



Morning Garden Family Handbook

2025–2026

(updated 8/30/2025)



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Daily Rhythm & Program Description

Just as rhythm is important in sustaining our bodies and the world around us, so it is an integral part of the Morning Garden structure. Our classes have a consistent daily rhythm which helps the children to feel secure and know what will happen next, thus freeing them up to play. We also incorporate the rhythm of the seasons into our activities and stories.

Daily Rhythms

Each class in Morning Garden has a unique schedule based on the developmental needs of the various age groups; however, many similar elements are present in each Morning Garden class rhythm.

Arrival and Outdoor Play

Tidy up play yard

Walk inside/Take off coats & put on indoor shoes

Snack

Free play/project & work time/Quiet observation

Circle Time and Puppetry

Storybook Time (Redbuds only)

Dress to go outside/outdoor play time (Saplings and Redbuds only)

Goodbye song

Arrival and Outdoor Play

Morning Garden classes begin and end outdoors in the Mulberry play yard. We play outside year-round unless it is raining heavily or extremely cold. This is a wonderful way for the children to experience the same area through the seasons; to see the leaves turn crimson on a tree, fall to the ground, then reappear; to see the bulbs they planted in the fall sprout and bloom in spring; and in winter, to ride on sleds where they had only recently been pulling their friends along in the wagon.

In the case of inclement weather, class will begin inside. We will hang a sign on the play yard gate to indicate this change.

As rhythm is so important for young children, please make every effort to arrive on time for class so that your child can experience the complete morning.

Walk to the Classroom

When our outdoor time ends and we put our toys away, we will take a short walk through the school grounds to our classroom. Please be mindful that we must cross the driveway, so it is important that you hold your child's hand and do not allow them to run ahead. Once in our room, coats and bags can be hung up in our shared cubbies, and both children and adults change into indoor shoes or warm slippers. Once we are in the room, we will all wash our hands.

Snack Time

Once we have washed hands and are all seated at the table we will light the candles and sing a simple blessing. Then it's time to eat! Washcloths and a bowl of warm lavender water are used to gently wash the children's hands and faces before they begin their play. Children who are finished after the candle has been snuffed may get up and play, while those who are still eating may continue to do so.

Learning to sit for a meal can sometimes take time. We strive to have the children stay at the table while the candles are lit, and if they leave the table we gently encourage them to rejoin us. Please do not allow your child to take snack foods away from the table and eat them elsewhere in the room. **We do not expect children to say please and thank you at the table at such a young age.**

Free Play / Project and Work Time

A lot happens during this time period! This is when the children have time for unstructured, self-directed play. We encourage you to allow your child to explore freely around the room, letting them explore, play, sit and watch others, or join in biscuit making or other work being done in the room, as they choose.

Some adults and children will help with clearing off the tables and sweeping the floor. A few children (with adult supervision) will want to wash bowls at the water table, while heavily soiled and breakable dishes will need to be washed in the sink. (All of the dishes we use are sanitized daily, as are table tops.)

At the same time, some adults/children may be involved in a seasonal project, painting, coloring, or in the "work of the room." This work might be watering the plants, folding the laundry, doing the dishes, ironing our napkins, etc. The children are always welcome to help the adults with their tasks if they choose, and this imitative behavior is encouraged.

Quiet Observation Time

Once we have settled into our class rhythm, we will set aside a few minutes of our work/play time for quietly observing the children. This will allow you, the parents, to simply sit back and watch what the children are doing. During this time, I will ask adults to refrain from talking with one another, allowing us all to surround the children with our loving interest. If your child needs you, you may of course quietly attend to them, but we will try to give them the space to play without interruption. We may be surprised at what we notice when observing the children in this way!

Circle/Puppetry Time

A song will let everyone know that it is time to gather for songs and nursery rhymes. We sing the same songs and verses for about four weeks, as children are nurtured by familiarity and thrive on repetition.

Coming together and singing songs or sitting for a puppet story is a new experience for most children, and some may not be ready to participate right away. If your child is noisy or running about, you may sit nearby with them and watch the circle. We ask that if they are unable to be in the circle/puppet story gathering that the parent works to minimize the distraction of your child's absence. If the child's behavior is escalating please leave the room and take a walk in the hallway.

Final Clean Up of Room

When the teacher sings the clean-up song and starts picking things up, the adults may join in, encouraging the children to help as they can. They will usually need a specific task, such as "please take

this block to the block basket,” or “you may tuck this dolly into bed,” etc. This is a complete clean-up of the entire room. We need to put everything back in its place!

Story Book Time (Redbuds only)

We will bring storybooks to the Redbuds class weekly. Picture books are important to this age group not only for literacy development, but also to help children see reflections of themselves as well as images of others who may be different from them in some way. If you feel so inclined, please bring a book from home or the library that your child enjoys. Simply let me know ahead of time so I can be prepared. We love using books as a way to celebrate children’s lives, interests and identities. Also if there is a special holiday your family is celebrating, we welcome your stories!

