



EARLY CHILDHOOD

PARENT HANDBOOK

Mission Statement:

“To Support, Strengthen, and Inspire the growing child, family, and community”

The Playgarden Early Childhood Parent Handbook

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The Playgarden

Parent Guidelines and School Policies

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to The Playgarden! 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 Early Childhood Education Program, 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 in a homelike environment, that allows children to relate what they learn to their own experience.

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, along with the larger community of Playgarden alumni and friends.

Our Programs

Butterfly Program	Hummingbird Program	Dragonfly Program	Forest Kindergarten
2 day (M/T or Th/F)	2 and 3 day (M-T or W/Th/F)	2, 3 and 5 day (M/T or W/Th/F or M-F)	2, 3 and 5 day (M/T or W/Th/F or M-F)
Ages 2 ½ to 4	Ages 3-5	Ages 3 to 6*	Ages 3 ½ to 6*

****Please note, students must remain 6 throughout our school calendar year.***

Also Available

Forest Gnomeschool	Ladybug Garden & Ladybug Forest	Camps	Playgarden Under the Stars	Lunch Bunch
Sponsored Kindergarten Nature Immersion enrichment M-Th	6 mo- 2 ½ 8-12 week sessions on campus and forest	Winter, Spring and Summer Camps	Evening playdates 4 sessions in Fall, 4 sessions in Spring	Offered for 30 minutes after Hummingbird dismissal

The Playgarden Curriculum

Our mixed age programs are truly a children’s garden – a protected space where the imagination and creativity of the child will flourish. The Playgarden 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 based in Oklahoma.

LifeWays practices are inspired by the experience of Waldorf education and the insights of Rudolf Steiner (the founder of the first Waldorf school in Germany), and are supported by contemporary early 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 living arts (domestic, nurturing, creative, and social arts) 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 young child learns through imitation, our teachers strive to be worthy of imitation through their actions, words and a commitment to their own innerwork.

At our school we like to say that "life is the curriculum." Basing our day's activities on the LifeWays Principles (see page 21 for more detail) your child's day will be spent in a homelike setting surrounded by teachers who are doing meaningful activities and welcoming the children to use their hands for work and for play. Teacher and child activities include practical life skills such as gardening, cleaning, cooking, washing, repairing, sewing and building, among other things. Special attention is also given to the aesthetics of our school environment as well as to seasonal crafts.

Our programs offer opportunities for the children to participate in the living arts which include domestic, nurturing, social and creative components. A foundation for lifelong literacy is fostered through storytelling and puppetry, individual time with books, poetry, verse, drama, and music on a daily basis, and the daily interactions of play and movement in a healthy, secure environment.

Children are invited to bake fresh bread, help prepare class snacks, set the table, watercolor paint, sing seasonal songs with their friends and teachers during circle time, and complete seasonal crafts. Movement and a curriculum centered around play, 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.

We feel that time in nature is one of the best teachers. The children go outside in all but the most inclement weather. This helps them become more robust and strengthens their bond with their outdoor environment. Natural materials are chosen for the children's play and work in order to give tangible impressions that will nourish their senses. 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

If you like, your 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. This is a voluntary option.

Arrivals and Departures

The school day will begin promptly at the designated time of your child's class. The Teacher will welcome each child at the front door or the Playgarden gate(s). 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. This little focused job assists the child transition to "being at school." If you have some questions or want to share some pertinent information about your child with the teacher, please present it in a note so that the teacher is able to maintain her focus on the welcoming of all the children.

****Please note, for administrative assistance, please go to the Kinderhaus front door, where the office is located.**

If your child needs some reassurance in leaving, you may try simply saying, "I will be back after story." If your child cries upon your departure, most often, the child ceases crying once the parent is out of earshot. If this is not the case, the parent will be called, and the teacher and parent work together to assist the child. We have an Early Bird option which allows your child to arrive as early as 8:00, which may be helpful to establish a better arrival experience for your child.

