



*Wonder Wander Wisdom*

## **PARENT HANDBOOK**

Forest GnomeSchool is sponsored by The Playgarden, Inc. 501c3 whose mission is *“To Support, Strengthen, and Inspire the growing child, family, and community”*.

### **Forest Gnomeschool Parent handbook**

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## Forest GnomeSchool Parent Guidelines and School Policies

### Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to Forest GnomeSchool! We warmly welcome you and your family into our school community and look forward to building a strong partnership with you. This handbook will be your guide to our Forest Gnomeschool curriculum, our philosophies, and policies. It contains our suggestions for making your family's experience here a warm and successful one. We are so happy that you have chosen to bring your child to our school, where our teachers believe in educating the "head, heart, and hands" of the child.

Our focus is on enriching each child's life with nature, play, and a sense of loving wonder all while feeling held by the community that sustains our school. We invite you to be a part of our school community.

The Playgarden, Inc. a 501c3 Nonprofit organization is the sponsoring umbrella of Forest GnomeSchool, an independent Kindergarten Enrichment program license # E04DU00333 and meets the criteria to be exempt from Early Childhood Licensure pursuant to 65C-22.008(3)(b), Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C).

Please read our Exemption Letter and site notes on how we are meeting these requirements:

[Exemption Letter](#)

[Exemption Letter with Notes](#)

### Forest GnomeSchool Curriculum

Our Forest GnomeSchool serves children ages 5-6 in a homeschool enrichment program that is truly a children's garden – a protected space where the imagination and creativity of the child will flourish. The Playgarden, Inc. is proud to be a LifeWays of North America Representative Site, and all of our Lead Teachers receive LifeWays Early Childhood training from Lifeways North America, Inc., a non-profit organization. In turn, Forest GnomeSchool incorporates the nourishing LifeWays curriculum solely outdoors.

The LifeWays Curriculum is inspired by the experience of Waldorf education and the insights of Rudolf Steiner (the founder of the first Waldorf school in Germany), and is supported by contemporary childhood research, as well as common sense and the wisdom of many generations of parents. Our practices are based on the fundamental need for relationship-based care (bonding and continuity), neurological research, and recognition of the importance of connecting with nature as central to the advancement of children's social, emotional, and intellectual skills.

At the heart of our curriculum are the 3R's: Reverence, Repetition, and Rhythm. Knowing that a child learns through imitation, our teachers strive to be worthy of imitation through their actions, words and a commitment to their own innerwork.

We feel that time in nature is one of the best teachers. Class will be held outside in all but the most inclement weather. A pavilion may be rented on heavy rain days or class may end early or

be postponed and made up at a later date. This helps the children to become more robust and strengthens their bond with their outdoor environment. We are an all-weather school and children will be playing in the warm rays of Father Sun, the playful gusts of Brother Wind, as well as the cool drops of Sister Rain. We celebrate the rhythm of the seasons with seasonal songs, crafts and festivals.

### **Home Visits**

Each Forest GnomeSchool lead teacher will schedule a “Home Visit” before the school year begins. These visits enable the children to experience their new teacher where they are most comfortable – in their own home – and help to make the first days of school much easier. Home visits last about 30 minutes to an hour. Often the children like to show their teacher their bedroom, favorite toys or play places. Please do not feel that you need to spend time cleaning or otherwise preparing your home for this visit! It is really meant as just a simple, but very helpful, bridge between home and school.

Your child’s teacher will contact you about making arrangements for a time that is convenient for your child and your family’s schedule.

### **Arrivals and Departures**

The school day will begin promptly at the designated time of your child’s class. We request that your child arrive on time. The child who is late is at a considerable disadvantage entering into play. This is especially true for a child who has a tendency toward shyness and/or difficulty with transitions. We ask that you say goodbye to your child before they cross into the school. The teacher will greet both of you and then direct your child to put away his/her belongings with the help of the teacher’s assistant. If you have some questions or want to share some pertinent information about your child with the teacher, please present it in a note, text or email so that the teacher is able to maintain her focus on the welcoming of all the children.

Punctuality plays an important role in the rhythm of the opening and closing of the school day. Please arrive on time to pick up your child. If you run into an emergency and are running late, contact your child’s teacher or please call the office at 904-241-3259.

