



GUIDELINES FOR FAMILIES

“The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right. “

– United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child

“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul.”

– Friedrich Froebel

“Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along grass-stained sleeves to the heart. If we are going to save environmentalism and the environment, we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.”

— Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*

PHILOSOPHY/ ABOUT:

Children learn most through exploration of their environment. A multi-sensory environment rich in sights, sounds and textures, both soothing and stimulating, nurtures a child's creativity and sense of self-worth.

Seedschool achieves this environment by featuring:

Holistic, self-directed, project-based learning

A child and family centered approach to early learning – parents are always welcome to participate and observe

A multi-age group: 4ish – 9ish years – preschool to lower elementary/ homeschool

Peer mentoring

Low teacher: child ratio

Extensive outdoor exploration in all seasons

Farming and gardening activities

Caring for classroom pets – chickens, seasonal caterpillars, and other friends

Life skills such as handcrafts and meal preparation

Toys and materials for learning, powered by children, made of natural materials with minimal plastic

Recognizing that each child is an individual who experiences life in a unique way, Seedschool is guided by the wisdom of a variety of educational theories and principles:

*Emergent Curriculum / Project approach

*The Reggio Emilia approach

*Sudbury Valley School approach

*The theories of Rudolph Steiner / Waldorf Education

*The teachings of Friedrich Froebel

*The theories of Maria Montessori

*Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

*Developmentally Appropriate Practices (NAEYC)

*Relationship / Attachment based care

* We believe in the spirit of the one room schoolhouse – a classroom community of mentoring and cooperation between preschool and lower elementary/ homeschool age children.

All children are accepted at Seedschool without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national or ethnic origin, gender identity, or physical or emotional need. We will make every effort to meet the needs of all children enrolled in our program.

DAILY ROUTINE:

Note that this is a *routine* rather than a *schedule*. There are not specified times and durations for activities. We will follow the elements of this routine each school day in order to provide the comfort that many children receive from predictability. What this routine lacks is the strict structure often found in school environments. If children are absorbed in an activity, stopping suddenly to move on to something unrelated can disrupt the learning process. The children may need more time to complete an activity and that is okay.

* *Gathering and Classroom Exploration:* arrivals and greetings, reconnecting with friends, free choice activities – we offer a wide variety of materials in our classroom such as books, puzzles, games, Legos, wooden blocks, the kitchen/restaurant/farmers market, classroom animals, and many open-ended art materials.

* *Outdoor Exploration:* may include walking, exploring, collecting, observation, journaling/ documentation (with photos, drawings and writing as able) of plant and animal species, dog park observation and documentation, tree climbing, maintaining a seasonal farm garden, Mud Kitchen exploration, snack and storytime under the trees

* *Projects:* Our program is built around project based learning. These activities may happen inside or outside, and may involve both individual and collaborative projects. See the heading *Project Based Learning* below for more details.

* *Tidying up:* adults will help children with this task, neither commanding, nor doing it for them

* *Mealtime:* Food is an important ingredient in learning. The children will manage their own simple preparation of food brought from home; when there is food to harvest, we will share it together. We will discuss the colors and textures of the foods we have, what they are, how they grew and where they came from. See *Meals and Snacks* below for further information and guidelines.

* *Quiet time:* rest, reading, and quiet play after lunch

* *Projects and outdoor exploration:* continued in afternoon

* *Gathering:* reading, discussion, observations of the day, departure



CONTACT:

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School happens at:

Central Commons Church

4711 Westside Dr

Dallas, TX 75209

SESSIONS/ CLOSINGS

* School hours are 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, Monday through Thursday. There is no school on Fridays.

* Summer school hours are 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM (June and July).

* Seedschool is in session September through May, with summer session for June and July. There is no school in August.

* We will be closed for the following breaks (generally following Dallas ISD calendar):

Fall/ Thanksgiving (full week of Thanksgiving holiday)

Winter (late December through early January)

Spring (mid-March)

Summer (full week of Memorial Day holiday and full month of August)

*Additional days off will be announced prior to the start of the school year in September.

* Inclement weather closings will be communicated via the family group text. If the forecast temperature will not exceed 32° F for the day, school will be cancelled.