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, please call the office at 904-241-3259. If you need extended care you may sign up for our Late Bird option.

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 person must show identification.

Per Department of Children and Families (DCF), parents may not unlock or enter the gate. A teacher must be present to open the gate at arrival, dismissal and at any other times throughout the day.

Parking

The three spaces in front of the building will remain open for drop off and pick up only. There are also spaces beside Breezy's Coffee Shop for your drop off and pick up only. Because of the traffic, we suggest that you hold your child's hand leaving and going to the car. If you are planning on staying for an extended amount of time, out of consideration of neighboring businesses, please park in any available on-street public parking place.

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 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 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 on a State Regulated form. Forms 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 a 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 draining 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 feel free to call with important information regarding your child. If you are unable to call but feel there is important information for that day, you may hand the teacher a note upon arrival at the gate. If your child will be absent, please call the office and leave a message, 904-241-3259.

Please check your child's bag daily for information from the school. School notices and your child's crafts can be found in the school bags. Important dates and information are also posted on our website: www.theplaygarden.org, on our "Playgarden by the Sea Parent Council" Facebook page, in our newsletter, and in emails from your child's teacher.

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 or the Board of Directors.

School Provided Snacks

Preparing and enjoying a morning snack are essential activities in your child's preschool day. In addition to providing nourishment for the body, food also nourishes the senses. As a young child's senses are still developing, we hope to stimulate the senses without overwhelming them. Wholesome, organic and GMO free foods provide an array of subtle flavors, colors, textures, and aromas unlike processed and artificially flavored foods. The senses are further nourished with a beautifully set table, a verse of thanks and a quiet yet joyful mood. In this warm space, a child can take in the social and nutritional value of snack time.

The teachers will make every effort to offer the children nutritionally rich foods prepared with organic ingredients. Our snacks are relatively simple and although they may be unfamiliar in the beginning, they are soon old favorites. A small amount is served to try. We recognize that some children may have allergies, special diets, or sensory issues. If your child has any food allergies or restrictions, please be sure to inform both the administration and your child's teacher. A list of allergies and restrictions are posted in both the Kinderhaus and the Cottage for easy reference.

We provide a small "Gnomie" snack shortly after arrival time. This snack is usually a small nibble. Examples include organic crackers, raisins, pretzles. Our "biggie" snack consists of a whole grain, vegetable, and/or fruit. Gnomie and main snacks are prepared primarily with organic ingredients and are all GMO-free.

Lunch

Children who stay through lunch need to bring healthy growing food. 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 of 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.

****Please note that we are a nut-free school. Please check the ingredients of prepared foods before sending them to school. For example, most packaged hummus contains tahini, which is a sesame product. Please do not pack lunch items containing these ingredients.**

Clothing and Warmth

Each child is provided with a cubby and/or a hook to hang jackets and their school bags. The child’s symbol will be visible so that the child will find the place for his or her belongings when he/she arrives.

Children should wear comfortable clothing that can get dirty. It is recommended that shorts or leggings are worn underneath dresses or skirts.

Please dress children in clothing that will be easy for them to manage in the bathroom. When a child is able to independently undress and dress themselves it is a huge sense of accomplishment!

Be sure your child dresses for the weather, including raincoat, rain pants and boots (no umbrellas) for rain, and a warm coat, hat and gloves in the winter chill.

Sunhats are strongly encouraged for nature walks and beach days.

Children should wear comfortable shoes (possibly with Velcro fasteners) that they can independently put on and remove (or working on it!). On beach day, sandy feet love Crocs or flip flops with a back strap.

Please save light-up shoes, fancy party shoes, as well as media-related shoes for home.

What to Keep at School

Your child will have a school bag that he/she will bring to school each day, provided by the Teacher (no backpacks). Please keep a complete (labeled) change of clothing inside of a labeled

Ziploc bag in the school bag. If your child is in the Butterfly program, please supply several pairs of (labeled) underwear and pants.