Your child will be released only to the custodial parent or legal guardian and the persons listed on the Childcare Application form. When someone other than the custodial parent or legal guardian is picking up your child, please inform that person of the departure procedures and provide the office with the change in writing, via email or note. This pick up person must show identification to the teacher at dismissal.

### **Absences and Illness**

**The health of the children and caregivers is of utmost importance.** Any child who is ill with an infectious or contagious condition must not be brought to school until the end of the infectious phase. If your child is ill and will not be attending that morning, please contact your teacher and then call the office, 904-241-3259. If there is some question concerning your child's state of health, it is often better to keep your child at home.

If fever, vomiting and/or diarrhea have occurred, parents must keep their child home to rest for at least 24 hours after the last occurrence.

The teachers will not be able to administer any daily medications other than an Epipen or an asthma inhaler. Please see the section titled "Children with Known Medical Needs" in this handbook.

If a child receives a minor injury during school hours, he or she may be offered a homeopathic dose of arnica, calendula for bug bites, antibacterial ointment, or a band-aid as needed. If a child requires more significant first aid, the parent will be contacted. An accident report will be given to you. This form will need to be signed and returned to school.

Teachers are certified in First Aid/CPR to assist the child in need. In the event of an emergency, 911 will be called and you will be notified by phone, and an appropriate course of action will be taken.

### **Communicable Diseases**

Parents will be contacted for early pick-up if a child develops any symptoms that suggest illness such as:

- Unusual listlessness
- Excessively red, yellow, crusty or draining eyes
- Yellow or green nasal drainage or severe cough
- Skin rash
- Persistent nausea, with or without vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Persistent headache, stomachache, or sore throat
- Elevated temperature

### **Communication between Home and School**

The lines of communication between the parent and teacher are always open. You may call at any time to leave a message for the teacher to return your call and/or to request a parent-teacher conference or appointment. If the teacher ever feels that a conference is necessary, she or he will contact the parent to schedule a convenient time.

Please take classroom concerns to the teacher first. If the teacher and parents are unable to resolve the issue, the issue may then be brought to the Administrator for a joint meeting. School concerns, not child or curriculum related, may be brought directly to the Administration.

## **Lunch**

Please provide healthy, low (no) sugar options with a balance of protein and carbohydrates. Please do not include any candy treats. We request that you allow your child to participate in packing her/his own lunches. Water bottles and lunch boxes should be media free.

We discourage sharing lunches because some children have food allergies. Please inform us if your child has a food allergy, and refer to the section titled “Children with Known Medical Needs” in this handbook for more details.

## **Dressing Appropriately**

Dressing your child appropriately is critical to your child’s enjoyment and comfort while playing and learning in Forest GnomeSchool. Appropriate gear is non-negotiable and essential to your child’s participation for the day.

Each child is required to have in their back pack their own sunscreen (reef safe and non aerosol) as well as insect repellent (deet free).

## **Clothing and Gear Requirements:**

- A media-free, child sized backpack that they can carry and open on their own (we really like this backpack from REI: <https://www.rei.com/product/102016/rei-co-op-tarn-12-pack-kids>)
- A media-free, insulated water bottle; preferably 12 oz.
- A media-free lunch box with cold pack
- Label all of your child’s clothing
- Dress your child in clothes that can get dirty
- Dress your child in clothes and close-toed shoes (without laces) that they can easily take on and off by themselves. Please save light-up shoes, fancy party shoes, as well as media-related shoes for home.
- Elastic waistbands are preferred and easier for the child.
- Do not dress your child in one piece overalls; they are difficult to remove when children need to potty.
- Your child will need a full set of SEASONALLY APPROPRIATE change into clothes in a labeled Ziploc bag or waterproof re-usable zip-bag that will be kept in their backpack
- No jewelry or headbands, which can easily catch on limbs, vines and play structures

## **Warm Weather Gear**

- For beach day, girls may wear their 2-piece swimsuits under their clothes. Shorts or skorts only please, no skirts or dresses.