ATTENDANCE:

- * Please notify us by phone call or text of any changes to your child's attendance such as absence, delayed arrival or early pick up. If you will be late picking up your child, please let us know and make alternate arrangements if necessary. We understand that occasional delays happen, but please make every effort to pick up your child by 3:00 PM.
- * Your child will not be released to anyone without your written authorization. Alternate adults must be listed on your child's enrollment form. Please keep your list up to date. You may email a signed and dated letter of permission if you must send someone who is not on your list. If you plan to carpool, be sure all parents involved are listed on each other's forms.
- * We are obligated by state law to release children to biological parents unless we have a copy of a court order stating otherwise.
- * Your child will not be released to anyone under the age of eighteen.
- * All children must re-enroll in the summer for the coming school year and all forms on file must be updated. Returning children and siblings will have advanced opportunity to enroll prior to enrollment being opened to the public.

FINANCIAL:

- * *All tuition payments and fees are non-refundable.* While we are sympathetic to families' changes in circumstances, the school has financial obligations and therefore must deem all tuition and fees earned upon payment.
- * A \$275 enrollment fee is due with your enrollment form and annually upon re-enrollment.
- * Tuition payments are due on the 1st of each month for that month's attendance. Tuition will not be billed in arrears.
- * Any payment received after the 3rd will be assessed a late fee of \$30. If payment is not received by the 10th, an additional late fee of \$50 will be assessed.
- * If payment is not received by the 15th, your child's space in the program may be filled and return enrollment will be subject to space availability. Collection enforcement will be pursued for non-payment of tuition.
- * We will send a tuition invoice by email or text in advance of the first of each month. For your convenience, you may schedule automatic, recurring payments.
- * For accounting purposes, checks and cash are not accepted for tuition payments. Square keeps it neat and tidy!
- * Enrollment and tuition are based on the school year (September through May) and divided into equal monthly payments. Each tuition payment is the same regardless of the number of days in the month. Tuition will not be reduced for months with school holidays.
- * Tuition will not be reduced for days missed due to personal holidays, illness or inclement weather. If scheduling and enrollment space permit, these missed days may be made up. We are not obligated to provide make up days and all make up days must be used within the current term or forfeited (Fall: September through December, Spring: January through May, or Summer: June through July).
- * Enrollment is not month to month. It is anticipated that your child will attend through the school year. If your plans change, you must provide 30 days written notice of withdrawal from school. Without this notice, tuition payments will continue to be due with late fees added and collection enforcement pursued for non-payment.
- * Re-enrollment fees for the coming school year are due by August 1st.
- * Tuition is subject to increase prior to each school year.
- * If you are experiencing financial hardship, please talk to us about tuition assistance and scholarship opportunities. These opportunities are limited and are reserved for families in true financial need.

HEALTH/ ILLNESS / INJURY:

- * Please keep all health information up to date in your child's file, including chronic conditions and their treatments and known food or seasonal allergies. Please also include symptoms that might occur in an allergic reaction and physician's instructions for treatment.
- * If your child appears ill or is severely injured while at school, you will be notified immediately. Please arrange for your child to be picked up as soon as possible after receiving our call. If neither parent can be reached, an emergency contact will be notified; please keep this contact information up to date.
- * Teachers and staff members are certified in CPR and First Aid. Parent volunteers are encouraged to obtain certification.
- * Teachers or staff members will treat minor injuries such as cuts and bruises with all natural first aid products.
- * Because there are bees and other stinging insects in the great outdoors, we will keep on hand the Homeopathic remedy *Apis Mellifica*, a sublingual tablet which quickly reduces swelling and allergic reaction. You may indicate permission on your child's enrollment form for us to treat your child for minor injuries and insect stings. 

* In a life threatening emergency situation, the child will be transported by emergency vehicle to the nearest emergency facility, accompanied by a staff member or parent volunteer if available.

* If your child has incurred any injury away from school, please let us know and explain any necessary treatment.

* If it is possible that your child has been exposed to a communicable disease, please let us know so that we may be alert to symptoms and notify the other families. Likewise, if exposure has occurred at school, all families will be notified.

* Symptoms such as runny nose and cough are not present in a well child. If your child has *any* of the following, she may not attend school:

- thick or heavy nasal discharge
- persistent or hacking cough
- vomiting or diarrhea within past 24 hours
- fever within past 24 hours

Your child must be free of these symptoms *without the use of medications* in order to return to school. Most cold medications merely mask symptoms and the illness is still present in your child.

* Please make extra efforts to keep your family healthy. Eat plenty of fresh wholesome foods, avoid processed and artificial foods, drink lots of water, get plenty of sleep and wash hands frequently.

* Please abide by the above guidelines and keep sick children at home. Bringing them to school serves only to expose the other children and teachers to illness and prolongs your child's illness through exposure to possible further infection and over exertion while in a compromised immune state.