Please make sure to label the bag as well as each individual item of clothing.

Please replenish this change of clothes as needed per use or seasonal appropriateness.

In addition, please send a seasonally appropriate change of labeled clothing with your child on the first day of school. This one will stay at school (place in a labeled Ziploc bag).

For beach days that are warm enough for swimming, please dress your child in a two-piece bathing suit or trunks with the net underwear removed.

Matching rash guards are provided by the school. Each child will wear this rashguard to the beach. This is considerably helpful to the teachers when doing headcounts and ensuring that all students are within sight.

What not to Bring to School

A child's personal toys should remain at home; however, if a security "lovey" item is needed during times of change, the item may stay in the cubby or the bag and "watch" from this vantage point.

Children are welcome to bring little gifts from nature to add to our nature table.

Clothing, undergarments, water bottles, and lunch boxes should be media free.

Clothing displaying Cartoon characters and TV or movie stars, including Disney princesses and Super Heroes are not to be worn at The Playgarden.

Please see our school media policy on page 16.

Rhythm and Family Life

When a child enters the Waldorf or LifeWays preschool, he/she and his/her family become 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.

Simple, predictable routine works best for the young 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 young child's growth and development. A young child is very active – moving and doing as her/his 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 our 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 figure 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. Young children should be in bed early (by 7:00 or 7:30 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 parents, brush teeth and get into bed. Parents can then choose a bedtime routine that is repeated the same every bedtime. Some families may choose to light a candle. A story can be read or told (one story works best), a simple lullaby, verse or prayer can be spoken and then the candle is blown out and it is time to sleep. 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. Remember that we are a nut-free school. Please read more about Lunch on page 6 of this Parent Handbook.

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.) At the Playgarden 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, often muffins baked by the birthday child themselves and handed out to their friends.

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 leaving the Playgarden. The Fly Away Ceremony is a symbolic and joyful tradition. Children who are entering Kindergarten or First Grade will receive a Rainbow Cape. All other children will receive a Rainbow Wand.

Seasonal Festivals and Events

At The Playgarden, 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.

In school Festivals/Holidays (students only)

Michaelmas

Candlemas

St. Nicholas

St. Patrick's Day (Shaun Shaun the Leprechaun!)

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

Other Events

Community Work Weekends (family)

Fall Parent Socials (adults only)

Jingle Bell Tea (family)

Annual Fundraising Event & Social (adults only)

Forest Campout (family)

Annual Chili Cook off (family)

Dutton Island Family Day (families attend the school day for a field trip)

End of the Year Picnic (family) – includes Fly Away Ceremony

See the school calendar for dates for these events!

Parent Education

For a child to benefit most from The Playgarden experience it is helpful for the parents to enhance their own understanding of our LifeWays and Waldorf-inspired approach to early childhood education.

In order to support that understanding, the Playgarden offers 1-2 community education classes during the year. Gathering support, honoring childhood, and promoting balance in family life are themes we highlight. We will explore simplification of our environment, family rhythm, scheduling and filtering out adult information for our children. Families who participate will be prepared to integrate sustainable simplifying changes at home, including enhancing their sense of purpose and connection with their partner in parenting; learning listening and coping skills to improve communication; and experiencing more calm and heart-felt connections at home.

Want to get started? Visit <https://lifewaysnorthamerica.org/upcoming-courses/>

Discipline for the Young Child

Age appropriate discipline for the young child can be approached on several levels. At The Playgarden the 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. The teachers assist the children to right a wrong situation and care for a child whom they might have harmed, oftentimes by helping a child to retrieve a “boo-boo ball” for an injured friend.

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. The Playgarden strives to work in partnership to help your child grow and develop self-regulation. If a child displays ongoing aggressive or negative behavior, their 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 our school and a child’s family to better understand 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, is a fairly common and age-appropriate behavior of a young child. Children will sometimes bite or hit/hurt 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 when 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.