- For Beach Day, boys may wear their swim suit into the forest, and change into dry shorts after the beach if they want. If your child is uncomfortable with the swim suit lining, please feel free to cut it out.
- Shoes, not sandals, will protect their feet. However, your child may bring a pair of flip-flops or natives to slip on after the beach.
- A comfortable sun hat similar to [www.rei.com/rei-garage/product/114321/sunday-afternoons-explorer-cap-sun-hat-infantstoddlerkids](http://www.rei.com/rei-garage/product/114321/sunday-afternoons-explorer-cap-sun-hat-infantstoddlerkids)

### **Wet Weather Gear**

Your child is required to have this gear if it is raining or if there is a threat of rain:

- Bogs Boots or similar waterproof- non leaking -snug around the calf- boots.
- Rain pants similar to Oakiwear, Lands' End, or REI brand.
- A light-weight rain coat with adjustable velcro closures at the wrist and a snug collar (similar to Columbia or REI). This article of clothing is intended to keep your child dry, not warm. We will use layers for warmth.
- Smart Wool socks or similar
- Rain hat similar to REI or Outdoor Research brand

### **Cold Weather Gear**

Layering is key to comfort during our cold weather days and provides more warmth than one large coat.

- Warm jacket and fleece layers
- A base layer of 2-piece silk long underwear
- Waterproof mittens or gloves
- A warm, snug hat or beanie
- Smart Wool socks or similar

### **What not to Bring to School**

A child's personal toys should remain at home.

Clothing displaying Cartoon characters and TV or movie stars, including Disney princesses and SuperHeroes are not to be worn as they interrupt deep imaginative play based on a company's creation versus a child's personal creation and imagination..

Please see our school media policy below.

### **Rhythm and Family Life**

When a child enters the Waldorf or LifeWays program, the family becomes a part of a community. The teachers enter a partnership to help families discover ways to create a healthy family. We hope that the following suggestions are helpful to you and your family.

A simple, predictable routine works best for the child. We encourage parents to slow down the pace. Choose simplicity; extracurricular activities and early sport activity can wait a few years. Creating healthy rhythms in your home is a gift to the security and healthy development of your child. Predictable bedtimes, mealtimes, and daily rhythms are difficult to achieve in this very fast paced world. However, they are essential for a child's growth and development. A young child is very active – moving and doing as their body is physically growing. An early dinner, quiet evening activities and early bedtimes (including weekends!) enable a child to be up and ready for school the next day. When a child lives with consistent and clear routines, a child feels secure in knowing what to expect next. When this occurs, transitions to meals, to sleep or other activities becomes easier and lessens conflict.

We know that creating a healthy family life can be difficult in our complicated world. We are always happy to meet with parents to find ways to help each individual family work out these issues. Please stop by and visit The Playgardens' school library for many helpful resources.

At home, parents can help the young child by setting clear limits and expectations. If possible, in early childhood, all children should be protected from media in all forms, including television, video games, tablets, smartphones and electronic books (see our Media Policy on page 16). Please also make an effort to limit your child's exposure to your own media use. Children love to be involved with real activities. Helping to prepare meals, cleaning up, caring for plants and animals, being in nature, and lots of imaginative play both indoors and out are the essential elements of a child's day. Even a three or four year old can have a chore that he/she can do every day at the same time. Setting the napkins for dinner, giving the dog water every morning, placing their toy trucks back in the garage every evening are just a few suggestions that can help develop healthy habits and a strong will. Parents should be making the decisions for the young child. The children look to their parents as models for their own development. When children are given too many choices they can become uncertain and nervous. When necessary, we suggest giving two choices as giving too many choices can be unnerving to a young child. Children need the model of loving, consistent adults so that one day they can become that model. Parents are the loving authority figures in their lives.

## **Sleep and Nutrition**

Bedtime routines can provide a wonderful opportunity to slow down the pace of the day and be together with your child in a quiet, warm setting. Children should be in bed early (by 8:00 or 8:30 pm). This will enable your child to get a good rest and give parents time for themselves as well. After the evening meal and clean-up activities, a child can wash up with his/her parent, brush teeth and get into bed. Parents can then choose a bedtime routine that is repeated the same every bedtime. When a routine is established every day at the same time, the child becomes accustomed to the rhythm and feels secure, looking forward to this special time each day.

Children require 10-12 hours of sleep each night. Early, consistent bedtimes provide the children with sufficient rest for a cheerful awakening and a happy day at school. If your child



has been up late at night for special reasons, we ask that you keep her/him home from school. It is very difficult for a young child to self-regulate when they are tired.

Teachers will be happy to work with families to give suggestions on how to make bedtime smoother for your family.

