes; occasionally, a family must withdraw from the program. We require written notice of withdrawal before the first day of 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 on 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 ongoing attendance is not in the child's or the learning center'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

The fees will be \$315 per month. Tuition may be paid in full on or before September 1st or in ten equal installments as follows:

- \$315 non-refundable deposit upon enrolment (month's fees).

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 [elatthegardens@gmail.com](mailto:elatthegardens@gmail.com).

When a child enrolls 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 enrollment.

## Preschool Community

### Family Involvement

*The Gardens* is a family-based program. Every child's potential is greater when families and teachers collaborate to provide consistent care. We 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, say goodbye in the boot room, allow us to welcome their child into the preschool, and help them adjust to our program and each other. After this initial adjustment period, parents will be encouraged to attend or participate in group activities as available. Family events will occur over the year, to which you will be provided an invitation with plenty of notice.

## **Communication**

We send out regular 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 throughout the week. We hope families will take the time over the weekend to look at the pictures with their preschoolers to evoke stories and experiences from their 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**

We invite parents to an open house at *The Gardens* early in the fall. 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, during which 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 become a vital group member. While recognizing that appointments or unforeseen circumstances arise, we ask that families make every effort to adhere to the daily schedule.

*Drop-off time* is between 8:15 and 8:45. Please arrive on time. Please let us know if you need to be late because of an appointment. We strongly discourage late arrivals and will only accept arrivals up to 10 (except for scheduled appointments), as this disrupts the whole group.

*Pick-up time* is between 3:00 and 3:30. If you want to check in with the teachers about your child's day, please arrive before 3:30. *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 in your Pickup Authorization Form will be allowed to pick up your child. Children can only leave with someone else if specific permission has been given.

If your child will not attend due to illness, travel, or other reasons, please let us know by phone, text, or email. Please let us know if your child is not attending due to a communicable illness.

## Birthdays

Birthdays are a big deal for 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 all the children can enjoy.

We welcome the distribution of birthday invitations for parties if the whole group is invited. We know this is a LOT to facilitate, and many families prefer celebrations to be more low-key. If you invite 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 permitted). This will prevent a lot of sad feelings! Thank you for your help with this.

## Adventurous Play

Current research supports the importance of children engaging in adventurous play. Adventurous play promotes children's gross motor development, such as balance and coordination, and 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 (though 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; a sick child will struggle to join in. We do not have the staff to care for a sick child while running an active group. Finally, a sick child at preschool almost always infects other children and staff, making it difficult for different families and, occasionally, leading to preschool closures due to a lack of available teachers. If

your child becomes sick during the day, you will be contacted and asked to pick up your child. Your listed emergency contact will be contacted if you are still waiting to be reached.

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 at least 24 hours, symptom-free, before returning to preschool.
- If your child has a fever, we ask that they stay home until it 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 if regular staff are unavailable due to emergencies or sickness. It is only sometimes possible to guarantee substitute teachers, and the preschool may close for up to seven days during one year without financial reimbursement. Every attempt will be made to contact you in advance in case of such a closure. Keeping sick children at home will help limit the days we are closed due to illness.

### **Prescription Medication**

If your child needs to take prescription medication during preschool hours, a parent or guardian must complete a medical consent form. The medication must be handed directly to one of the teachers. All medications must be provided in their original box or bottle and clearly identified with your child's name and dosage. The teacher will administer the dosage 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 an emergency, injury or illness, the preschool will not hesitate to seek proper care for a child. Emergency contact information must be kept up to date. Please inform the preschool teachers immediately if there are any changes during the year. In the case of an emergency, the child's parents will be notified as soon as possible. The emergency contact person will be called if the parents are not reachable.



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 when 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 to 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 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 should contain foods from the four food groups, as set out in Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating (at least two food groups in a snack). We promote healthy living and eating habits and encourage you to avoid sending high-sugar foods.

### **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 ask that you avoid sending foods containing any indicated allergens to preschool.

### **Clothing**

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

- One pair of indoor shoes (labeled and should stay at preschool).
- Labeled outdoor clothing (be prepared for changing weather as we get outside daily).
- 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 a quiet time if wanted (e.g., a blanket or stuffed animal).

### **Toys**

We ask parents to explain to their children that toys should stay in their car or at home. Children are not allowed to bring toys into the preschool. However, books or other educational materials that may interest all 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 productively 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 with each child so that big feelings are met with compassion and nonjudgmental inquiry. All children's feelings are considered valid and informative. We seek information about their feelings 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.

Through our curriculum, we provide daily guidance on how to handle uncomfortable feelings. 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 a circle when everyone is calm and attentive.

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

When a child behaves disruptively, teachers 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 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 an understanding of compassion and clear strategies for working with each 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. We strive to ensure that communications between home and preschool are confidential 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 Student

At *The Gardens*, we are committed to providing a space for children where their voices will be heard. We value children not just for their potential as they grow but for who they are now: citizens in their own right. We teach our students to be mindful of themselves and others, realizing that when children understand the mind-body connection, they can better regulate emotions and understand the perspective of others. We commit to ensuring that each child who 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 and secure.

## 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, college and university students come to *The Gardens* for observation visits and field placements.

## Consent to Share Photos

As a learning centre, we take photos of the children and/or environment and post them on social media and our website in hopes of collaborating and inspiring other early learning centres. Finally, we send photos of children home to our registered families in hopes that they will support the 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 our curriculums and pedagogies, please see our website at [www.earlylearningatthegardens.com](http://www.earlylearningatthegardens.com).

**First day of Preschool:**

**Monday, August 26<sup>th</sup>**

**Last day of Preschool:**

**Friday, June 13<sup>th</sup>**

### Preschool Closures (2024-2025)

Labor Day:

September 2<sup>nd</sup>

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation:

September 30<sup>th</sup>

Thanksgiving:

October 14<sup>th</sup>

Remembrance Day:

November 11<sup>th</sup>

Christmas Holidays:

December 20<sup>th</sup> – January 3<sup>rd</sup>

Heritage Day:

February 21<sup>st</sup>

March Break:

March 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>

Good Friday:

April 18<sup>th</sup>

Easter Monday:

April 21<sup>st</sup>

Victoria Day:

May 19<sup>th</sup>

Aboriginal Day:

June 21<sup>st</sup>

### Professional Development Days

To be determined.