The open format of our nature-based curriculum requires that children can follow multistep directions and identify boundaries. The safety of every child is of utmost importance to campus and forest teachers on campus and on field trips. If your child hides or runs away from the class as a stress response and is unable to follow directives to comfortably stay with the group, your child may be sent home for the remainder of the day.

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, use kind hands with their friends, or repeatedly run/hide, it may be necessary to ask that your child be withdrawn from the school. Such a decision would be made by the College of Teachers 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, snack & supply fee, deposit, or any tuition applicable to the time the child attended the school as outlined in your signed Financial Contract.

Media Policy

The Playgarden is a “no media” school. 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 read, play musical instruments, draw, paint, and play games as healthy alternatives to media-based entertainment.

Although every family must decide this issue for itself, The Playgarden 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.

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.

Administration

The Administration works alongside the College of Teachers and the Board of Directors. The Playgarden's administration supports the daily workings of our school. They strive to be a source of information and support for the families as well as the teachers. They maintain records for licensing purposes, collect tuition and payments due, ensure that the budget is adhered to, and that enrollment is completed in time for appropriate staff to be added.

College of Teachers

The College of Teachers, or CoTs, is composed of The Playgarden's teachers. CoTs meets regularly to discuss ways to offer support to the school's community, administration, the board as well as each other. It is these meetings that Rudolf Steiner viewed as the "heart and soul of the whole teaching." CoTs focuses on maintaining the school's rich curriculum through the celebration of the seasons and maintaining a meaningful festival life for the school and its community. CoTs also works closely with the parents with the intention of being a resource for parenting and developing a healthy home life that is conducive to growth and a sense of wellness for the entire family.

Parent Council

The Playgarden is a volunteer-based community organization. Parents in every Waldorf and Lifeways school show great generosity with their time and talents. Playgarden parents contribute time and energy towards fundraising events, school festivals, school maintenance, and so on. The children see parents modeling community service in their support of the school on a daily basis. This service makes Waldorf and Lifeways Education possible; without it, the schools could not exist.

Your support will help our school grow and thrive. Do not be shy about expressing interest in positions currently filled: our volunteers look forward to sharing the mission and the work! Volunteering is an excellent way to meet fellow parents, be more active in your child's school life, and gain a deeper understanding and insight into Lifeways and Waldorf principles. There are a number of present Committees that you can join.

School Policies

Volunteer Opportunities

Our school relies on volunteers. Each family is requested to volunteer 20 hours annually and 30 hours when families have multiple children enrolled. 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. Families may donate up to 15 hours@ \$20 per hour and \$30 per hour if two or more children are enrolled. We still ask that you volunteer 5 hours a year.

At the end of the school year, families who have not donated service hours or not pledged to buy-out service hours will be charged \$40 per hour or \$50 per hour for two or more children enrolled at The Playgarden.

Volunteers on-campus, and in the Forest, during school hours will be required to sign 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. 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.

Field Trips

All programs will visit the beach or Dolphin Park (Oceanfront Park 429 1st St S). You will find a waiver to sign at the end of this handbook. The waiver must be signed before the child can participate in the field trips.

Emergency Closing of the School

In case of severe weather, check your email for updates and school closures. We will notify you via email, text or by phone by 7 p.m.

Emergency Preparedness Weather Plan

In the event of inclement weather, e.g. a hurricane, the Lead Teachers and teacher assistants will guide the children into the hallway and bathroom located between the kitchen and craft/snack room in the Cottage, and the Kitchen or basement in the Kinderhaus. The students will be seated closely together. The Administration or Lead Teacher will ensure all doors and windows are secure. Parents will be informed via text or phone call of inclement weather and asked to pick up their child as soon as possible. All staff will remain on site until all children are safely removed from the school with their parents.