Please ensure that your child has a nutritious **sugar free** breakfast at home. It is very important for your child to come to school with a belly full of nutritious foods. A warm protein-rich meal served with fruit and whole grains is both filling and sustaining.

If your child is at school during lunch hours, please provide a healthy lunch, with no cookies or other sweets.

## **School Celebrations and Events**

### **Rites of Passage**

In the Waldorf tradition, we believe that "all children need and deserve rites of passage that celebrate transitions and recognition as emerging individuals." (Torin Finser, Waldorf Educator.) In the Forest GnomeSchool we celebrate two rites of passage – the Rainbow Bridge (birthdays) and the Fly Away Ceremony.

#### **Birthday Celebrations: Rainbow Bridge**

In striving to maintain a very consistent rhythm with our littlest ones, we observe birthdays in a sweet simple way. The story of the day will be a birthday story for the birthday child accompanied with a healthy birthday treat for all the children.

Your child's teacher will contact you to schedule your child's celebration as well as to provide more program-specific details.

#### **Fly Away Ceremony**

At the end of the year picnic, we hold a special ceremony to acknowledge those children who will be graduating from Forest GnomeSchool. The Fly Away Ceremony is a symbolic and joyful tradition.

### **Seasonal Festivals and Events**

In Forest Gnomeschool, we are a community that celebrates the cycles of the year through a rich and diverse festival life. Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf Education once said:

*"Waldorf school should be like a beacon of light into the night – it exists not only for what is inside but for what is outside as well. A Waldorf school radiates. A school only achieves that radiance if it is willing to be more than a building, more than an educational facility. A school is only a beacon if it manifests a*

*heart. That heart is created through the community life of a school, and the connections we make with one another."*

Festivals help to create this radiant school that Steiner spoke of almost 100 years ago. Throughout the year, Waldorf Schools celebrate festivals to connect us with the cycles of nature, establish a seasonal rhythm for the children, and strengthen the school and greater community. Festivals help us to nourish our inner spirit through the sharing of stories, food, songs and activities linked to the seasons, all expressed with beauty and reverence. Most of our festivals include fun activities for all ages, along with delicious potluck food.

In addition to the community-wide festivals listed here, teachers celebrate other festivals in the classroom. In both cases we honor different cultures and religious traditions through circle songs. Please share your family's traditions with us! As parents, we are nourished through the sharing of stories, food, songs, and activities linked to the seasons and expressed with beauty and reverence.

We, along with our children, feel the joy in the anticipation, the preparation, the celebration itself and the memories! Festivals are an important part of the school life of the Playgarden and we urge all families to attend and take part by volunteering. Please talk to your teacher or the Parent Council Representatives for volunteer opportunities.

### **Community Wide Festivals (all families)**

Fall Festival

Martinmas Lantern Walk and campout at Goldhead State Park (alumni participate, and many families camp)

Winter Spiral

May Day

### **Discipline for the Child**

Age appropriate discipline for the young child can be approached on several levels. Forest GnomeSchool teachers strive to lead by example and to be worthy of imitation by the children. The teachers work to create a positive, emotionally calm atmosphere where the teacher sets consistent boundaries. Warmth, humor, song and predictable weekly rhythms are just a few tools that help create an environment where children can learn and thrive. Our teachers carefully observe the interactions and play of the children so that they will know when it is time to redirect a child to prevent a difficult situation before it begins or to help children to mitigate a tricky situation. The teachers assist the children to right a wrong situation and care for a child whom they might have harmed.

Teachers strive to set a tone of respect and empathy and to strengthen the social instincts of the classes. Teachers also work with parents to help create a home life that has a healthy discipline and a sense of calm and connection. We know this can be a challenging task and are here to work alongside the families and offer our input and resources. Forest GnomeSchool teachers

strive to work in partnership to help your child grow and develop self-regulation. If a child displays ongoing aggressive or negative behavior, his/her teacher will arrange for a meeting to discuss this behavior. Parents are asked to share with their child's teacher any circumstances that might affect the child's behavior at school, such as family issues, visitors at home, illnesses, etc. This information will always be held in confidence and is essential to a teacher's work with the children. Sharing such information will assist in the process of better understanding a child's difficulties and develop a consistent plan to address issues at home and in school. At times a teacher may recommend additional services or request medical attention be provided to help better address and understand a child's particular needs. This will be done in the spirit of working in partnership with families to help find resources to assist the child to thrive physically, intellectually, and developmentally.