Going Outside / Outdoor Play / Good-bye Song (Saplings and Redbuds only)

After the story we put on our outdoor clothing and boots and walk together to the play yard. (Again, please be mindful that we must cross the driveway and parking lot to get there, so it is important that you or another adult hold your child’s hand). Outside time is a great place for parents to socialize while inside time your children might need more attention and support. Just before noon we will tidy up the play yard, come together in a circle and sing a short good-bye song.

Suggestions for Parents

Parent’s Role in the Classroom

With all of the activity, it is easy to get caught up in work or conversation, but we do ask that each parent remain attentive to and responsible for their child. **Please be conscious of the tone and volume you bring to the environment and its effect on the group. Outside time is a great time for adults to socialize with one another, while inside time should remain a time where the focus is on the child’s experience.**

We want to ensure that materials are used appropriately: for example, we build with blocks (we do not throw them!). Also, conflicts between children will arise occasionally, so it is important that parents (and teachers) keep an eye out so that we can keep everyone safe. Behaviors such as hitting and pushing are not unusual in children of this age. Sometimes children are able to resolve little tussles on their own, and it is important that they have the opportunity to do so, as this helps them build resilience.

If we intervene in every situation, the children will not learn the skills they need to navigate the world. There are times, however, when an adult does need to intervene. It can be helpful to first acknowledge the situation: “I see that you both want to play with that truck. Let’s get another one.” Sometimes redirection can also be helpful: “You may come help me cut the apples now.”

Most young children do not know how to share or take turns at this age. However, if we model appropriate responses to conflict and allow them some space to work things out on their own, they will learn these social skills in time.

If a child becomes upset or disruptive it is fine to take them out of the room for a few minutes until they have calmed down. You may feel embarrassed or shameful if your child is expressing emotions or being

defiant, but please understand that we know the child's expression of feeling and their will is developmentally appropriate. **Ask the teacher if you need help discerning what the boundary should be in a situation.** It is important to me that I respect the authority of the parent and the relationship between parent and child. I am cautious to intervene while parents are present unless I am invited to do so (except for safety reasons), so **please ask if you need support.**

Free Play

If we allow the children to play and explore freely we are nurturing one of their greatest gifts: their imagination. While the children are playing we try not to direct their play or to help them when they do not need help. We also strive not to interrupt the flow of play by asking them questions about what they are doing, or asking them to come out of play to help with a project. We want the children to have the opportunity to develop their social skills, so we encourage parents not to sit and play with them for extended periods of time unless necessary. Also, please be aware that at this young age many children will play by themselves or "side by side," as they are not yet developmentally ready to engage in interactive play with others.

Imitation and Work of the Room

Young children are completely given over to their physical surroundings; they absorb and imitate everything that they encounter in their environment. It is very important that what children see and hear be worthy of imitation. By having parents do work in the room, we are not trying to have you do our menial chores. The main purpose is to be doing a task, no matter how trivial, with care and reverence, in order to be a model of meaningful activity for the children. Children love to assist with tasks and often a child will come over to you and want to help, and we gently and patiently encourage this help. They may just want to watch, and that is fine too. We've found that if our hands are busy with a project, room work or handwork, we can often observe our children while we work and talk quietly with the other adults.

Media Policy for Early Childhood Programs

A media-free childhood is a gift for the young child and maximizes their greatest potential. Research and educators outside the Waldorf movement have observed that television, computer usage, movies, phones, and other popular media can have strong unfavorable effects on children. Electronic media interferes with children's ability to learn, play, and socialize.

As a school, we view electronic media and digital technology as useful tools that older students and adults can use to support efficient and productive work. With this in mind, we strongly encourage families to work with and have open communication about the following recommended guidelines.

For families in early childhood, we request that parents eliminate media exposure from the daily experience of the young child, including on weekends. We acknowledge that this is an ideal to strive for and not an easy task in our day and time. As teachers of your children, we are committed to supporting parents with the transition to a media-free home environment."

Additional Information for Parents

Parking

Unfortunately, we are *no longer* able to offer parking on campus as we did in prior years. This driveway area off Winebiddle is our fire lane and must be clear at all times.

Alternative parking is available on Coral St. as well as along Penn Ave. Please be aware that much of S. Winebiddle and S. Evaline is only 1 hour parking for those without a residential permit.

Indoor Shoes and Clothing

Please bring indoor shoes for yourself and your child to wear while in the classroom. Our floors are tile and can be cold - as well as slippery. Socks alone will not be sufficient. Also, to comply with fire code regulations, we are to have “shoes” with a sole on at all times.

