

SBS Kindergarten Parent Handbook

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“Receive the children in reverence, Educate them in love, And send them forth in freedom.”
Dr. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)

Introduction

The Waldorf Kindergarten is truly a “children’s garden.” Here the young child grows strong and gracefully in a time frame that cannot be hurried or forced if they are to grow into a capable, vibrant, and balanced human being. The Kindergarten creates a warm, loving atmosphere that nurtures each child’s own development through creative play, bringing the children together as a group so they can experience the happiness of the Kindergarten family joining together as one. The flowing rhythms of the day, week, and year inspire the artistic activity of the classroom and the practical activities of each day. The children are encouraged to discover the world around them and gradually find their places within it.

The following pages describe the environment of our Kindergarten and the more practical aspects related to meeting the children’s needs within the home and school settings. We hope that all parents and caregivers will read the material as it is designed to answer many questions Kindergarten families may have and prepare you, and your child, for the first day of school.

What to bring the first day of school

Snack - please send a hearty snack packed with 2 cloth napkins, in reusable containers when possible to reduce waste.

Full change of clothes that can stay in the classroom

Please include seasonally appropriate shirts, pants, underwear, extra socks, and a sweater for those times when your child may need a change.

A pair of thick, warm socks or slippers to keep in the classroom

For indoor play time on cold mornings.

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Lunches for Aftercare and Hike Days only

Please note that lunches only need to be brought to school if your child is attending Aftercare on that day. Lunch is not included as part of the Kindergarten day, except for on Hike Days. Please send lunch with your child on Hike Days.

Please leave toys and other “show-and-tell” items at home.

Clothing and Shoes

What children wear often determines the quality of their experience. Clothes that are warm and easy to play in, fit well, and are comfortable help children feel at home in the world. The most important aspect of the clothing for the Kindergarten child is warmth throughout the year. Children of this age, despite so many signs of independence, have not yet fully developed their inner temperature gauge that enables them to make decisions about the appropriate clothing for the day. Layers really help. The children are often painting, baking, and playing in the dirt and mud outside. Party dresses and fancy shoes are not appropriate for the Kindergarten except on a few special days.

We respectfully ask, and our dress code requires, that children wear clothing without **words, logos, or strong graphic designs**. Plain clothes please. Small logos on shoes or jackets and gentle pictures are ok. Please ask if you have questions about a particular clothing item.

Shoes or athletic sandals should be attached securely and firmly to the feet. Please no shoes with lights, cartoon-decorated shoes, heels, clogs, Crocs, flip-flops, or shoes with GIANT logos.

Rain Gear – We play outside everyday, rain or shine, and so we will ask you to send in rain gear that will stay in the classroom when the weather begins to change.

- Rain boots – tall enough for the very deep puddles in our play yard
- Raincoat with a hood that is long enough to cover their bottoms.
- Rain pants that fit easily over their other pants. (Borrows are available)

Land's End is a good place to find quality, nontoxic rain gear.

It is very important to label all clothing items with your child's name.

Please let us know if you would like to borrow a pair of rain pants.

***A note about skirts and dresses:** Please send children with leggings or shorts underneath their skirts and dresses to allow for complete freedom of movement during all parts of the Kindergarten day. Tank tops and sun-dresses must have straps 2 inches wide, or be worn with a t-shirt underneath.

We ask that **jewelry, watches, make-up, tattoos, and nail polish** not be worn in the Kindergarten.

Kindergarten Arrival

Please drop your child off in the back of the school next to the kindergarten play yard between 8:00 and 8:15am. You are also welcome to park your car in the middle of the drop off lot and walk your child over to the kindergarten play yard. Our school day begins at 8:30am. **We ask that you make every effort to be on time.** Please go to the office to get a late slip if you arrive at school after 8:30am.

When saying good-bye to your child, a joyous and matter-of-fact “see you later” and kiss will help your child enormously. When separation difficulties arise, as they do at some time for nearly every child, we can work together to ease this. What works best is to arrive well before 8:30am to enable your child to engage with their classmates and teachers before we move inside. A healthy transition in the morning is a true gift to your child.

Kindergarten Departure and Aftercare

Our school day ends at 12:35pm and we will do our best to end our day promptly. Please be on time for pick-up. Kindergarten Pick-up is in front of the school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. On Thursday, please pick your child up in the back of the school. If you need to pick up your child after 12:35, information for our Aftercare program can be found in the school office. A teacher will accompany any children going to Aftercare at the end of the Kindergarten day.

Hike day pick-up at Westwood Hills parking lot is at 12:30pm.

Rhythms of Home and School

When we observe the natural world, we see its rhythmic nature. The sun rises and sets; the seasons come and go through the year. It is our experience that many aspects of health and discipline can be addressed in no better or more productive way than through the establishment of regular, loving rhythms. We cannot overemphasize the benefits that will accrue for the well being of young children if attention is paid to rhythm and routine.