Hitting, biting, or otherwise hurting other children, can happen on occasion. Children will sometimes bite in an effort to communicate frustration or anger before the child has learned to communicate these feelings with words. However, it is necessary that a child be sent home immediately when repeated biting (or other harmful behavior) occurs. This helps to impress upon the child and the other children that this behavior is not tolerated in school.

For the health of your child and the safety of all of the children, if after working with you to help your child to participate harmoniously in class activities, help your child in the process of separation from his or her home environment, and/or use kind hands with their friends, it may be necessary to ask that your child be withdrawn from the school. Such a decision would be made by the teacher and administration after substantial discussion and deliberation with all parties involved. In such an event, it is the school's policy to return any prepaid tuition, but not the enrollment fee, supply fee, deposit or any tuition applicable to the time the child attended the school.

## **Media Policy**

Forest GnomeSchool follows a "no media" policy. We are dedicated to nurturing the children's capacities for imagination, healthy emotional development, independent thinking and positive action. More and more research is showing the detrimental effects of screen time on the young child. This ranges from rising levels of obesity to low reading levels and hyperactivity. Childhood is the time for learning through activity. We encourage children to play energetically and imaginatively, to spend lots of time outdoors in nature, to run, climb, draw, paint, create and play games as healthy alternatives to media-based entertainment.

Although every family must decide this issue for itself, the Forest GnomeSchool adheres to the LifeWays and Waldorf principle of encouraging families to eliminate media or limit it as much as possible. Our emphasis is on loving human interaction with warm speech, live singing, verses, and stories rather than technology. LifeWays and Waldorf Early Childhood Centers are television and video-free environments except for use in administration and adult education.

**We firmly ask that children not engage in any media prior to school day.** This will help the children benefit the most out of imaginative play and story, which are directly linked to

intellectual development. If you would like more information about this, please ask your teacher or the school administration and we would be glad to discuss this with you.

**Any child who disturbs the healthy classroom and play environment due to not adhering to our school's media policy at home may be asked to leave the school.**

## **The Playgarden Governance**

The Playgarden is a Florida not-for-profit corporation that has tax exempt status as a 501(c)3 organization. The organization's governance model is based on a Three Pillars Model. The Board of Directors, Administration, and the College of Teachers (CoTs) form the Three-Legged Stool, also referred to in Waldorf education as the three-fold collaboration. The decisions regarding the life of the school are made through a process of shared decision making by these three pillars.

## **Board of Directors**

Under Florida law, the organization is governed by the Board of Directors. Our board members are volunteers who are parents and community members. Board positions include a President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and a teacher representative from the College of Teachers. Additionally, the Board is made up of several committees, e.g. Governance, Resource and Development and Finance, each of which performs certain functions.

The Board of Directors is responsible for fulfilling the organization's Mission and Vision, developing and implementing the overall strategic plan of the organization, ensuring the sound administration of the school, addressing legal and compliance issues, and monitoring the financial health of the organization. The Board typically meets monthly for reports and decision-making. Please let us know if you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors. There is a Community Board Meeting at the beginning of each school year, which all are welcome to attend in order to learn about how the Board works.

## **School Policies**

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

Our school relies on volunteers. Each family is requested to volunteer 10 hours annually to give back to the community as part of our mission. However, we understand that this may not be possible for all families. For those unable to contribute their time and talent, we offer a buyout option. At the end of the school year, families who have not donated service hours or pledged to buy-out service hours will be charged \$40 per hour. Volunteers will be required to fill out a Volunteer Affidavit.

## **Payment of Tuition and Financial Obligations**

Tuition may be paid yearly, bi-yearly, or in ten monthly payments that are due the first of each month, July 1st through April 1st. **A late payment of \$25.00 will be due if any payment is made after the 15th of the month.** Even though tuition may be paid in installments, the contract is not fractional. The principal expenses of the school do not necessarily diminish with the departure of students during the year; consequently, the obligation to pay tuition is unconditional, and refunds will not be made for absence, illness, or withdrawal. Please see the financial contract for more information.

Payments may be put in our lock box, paid on-line, or mailed to The Playgarden, Inc.