Emergency Preparedness Lockdown Plan

In the event of an emergency, the Lead Teachers and teacher assistants will guide the children into the hallway and bathroom located between the kitchen and craft/snack room in the Cottage, and the Kitchen or Basement in the Kinderhaus. The students will be seated close together. The Administration or Lead Teacher will ensure all windows and doors are secure. Parents will be informed via text of imminent danger and instructed to please wait for the danger to clear. Administration will join teachers and students and periodically check for continued safety. All families may pick up their children after danger has passed.

Weather and Make Up Days

We follow Duval County Public Schools for school closures for weather days when classes are canceled. Make-up days for our 2,3,4, and 5 day classes pose unique challenges with few weather day options that may or may not land on a day your child regularly attends.

The maximum number of days that we can reasonably accommodate are

2 day classes: Three make-up dates

3 Day classes: Four make-up Dates

4 day classes (Forest Gnomeschool): 5 make-up Dates

It is at the teacher's discretion to set make-up days, utilizing calendar weather days when possible, potentially adding dates to the end of the year, or other creative additional time added to class with the understanding that all students may not be able to attend make up days due to family schedules. We do not offer reimbursement for missed days/ weather days.

Child Abuse and Neglect

All childcare personnel are mandated by law to report their suspicions of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment to the Florida Abuse Hotline in accordance with section 39.201 of the Florida Statutes, which can be reached at 1-800-962-2873, or <https://reportabuse.dcf.state.fl.us>

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 The Playgarden'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 including 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.

Fire Drills

In accordance with State law, fire drills are held once a month. During fire drills all children and adults must leave the building.

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.

Spring River School

If you are wondering about "life after The Playgarden" for your child and family, we want you to be aware that we have a sister school, a Waldorf homeschool support program called Spring River that runs through high school.

Spring River School sprung forth from the thirty-year tradition of The Playgarden. Parents from our community, joined by local educators, were driven by a common desire to create a transformative educational experience where their children could grow and learn in the spirit of the Waldorf education they had grown to love and appreciate during those early childhood days. That small group of families became a larger community and those desires took form first as seasonal community festivals and parent education groups, then as enrichment classes supporting the homeschool efforts of the families who chose that path, and finally as a full offering of main lesson and enrichments for homeschooling families in the fall of 2018. Spring River was developed out of love and respect for childhood and an understanding of human development.

At Spring River School, each child and parent is met with warmth, acceptance, and joy; supporting one another through homeschool/hybrid classes, festival preparations, celebrations, and community gatherings. To learn more please visit the Spring River website at Springriverschool.org.

**The Playgarden 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 child care 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.
- Preschool/VPK programs provide a developmentally appropriate, play-based approach found in Waldorf preschools 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.

*“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. # C04DU0388

The Playgarden's Parent Handbook Agreement and Authorizations

Child's Name: _____ School Year: 2025/26

*all document links available on our website Enrollment Docs page [LINK](#).

Carefully read and **check to agree to each item:

Field Trip Authorization:

- I give permission for my child to walk to the beach, Dolphin Park, other planned off-site locations and sprinkler/water play.

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 on campus, a fieldtrip, or in Forest class.*

Know your Child Care Facility:

- I/We have read and reviewed the Department of Children & Families informational brochure. [LINK](#)

Influenza Brochure

- I/We have read and reviewed the Department of Children and Families [LINK](#)

Distracted Driver/Parent

- I/We have read and reviewed the DCF Distracted Driver form [LINK](#) DATE: __9/1/25__

*must be signed in Sept & April

Parent Acknowledgement

- I am in charge of my child during festivals and community events.
 We are a low to no media school, I have reviewed the Parent Handbook media policy.

I/We have read completely The Playgarden's Parent Handbook. All forms available on website.

I/We understand that we must bring this signed form on the first day of school in order for our child to begin their program.

Print Name of Parents or Guardian(s): _____

Signature(s) _____

Date: __8/18/2025__ *must be signed first day of school

***If you are in a forest class, please also read, sign, and return the Forest Manual through Procure, print and sign, or email.**