* *No medications will be administered at school.* Exceptions may be made for chronic conditions under long-term treatment or emergency treatments such as Epi-Pens. These will be managed as appropriate to the individual situation.

MEALS AND SNACKS:

* Mealtime is an integral and fun part of the school day and diet can have a profound effect on learning and growing. Please supply a healthful lunch, snacks and water (in a reusable /non-disposable bottle) from home each day following the guidelines below.

* In keeping with Seedschool's environmental consciousness, please use washable, reusable serving /packing materials and cloth napkins to minimize waste. Please avoid plastic food storage bags, straws, and other single use items. Consider buying in bulk and packaging in reusable containers rather than buying single serve cups of yogurt, and single serving convenience snacks.

* Food scraps will be composted for use in the garden or fed to the chickens. We will recycle or reuse paper, aluminum, glass and plastic containers as is appropriate.

* Please make us aware of any food allergies, limitations or dietary preferences your child has. If necessary, other families will be notified not to bring foods containing potentially dangerous ingredients.

* Remember to start the day with a nutritious breakfast containing some protein, fruit and carbohydrates to fuel your child's day.

* We do not have kitchen facilities and cannot refrigerate nor reheat lunches. Please use ice packs and insulated containers as appropriate.

* Please do not send sweets and overly processed "convenience" foods such as *Lunchables*, "fruit" snacks and sugary yogurts. Artificial ingredients in these foods can cause irritability, behavior changes and illness in children.

* Read labels to avoid sending foods with additives such as artificial colors or flavors, artificial sweeteners (*Aspartame*, *Splenda*, etc.), dairy products with antibiotics or RBGH, and high fructose corn syrup.

* Sodas and beverages containing caffeine are not allowed. You may send water, milk, pure fruit juice, herbal tea and similar. We will provide reverse osmosis filtered water for refill of re-usable water bottles.

* Organic fruits and vegetables, whole grain and whole dairy foods are encouraged.

* Lunch leftovers will be sent home so that you can monitor what your child has eaten.

* These guidelines should also be followed when bringing any snacks or treats for family gatherings. For these events, we ask that foods are labeled (with ingredients) to indicate vegetarian, vegan, gluten free, dairy free and so on.

* We have a *Tasting Plate* at lunch time. Children may choose to share a few pieces of something from their lunch with their friends. They do not have to participate and you do not need to send anything extra. The purpose of this practice is to promote kindness and awareness of new foods. It also helps control the tendency to take food from someone else's lunch as they are able to take from the Tasting Plate instead. Food allergies and preferences will be observed.

CLEANLINESS:

- * Children will assist in cleaning and tidying of the classroom space.
- * Only non-toxic and environmentally safe cleaning products are used.
- * Towels and rugs are regularly washed in fragrance free detergent without bleach or fabric softeners.
- * To keep the floor and rugs as clean as possible, please remove shoes before entering the classroom.

OUTDOOR EXPLORATION:

- * Today's children spend far less time outdoors than generations before them. Greenspaces are rapidly succumbing to urban and suburban development. Seedschool offers children a rare opportunity for nature immersion.
- * Children will spend extended periods of time exploring outdoors. We are grateful to share nature's playground.
- * We will use binoculars and magnifying glasses to discover birds and other wildlife. Children will be encouraged to quietly observe what they find and keep documentations with photos, drawings, and writing as able. Each child will have a nature journal to carry outdoors; photos will be shared with families and on social media.
- * We will grow seasonal, edible plants in the Farm Garden. Children will learn about seed starting, planting times, soil health and pollination. They will carry water, dig holes, prune and harvest.
- * We will care for a small flock of chickens.
- * While exploring outdoors, children will each carry water and a snack. We have small trail bags if needed. Please provide a reusable water bottle with fresh water each school day.
- * We will carry simple first aid supplies while exploring outdoors. We will follow all safety rules as established by Seedschool and Central Commons Church. Special rules that pertain to the children will be discussed frequently; in fact, the children will help to create these rules and will be charged with reminding each other of safe and kind behavior.