Any fees incurred from a returned check will be the responsibility of the signee.

**Payments of any kind should not be given to the teachers.**

## **Emergency Closing of the School**

In case of severe weather, check your email/text communication for updates and school closures. We will notify you via email, text or by phone by 7 a.m. If school is canceled, a makeup day will be scheduled for a future Friday.

In the event of severe weather DURING the school day, Forest GnomeSchool teachers will monitor radar and cancel class as is appropriate. Parents will be notified and will need to pick up their children from Hanna Park promptly.

## **Children with Known Medical Needs**

If your child requires any special attention or medication, please discuss this at length with the school's Administrator and teacher, and make sure the school's Administrator has all of the required documentation in your child's folder. It is Forest GnomeSchool's policy that teachers be trained by the parents of children with known medical needs in specific emergency procedures for enrolled children, including but not limited to those that require the use of an asthma inhaler or EpiPen. If your child has a severe allergy or suffers from asthma and has a prescription for an EpiPen or inhaler, two EpiPens or inhalers, as applicable, must be provided to the school that will not expire during the school year. Please include labels with your child's first and last name, and an expiration date. Please provide documentation from your child's medical provider in the form of an "allergy action plan" for the school to follow including any information concerning signs of an attack or of an allergic reaction. It is the parents' responsibility to provide the EpiPens and/or inhalers, and sign a waiver that administration, teacher and teacher assistants may administer the EpiPen if anaphylactic symptoms are identified, or administer the inhaler in the case of asthma symptoms (see the Agreement and

Authorizations at the end of this Parent Handbook). All staff members receive information on how to administer EpiPen medication during CPR training, but we rely on you, as the parent of a child with known medical needs, to inform us as to how we should administer any type of medication to your specific child. Posters showing directions for proper administration are located in both houses and office. EpiPens and inhalers will be kept in the office under supervision, and will be taken on field trips as part of the first aid kits (including the forest program), with the designated child. Please keep us updated on allergies and symptoms so that we may best honor your child's specific needs.

## **Photography**

We like to publish pictures of your child throughout the school year's events; beach days, school days, festivals, etc., on our website, brochures, and Facebook for the purpose of publicity, illustration, and web content. No names or other personal information about the student, such as e-mail address, phone number, or home address will be placed under the pictures. You will find a waiver where you may elect your choice to consent to Playgarden's use of your child's photo at the end of this handbook.

**Forest GnomeSchool is a program of The Playgarden  
which is a LifeWays Representative Site.**

***We adhere to the Warmth and Nurturing principles and practices of LifeWays®.***

Lifeways® practices are based on the fundamental need for relationship-based care (bonding and continuity), neurological research, and recognition of living arts (domestic, nurturing, creative, and social arts) as central to the advancement of children's social, emotional, and intellectual skills. These practices can be applied in parenting, family childcare homes, childcare centers, pre-schools, and extended care programs. The physical setting is home-like rather than institutional or school-like.

- Adult and child activities include practical life skills such as building, gardening, cleaning, cooking, washing, repairing, and sewing, among other things.
- Movement/play curriculum emphasizes child-initiated activities that promote healthy musculoskeletal development, providing opportunities for unstructured spontaneous movement in a safe environment. Traditional games and finger-plays provide opportunities for the children to imitate healthy movement, develop proprioception, and increase both small and large motor skills.
- The children go outside in all but the most inclement weather. This helps them become more robust and strengthens their bond with the environment in which they live.
- Child guidance is based on L.O.V.E. Approach to Discipline: Listening, Laughter, Order, Objectivity, Versatility, Vulnerability, Energy, and Enthusiasm.

- Natural organic foods are provided (whenever this is possible), and the children can participate in the food preparation.
- Foundation for lifelong literacy is fostered through storytelling and puppetry, individual time with a book, poetry, verse, and music on a daily basis, drama, and the daily interactions of play and movement in a healthy secure environment.
- Emphasis is on loving human interaction with warm speech, live singing, verses, and stories rather than technology. LifeWays® Centers and Childcare Homes are television and video-free environments except for use in administration and adult education.
- Festivals and celebrations honoring traditional seasonal festivals, cultural backgrounds of the families, and children’s birthdays are offered.
- When possible, ongoing relationships are established with senior adults and youth who visit on a regular basis.
- Community friends who speak a native language other than English may be invited to play simple games or sing simple songs with the children on a routine basis.
- Small groups of children who stay together with the same caregivers over a several-year period create a more homelike atmosphere and better teacher-child ratios.
- Forest programs provide a developmentally appropriate, play-based approach found in Waldorf programs throughout the world.
- Extended Day programs recognize the need for children to experience the nurture of a home-like setting with opportunities for relaxation, rest, and robust play.