Rhythmic consistency allows children the security to devote their energies to the tasks of growing and exploring the world. The Kindergarten has a regular rhythm to the day, the week and the year. Certain activities happen every day in a predictable sequence, including therapeutic movement, circle time, creative play, clean up, rest, snack, outdoor play, and story. Each day is designed with moments of activity and moments of quiet. Weekly activities include painting, hiking, and hopefully some cooking. Festivals, circle themes, songs, and special seasonal crafts connect us to the rhythm of the year.

We hope that Kindergarten families will join us in the effort to build a rhythmic life for the children by providing consistent times and familiar rituals for meals and bedtime.

Media Policy

Electronic screen media (TV, movies, video games, computers, tablets, smart phones, etc.) is a prominent feature of modern American life. The Waldorf educational approach practiced at Stone Bridge School asserts that, while instruction in and use of these devices is appropriate in later grades, exposure to electronic media in Grades K-5 negatively affects a child's imagination, healthy development, and social interactions. This position is corroborated by the American Academy of Pediatrics and current child developmental research. Children are deeply affected by everything in their environment. Television, video games, and other electronic media have a lasting influence on children's behavior, development, and school performance, as well as on their peers' school experiences.

Our faculty recognizes that media viewing falls in the domain of family life and that it is the parents who decide what role electronic media plays in their children's life. In accordance with the values of the Stone Bridge community, we ask families to limit their children's exposure to screens and to commit to seeking out alternative activities fully involving their children's capacity to develop a healthy mind, emotional life, and physical body. We strongly recommend that children in grades K-5 not use electronic media and specifically ask that they not use electronic media on school days/evenings.

In order to facilitate well-informed decision-making regarding the role of electronic media in your family's life, we encourage you to do your own research. Here is an excellent place to start:

- screenfreeparenting.com

From the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/The-Benefits-of-Limiting-TV.aspx>

Hike Days

One of the ways that we encourage and nurture healthy physical development and a deeper connection to the natural world is through our Hike Days. Depending on the scheduled school and class activities, weather, and students' needs, each class teacher will decide when hike days are feasible.

These outdoor experiences are a valued part of the Kindergarten curriculum that require parental involvement and support. A committed "Hike Day Parent" is needed to assist the teacher on hike days each week and to help drive children to Aftercare after the hike each week. Two additional parents are requested to attend the hike to ensure adequate supervision and safety of the children.

On this day, please drop off (8:00-8:30am) and pick up (**12:30pm** or earlier if you need to get to SBS by 12:35 for older children) at the Westwood Hills parking lot. Make sure that your child has a small backpack to carry their own water, a snack/lunch for the end of the hike, and a change of pants. Children should wear old clothes, LONG pants (very important for tree climbing!) and good walking shoes PLEASE. And please join us if you can, everyone is welcome!

Please refer to our Chaperone and Volunteer Guidelines for the school's protocol for drivers and chaperones; Office personnel can provide the guidelines and paperwork required for chaperoning SBS field trips.

Parent-Teacher Communication

We are always happy to speak with you should you have any questions, concerns, messages, etc. regarding your child and the Kindergarten. While brief messages can be delivered at drop off, pick up, or by email, longer conversations are best scheduled ahead of time, in person or by phone. Please know that we will always ask that discussions about your child take place not in the child's presence – it is important that adult conversations and thoughts about a child's particular development be kept in the realm of adult consciousness only.

In order to let you know what is happening in class and other important events and dates, we will periodically send out an email newsletter. Please let us know which members of your family would like to be included on the email newsletter contact list.

Each month or so we will distribute an article for you to read that we hope will deepen your understanding of some element of the Waldorf pedagogy, curriculum, or the development of your child. Look for these in our newsletters. Parent-teacher conferences will be offered to each individual family in the late Fall or Winter months.

Community Education

Our school has wonderful speakers and educators that come to speak throughout the year as part of our community education and enrichment series. We will let you know well in advance when any of these events are scheduled - please make every effort to attend.

Festivals

Throughout history and around the world, human beings have celebrated festivals to mark the turning cycle of the year and nurture a relationship with the world of nature and its rhythms. In the Waldorf Kindergarten, it is our goal to offer an experience of the seasons through community festivals that are meaningful and relevant. These celebrations are characterized by simplicity and joy that speak to the universal qualities of the human being and meet the needs of the young child, creating a mood of reverence that each family can carry back to their particular celebrations, whatever their religion or culture.