PROJECT BASED LEARNING:

- * Our program is built around project based learning. Projects may be collaborative or individual and activities will happen both indoors and outdoors. The inspiration for projects ideally comes from the children rather than being directed by the teacher. The teacher will plant seeds of ideas by offering selected books and materials and guiding discussion amongst the children. Children are encouraged to *discover* what they want to know more about and find ways to learn it. Children experience a deeper, more comprehensive level of learning when allowed to become fully immersed in a project they have interest in and ownership of. Projects may continue only for a day or as long as many weeks. Other projects may develop before the first is finished, attention may come and go, and projects might merge.
- * Play is an essential part of project based learning. The children are free to choose the direction they wish to follow in their play. They will be reminded of kindness and safety, but otherwise are respected in their choices.
- * A past group of children once found an over-abundance of tomatoes on the plants in their garden. This led to a discussion of what we would do with them. Suggestions included soup, salsa and pizza sauce. The children created a "restaurant" in the classroom that served things made from tomatoes. They created "money" that held the value of one tomato, five tomatoes and so on. They harvested and tasted the tomatoes. They gave some green ones to the mail carrier who said she wanted to make fried green tomatoes. This spontaneous project required these children to use many learning skills: sorting, counting, classifying, reasoning, collaborating, socializing, researching, fine and gross motor skills and more.

DISCIPLINE / BEHAVIOR:

We demonstrate and expect Loving Kindness towards all others – human and animal. We will show respect for others' space. We will be aware of the needs and limitations of others. There will be no squishing, poking, dropping, throwing, grabbing, pushing, hitting, abusive language or action towards humans, or animals.

- * Discipline is an ongoing process, not a means of punishment. Often when children "misbehave," it is the adult's expectations that need adjusting, rather than the child needing to be "managed." At Seedschool, independence and self-discipline are encouraged by setting reasonable limits and expectations on behavior. Kind and appropriate behavior is modeled and reinforced. Undesirable behavior is redirected: alternative actions are suggested and when necessary, the behavior is discussed with the child. When quarrels break out between children, they are encouraged to talk over their feelings as able and work out a solution. The teacher will mediate as needed to suggest words the children may use to identify their feelings and to guide them through the situation.
- * The concept of "time-out" as it applies to children was originally intended for the same purposes as it is used in team sports – taking a few moments to re-think and re-group. Unfortunately, it has in many schools degenerated into the

archaic punishment of sitting in the corner. We will employ this concept as an option only in a non-punitive way when a child or children need a break from the action to collect their thoughts, talk things over, calm down from a difficult situation and decide what comes next. A child may choose to “walk away,” or “go elsewhere” briefly until ready to return. We allow the child to decide on his own when he is settled and ready to return to the group.

* In no case will any form of physical discipline or humiliation be employed, nor tolerated from staff or volunteers.

* It is Seedschool’s philosophy that children learn from exploring and observing the environment around them. We strive to offer them a positive and encouraging environment. You can help in this effort by providing a similar environment at home. Knowing that young children are highly impressionable, we suggest that you avoid television programs, videos, computer games and toys that encourage solving problems through violence, aggression, or competition. Instead spend time with your child talking, reading, and exploring activities (on-screen and off) that promote problem solving through empathy and cooperation.

* Imaginary weapon play directed at others will not be tolerated at Seedschool. If it occurs, children will be asked to find other ways of expressing themselves. We believe that learning to live a life of kindness to others begins in early childhood and that the terrible violence in our world could be lessened through awareness and prevention from the beginning.

* That said, we recognize the importance of dramatic and risky (but safe) play for children. This may include play that directs energy to the chasing and conquering of unseen foes, use of sticks as a variety of play props, and climbing trees. Children are encouraged to explore their vast imaginations, and to understand when lines are crossed that may pose physical or emotional harm to others. Gun play in any form is never allowed.

* Please let us know if your child is experiencing any major changes at home such as a move, divorce, or new sibling. Big events (even seemingly happy ones) can be stressful to children. Being aware of these life-altering changes can help us to understand behavior changes that we see in your child.

* Help us get to know your child by telling us about unique family interests, recent vacations or adventures, other languages spoken at home, names and types of pets, special names for grandparents, substitute words for things, anything at all to help us know and understand your child better.

* If any dangerous behaviors such as biting or hitting do not cease after age appropriate guidance from the teacher, you may be asked to pick up your child from school for the day. Recurring behavior problems in the classroom will be discussed with parents and guidance offered for at home solutions. While we consider it a last resort, repeated occurrences may eventually lead to your family being asked to leave the program permanently.

* Feel free to come to us with any discipline or behavior concerns, either at home or at school, at any time. We will be most successful in solving any problems if we work together and apply consistency between home and school.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS:

* Each child will be provided with space for storing personal belongings while at school.