**LifeWays Principles:**

1. Young children thrive in the presence of parents and other devoted caregivers who enjoy life and caring for children. They learn primarily through imitation/empathy and therefore need to be cared for by people with integrity and warmth who are worthy of being imitated. This is the foundation for learning and healthy development.
2. Having consistent caregivers, especially from birth to three years old and, preferably, up to primary school age, is essential for establishing a sense of trust and well-being.
3. Children need relationships with people of all ages. Infants and toddlers thrive in family-style blended-age care, while older children see nurturing modeled by the adults and experience their own place in the continuum of growing up. Children of all ages can both give and receive special blessings when in the company of elders and youth who enjoy children.
4. Each person is uniquely valuable, gifted with purpose, and worthy of respect throughout all phases of his or her life’s journey.
5. Human relationships and activities are the essential tools for teaching the young child all foundational skills for life. Infants and toddlers develop most healthy when allowed to have freedom of movement in a safe environment. For three-six year olds, creative play, not technology or early academics, forms the best foundation for school work and for life-long learning.
6. In infancy and early childhood, daily life experience is the “curriculum.” The child’s relationships to the caregivers and to the environment are the two most important aspects through which the child can experience healthy life rhythms/routines. These

include the “nurturing arts” of rest and play, regular meal times, exploring nature, practical/domestic activities, social creativity, music, and simple artistic activities.

7. Young children thrive in a home or home-like environment that offers beauty, comfort, security, and connection to the living world of nature. Healthy sense development is fostered when most of their clothing and playthings are of non-synthetic materials and their toys allow for open-ended, imaginative play.
8. Childhood is a valid and authentic time unto itself and not just a preparation for schooling. Skipping or hurrying developmental phases can undermine a child’s healthy and balanced development.
9. Parents of young child need and deserve support in their part of parenting-from professionals, family, and one another. They thrive in a setting in which they are loved, respected, and helped to feel love and understanding for their children.
10. Caregivers also have an intrinsic purpose and need to be recognized and appropriately compensated for the value of their work. They need an environment in which they can create an atmosphere of “home”, build true relationship to the children, and feel autonomous and appreciated.

For more information, please visit the LifeWays website:

<http://www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org>

**AFTER READING THROUGH THIS HANDBOOK, PLEASE PRINT AND SIGN THE PARENT AGREEMENT ON THE LAST PAGE. THIS SIGNED FORM MUST BE TURNED IN AT PARENT ORIENTATION.**

Our Mission:

*“A community that honors and celebrates the spirit of early childhood.”*

Our vision:

*“A community that honors and celebrates the spirit of early childhood.”*

The Playgarden is a Florida not-for-profit corporation, which has applied for tax exempt status as a 501©3 organization that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origins, genders, or religious affiliation in the administration of its educational or admissions policies. Forest Gnomeschool License #E04DU033



## Forest Gnomeschool Parent Handbook Agreement and Authorizations

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Forest Handbook available for review on our website [LINK](#)

***Please use check mark or initial acknowledgement:***

### Field Trip Authorization:

- I give my child permission to attend daily field trips to Hanna Park, Hanna Park beach, lake locations and Dutton Island.
- Sunscreen and Bug Spray Reapplication Authorization:**
- \*\*Teachers may reapply bug spray and sunscreen as needed.*
- Campfire Authorization:**  
*\*Children may enjoy a safe and secure campfire during class or field trip.*
- I/We have read completely the provided Parent Handbook.
- I/We understand that we must bring this signed form on the first day of school for our child to begin the program.
- I/We have read the Exemption Letter and notes in this document and understand that Forest Gnomeschool is a Kindergarten Enrichment program License # E04DU00333 and meets the criteria to be exempt from Early Childhood Licensure pursuant to 65C-22.008(3)(b), Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C).
- Forest Gnomeschool is a no media program. I/We have read the handbook media policy.

Print Name of Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 8/21/24