Our room temperature varies, so it's a good idea to layer clothing, especially during the colder months. As we spend a portion of each class day outside, please come prepared for the weather so that both you and your child can enjoy our time in the play yard. For much of the year the play yard can be muddy, so we highly recommend rain pants and rubber boots. Snowsuits are a necessity in the winter time, along with hats, mittens and warm boots.

Caregivers

Any loving caregivers are also welcome to bring your child. What is important is that the caregiver be someone who has warmth and love for the child. We recommend that the caregiver be consistent and have an interest in participating in the class. Our classroom fills up quickly, so we ask for only one adult per child per day, please.

Siblings

Babies and younger siblings are always welcome to come to our parent-child classes. Please note that once a younger sibling is 18 months old he or she will be counted as an enrolled member of the class and an additional tuition payment may be required. If older siblings are off school on a day that we meet, they are welcome to come visit. We do ask that you please inform the teacher in advance.

Cell Phones and Leaving the Room

Morning Garden class time provides us with a special opportunity to focus on being with the children, so we ask that you please refrain from using cell phones in the classroom and in the play yard. If you need to make a call or send an email, etc., please ask another adult to keep an eye on your child and step out into the hallway for a few moments. **It's uncomfortable for me to do, but I will say something if I feel a phone is being overused.**

Snack

We use (mostly) organic ingredients for snack, and purchase organic fruit whenever possible. If your child has any food allergies that we should be aware of, please let us know. Our recipes can be adjusted if needed with advance notice.

Birthdays/Holidays

We honor children's birthdays in a simple, gentle way during snack time. We sing a special song as we light a candle for the birthday child. Then in our quieter voices we all sing “Happy Birthday.”

If your family celebrates a special holiday and you'd like to bring some elements to celebrate with the group, please reach out so we can find a way to share in the celebration together.

Peanut Free Room

Our classroom is a peanut-free area. Please do not bring any snacks or other food containing peanuts into the classroom. Please have your child change clothes if peanut butter is spilled on them during breakfast at home.

Bathrooms and Diapering

Please feel free to use the bathroom whenever the need arises. There is a visitor's bathroom located to the right of the large staircase. There is a diaper changing table in the handicapped accessible bathroom located down the hallway behind the staircase, and there are additional children's bathrooms at the end of that hall and to the left.

Illness and Absence

If your child is not feeling well, please keep them at home where they can be given the extra care and attention they need. If a child has been running a fever, they should not return to school until they have been fever-free for 24 hours. The same 24-hour rule also applies to symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea.

We appreciate knowing if you are not going to be able to make it to class. If possible, please call the school's front office and they will relay your message to the teachers. You may also email Teacher Beth directly.

Snow Delay or Cancellation

If the Waldorf School is closed we do not have class. If the school has a 2-hour delay we DO have class and will start in our room at 10:00. All families should have registered to receive school notifications when they enrolled online. Cancellations and delays are also announced on local TV stations. Please contact the Front Office with any questions.

Fire Drills

The school has a fire drill once a month in compliance with state regulations. If one takes place while we are in class, our procedure is to leave the room immediately, exit the front door and walk out to the sidewalk in front of the school. Please do not take the time to get coats, outdoor shoes, etc. If you are not in the room when the fire drill occurs, please exit through the nearest door.

Morning Garden Parent Library

We have a small collection of books on Waldorf Education, parenting and family life that may be checked out for two weeks at a time. Please use the provided sign out sheet (on the clipboard) to check out books and mark when they have been returned. The library is available only to parents enrolled in the Morning Garden classes.

Transition Information (Redbuds only)

The Transition

“Each time my children transition I feel the growing pains of transitioning into the new parent they need. Adjusting to the new them and the new me is exciting, confusing, and even sad. I remind myself I can change, grow, and be flexible. I can offer each of us abundant grace.”

-Janelle Scales

Our transition begins in early November. A few weeks before that we will tell a “Transition Story” during story time. In November we will start a two-step process to help the children adjust to being in the class without their parents. First, parents will stay with the class while we are outside, and will enter the school with their child. After helping them with their indoor shoes and taking them to the bathroom, the parents will say good-bye. The following week, parents will say their good-byes in the play yard. Transitions can be difficult for some. We know that parent and teacher confidence can help instill a sense of well-being for the children. We also know that with say goodbye can come tears and we allow all feelings to be expressed and with a hug and a kiss goodbye, children are often feeling happier within minutes of saying goodbye.

Parent/Teacher Conference (Redbuds only)

Parents in the Transition Class will have the opportunity to meet with the teacher for a conference prior to the transition in late October and again in March. This gives us a chance to individually share observations about how the child is doing at home and at school, discuss their development, and address any concerns as needed. Please do not hesitate to talk with the teacher about any questions or concerns you may have at any time during the year.