* Children should dress in seasonally appropriate, comfortable, washable clothing that is free from violent or disrespectful images and commercialized characters (such as villains and super heroes). This applies to bags, backpacks and lunchboxes as well.

* Sand, dirt, paint and crayons are basic ingredients of childhood and are likely to get on clothing and skin. Please remember that getting messy is a part of exploring and learning and that a messy child had fun at school! Both the children and their clothing are washable.

* The children will go outside every school day including in rainy, windy, hot and cold weather. Your child should be dressed appropriately for the day’s weather. Please invest in a good quality fully waterproof rain jacket with a hood and sturdy waterproof boots that are both comfortable and easy to run and climb in (Bogs or similar).

* Children should not bring umbrellas as they create hazards when walking as a group.

* On dry days, sturdy closed toed shoes, or sandals with sturdy, wide straps are acceptable (Keens or similar). Bare sandals and flip flops are not safe for active outdoor play and should not be worn to school.

* Children should wear clothing that is easy for them to get on and off independently for using the toilet and changing when wet or muddy.

* All children should have at least one, preferably more seasonally appropriate extra outfits (including socks, underwear, and shoes) on hand each day, especially if it is or has recently been raining. We have found it easiest to pack these things daily in your child’s backpack.

* Please provide a reusable water-resistant cloth or nylon bag to take home soiled clothing. The bag should be returned on the next school day. Do not bring plastic grocery bags; they are harmful to wildlife and the environment when thrown away.

* Children may occasionally bring items from home to share with the class. These may include books, small simple toys or items found in nature that your child would like to talk about and share with friends. Comfort objects (favorite bear, blankie, etc.) are always welcomed and we will help the other children to respect the meaning of these special things. No toys or books depicting violence or commercialized characters are permitted. This includes all action figures, war toys and weapons of any kind.

* *It is essential that your child's name is on everything that is brought to school.* Personal items are easily mixed up and we cannot be responsible for recognizing each child's belongings. Please use permanent marker, fabric marker, sew in or stick-on labels to identify *all* clothing items, boots, bags, backpacks, water bottles, lunch containers, etc. Particularly in the wintertime, label all coats, hats, gloves and scarves if you wish the same ones that you came with to return home with you at the end of the day.

CELEBRATIONS:

* Out of respect for the diversity of cultures and faiths we may find amongst our families, our school celebrations and activities will emphasize seasonal changes – Summer and Winter Solstice, Vernal and Autumnal Equinox – over religious holidays (yet religious observances will be acknowledge and respected). To promote cultural awareness, we invite you to share your family's holiday and seasonal/ cultural traditions with the class in simple, age appropriate ways. Check with us to make arrangements.

* Birthdays are a joyful occasion and we will honor the birthday child on the school day closest to the actual birthday. You are encouraged to help us create this school celebration by providing a simple activity and/or healthy snack to share. Please do not bring heavily frosted cakes and cupcakes, candy, juice boxes and other sugary items. It is appropriate to bring fruit, cheese, crackers, simple cookies or muffins. Check with us for any food allergies or restrictions in the class.

* Please do not bring elaborate decorations or balloons. Balloons may frighten children when popped and cause a negative impact on the environment when disposed of.

* If you wish to pass out invitations to a party outside of school hours, we ask that all children are included to avoid hurt feelings. They will talk about the party at school the next week and those who were excluded will know.

PARENT COMMUNICATION AND INVOLVEMENT:

* Please keep all contact information up to date in your child's file and notify us if your phone number or email address changes. Please add matilda@seedpreschool.org to your address book to ensure delivery of all school emails.

* We have a family group text for school communication. Please add 214-546-6214 to your address book. Be sure to read all school messages as they contain information that you need to be aware of. Everyone is welcome to initiate conversations about topics pertinent to the children and school. Please keep it simple and friendly. Anything that doesn't pertain to the entire group should be sent individually.

* Please conclude all phone and text conversations prior to entering the classroom or outdoor play area. Your child deserves your full attention during drop off and pick up times and the teacher may want to share information with you about your child. Time at school is for the children, not for attending to business or social plans.

* Parents are encouraged to volunteer in the Farm Garden or classroom. There is always work to be done in the garden and other outdoor play spaces. We will schedule seasonal family workdays on weekends. You are welcome at other times as well, either during the school day or outside of school hours to help with current needs. You may also like to share knowledge of specialized hobbies and skills with the children. Let us know if you would like to share something with the class.

* All parents are welcome to spend all or part of the school day interacting with or simply observing their child's explorations.