Many elements of the Kindergarten at Stone Bridge School honor the seasons of nature including stories and nature tales, seasonal songs and verses, the nature table, seasonal crafts, activities and games, and hike days. All of these year-round elements of our program prepare us for the festivals that we celebrate each season. In addition to celebrating each child's birthday, the following is a description of the festivals that will be celebrated in our Kindergarten this year. Some parents may be inspired to create additional festivals outside of school, or to attend festivals at other Waldorf schools, such as the Sprite's Festival at Woodland Star in Sonoma.

In Autumn, we harvest from fields and gardens as the forces of the Earth begin to draw inward with the plants fading, leaves dropping, and the days growing shorter. We gather together as a school community to celebrate the **Harvest Festival**, offering gratitude for the abundance in our lives and summoning courage for the coming darkness of Winter. As the outer light of the Sun diminishes, we make lanterns in the Kindergarten and when we carry them out into the darkness on our **Lantern Walk**, we experience how our inner light shines forth.

With Winter's shorter days and long, dark nights, the children of the Kindergarten celebrate the birthday of **St. Nicholas**, hearing stories of his generosity and finding ways to offer generosity themselves. Just before winter break, we gather together in the warmth of our school community to celebrate the **Winter Assembly**, showcasing the songs and talents of the students in grades 1-8. And in February, we celebrate love by creating special cards for each other and delivering them on **St. Valentine's Day**.

In the Spring when plant life emerges, sap rises and buds burst, each Kindergarten child plants and tends a grass basket and has a chance to decorate a special egg for a friend in the other Kindergarten class. They then hide their egg during our annual **Egg Hunt** and seek for the egg that was created for them. Our Egg Hunt is followed by a **Spring Picnic** with our families. During our school-wide **Spring Festival**, families are invited to see the younger Kindergarten children with the important job of opening and blessing the festival, and the older Kindergarten students who will be moving into First Grade perform the first Maypole dance. This is the community's first chance to see the rising First Grade class all together. During the last week of school, the **Lavender Ceremony** honors the transition for children moving into the First Grade. It is our hope that these experiences of rhythmic harmony with the year's seasons will offer the children an ever-deepening connection with both their community and the natural world.

Birthdays

For the young child, birthdays are among the most special days of the year. Your child's birthday will be joyfully observed in the Kindergarten with a birthday story and a special snack. Your child's teacher will contact you prior to this day to share with you the details of how you can help and what you can expect.

We ask that invitations to home birthday celebrations be made by mail or telephone and **NOT** distributed at school.

Illness and Fever policy

In order to maintain optimal health within the class community, we ask that you keep your child home if they are not feeling well. Here are some guidelines for when your child should stay home:

- If your child develops a fever, we ask that they stay home for **24 hours** after the fever has broken without the use of fever reducing medications.
- If your child is coughing frequently or has a sore throat.
- If your child has vomited or had diarrhea, they must be free from these symptoms for 24 hours before returning to school.

These measures will greatly help to contain the spread of illness within the class.

Please ensure that your child gets plenty of **sleep** and healthy **nutrition** in order to support their immunity. Children of this age need 11-12 hours of sleep per night.

Warmth is also very important to keep in mind when trying to sustain immunity. When the children are dressed in layers, they can stay warm during the cold mornings and shed their layers as the day warms up. A way that we check for warmth, even when the child says they are hot, is by feeling their hands. If the child's hands are warm, this is a good indication that they can remove one of their layers.

Thank you, dear parents, for your support in helping to keep everyone healthy!

Volunteering

The Stone Bridge School community thrives when there is a high level of parent engagement. We will begin inviting parent volunteers into the Kindergarten after the children have made the initial adjustment to life at school. In addition to volunteering in your child's classroom, there are multiple ways to contribute to the life of the school. We hope that each family will find a way to help that will be inspiring and perhaps educational, while contributing to the common good of the whole community, including participation in hike days, parent evenings, campus work days, community education events, and attendance at meetings for any of the school committees.

SBS committees play a vital role in the school's well-being and require dedicated parent leadership and volunteerism. Such committees include those dedicated to: Enchanted Village Faire, Festivals, Hospitality, Site Maintenance, Community Enrichment, Outreach and Inreach, Hiring, Charter Council, Parent Council, and Yearbook. Please see the SBS website for a description of each committee and contact the office or Administration if you have any questions.

Reading about Young Children and Waldorf Education

There are many wonderful resources that will enrich your understanding of Waldorf Education, the Waldorf Kindergarten, and the development of the young child. Here are a few to begin with:

- waldorfeducation.org
- allianceforpublicwaldorfeducation.org
- *The Soul of Discipline* by Kim John Payne, M. Ed.
- *Simplicity Parenting* by Kim John Payne, M. Ed.
- *Heaven on Earth* by Sharifa Oppenheimer
- *You Are Your Child's First Teacher* by Rahima Baldwin-Dancy

Acknowledgement

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