

Nature's Way Montessori School Parent Handbook

Toddler - Upper Elementary 2020-2021

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Welcome to Nature's Way

Our parent manual is an important document for you to read thoroughly. In these pages, you will find answers to many commonly asked questions about our community. Over the years we have agreed upon procedures that allow us to work together as a team of parents and staff supporting the development of your child. If you find that we are doing something different than what we say, please let us know so we can evaluate our choices and make amendments.

In a Montessori school, the function of a teacher differs significantly from that of a traditional teacher. As such, we have chosen to refer to our teachers as classroom guides. Teams of Montessori-educated guides oversee students in nongraded, multi-age classrooms. Throughout the school, students are engaged in independent activity for the majority of the day. Classroom guides facilitate a child's ability to direct his or her own work by providing individualized guidance that honors the abilities and developmental stage of each child.

Contact information:

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EVERYDAY CONCERNS

First Day

The first day is often harder for the parents than for the child! Although the child is experiencing a new environment, new rules and new people, the day is planned to help him or her to adjust to these changes. Often parents worry throughout the day while their child is easing through this period of transition.

There are many things you can do to ease your transition:

- ❖ **Come by the school** with your child several times before the first day so you are familiar with the location, entrance route, rush-hour traffic patterns, etc. If the school is open, come in and talk to the staff.
- ❖ **Attend the Parent Meeting in August and read your Parent Handbook** carefully. These things will familiarize you with the routine and personnel of your child's new environment. Call with any questions or concerns before the first day of school.
- ❖ **Find out what the first day's schedule will be** so that you can talk to your child about what he should expect. Use the guides' names frequently so your child becomes familiar with their names.
- ❖ **Be prepared.** Make sure you have provided any items your child's guide has requested.
- ❖ **Call** if you feel anxious during your child's first day at school. Plan to call around lunchtime when it is possible for the guide to come to the phone.

Let us know after the first day's experience what might help other parents to ease the first-day stress.

Arrival & Dismissal

The driveway is a congested area during arrival and dismissal. Please help us facilitate safety by following the driveway procedures that are given at the beginning of each year, both at the parent meeting and in e-mail communication. This year our arrival and dismissal procedures can be found in our [COVID School Safety Document](#) on pages 4 and 5.

Here are ways you can say good-bye to your child in the morning drop off in a brief and positive way:

1. Tell your child when you will return for him. Explain this in a way he can relate to: "I'll be back after you wake up from nap."
2. Don't try to stop your child from crying or expressing unhappiness in other ways when you leave. Such expressions are important for the child. Accept his/her

protests sympathetically and offer reassurance that you will return later. Remember that this crying is likely to end as soon as you leave.

3. Be sure to make it clear throughout the parting process that you are definitely leaving. Your calm certainty will help your child accept the separation. If you show that you are upset, s/he may intensify protests.

4. A departure ritual may ease the transition. The ritual you agree on with your child can be a good-bye sequence of endearments (e.g. 1 kiss, 1 hug, and a high five) or special words. Like bedtime rituals, departure routines reassure your child at anxious moments. Be warned! Once adopted, they can be altered only at your peril! When you have completed your departure ritual please leave promptly and do not prolong the separation.

Classes dismiss curbside at the following times:

Toddler & Early Childhood Community: 2:30

Lower & Upper Elementary: 3:00

Adolescent Community 3:30

Release of Children to Persons Other Than Parents

Written instructions from a parent must be left with the office or a call made to the office on the day that your child is to be picked up by someone who is **not** included on the child's **Identification and Emergency Information Form**.

You will be asked to give the individual's name and the approximate time the child will be picked up. Please inform the individual picking up your child that they may be asked for personal identification.

Clothing

Please encourage your child to choose practical clothing – comfortable, washable, play clothes and comfortable shoes. All students should be able to manage their clothing on their own. Please use thought and care in helping your small child select his/her clothing so s/he will not feel restricted in choice of activity or movement -avoid overalls, pants with heavy snaps and belts, leotards, or any other clothing that is difficult to unfasten, remove, or put back on. A child's dress is a powerful instrument in developing independence, image, and self-respect.

Label **all clothing** with your child's name, especially garments that are frequently removed (e.g., sweaters, jackets, raincoats, hats, gloves, etc.).

Shoes are not worn in the classroom. All children need to wear socks or indoor slippers at school.

We go outside in all types of weather. Please check the weather daily and send appropriate attire, including rain boots, rain coats, and winter weather gear. We have various mediums in our outside environment (sand, dirt, mulch, etc...) and encourage

your children to experience the offerings of the environment to the fullest extent. Please encourage your child to wear clothing that you are comfortable getting wet and dirty. Soiling favorite or “fancy” clothing or clothing that they have been told should not get dirty can be a source of distress, especially for young children.

Lunches

Nature’s Way Montessori respects each family’s approach to food and nutrition and embraces the social and cultural eating practices of our students. Nature’s Way Montessori encourages all children to eat foods that are healthy. We ask that you provide a healthy breakfast each school day and send nutritious lunches. Be creative!

We encourage you to talk to your child about the health benefits of the foods you include in their lunches and have your child actively participate in the preparation and packing of meals. Books on healthy food choices are available in our library. We find that desserts are quite distracting to children eating in a school group environment, and while we do not label these foods as ‘bad,’ we do insist on a no soda and dessert policy at school. We consider the following foods to be desserts: candy, chocolate, cake, cookies, and drinks with less than 90% juice. Please reach out to us if you have questions about any particular food item!

We allow children to consume as much or as little of their packed meals and snacks as their appetite dictates, and we encourage exposing them to a wide variety of foods- both for physical growth and self-awareness of their tastes, preferences, and hunger cues. All classes have a microwave oven, so please feel free to send items that need to be heated, if your child desires them.

We strongly encourage you to send foods in reusable containers- please avoid plastic bags and heavily packaged foods. Plastic or cloth containers for food and drinks are a sensible and sanitary alternative. We would prefer that students bring a non-distracting lunch box and containers which your child can open and close independently.

To show you the things that your child is and is not eating at school, we will ask your child to take home food that is not consumed.

Snack

The guides in individual communities will share with you their plans for snacks prior to the start of the school year.

Nap

Children attending the Toddler and Early Childhood Communities who nap will rest in the afternoon. The guides in these communities will inform you of the bedding to supply and any other procedures followed for nap.

Bringing Items to School

Toys, candy and gum are not allowed at school. Although children enjoy sharing their toys with classmates, they cause confusion, distraction, and sadness if the object becomes lost. Please check your child's bag each day.

Items of special interest such as flowers, seeds, books, pictures, insects, rock, shells, cultural souvenirs, etc., are always welcome and should be identified with your child's name. Please check with your child's lead guide before sending these items.

Handheld video games, cell phones*, and other electronic devices may not be brought to school. *Upper Elementary students may bring cell phones to school as long as they are kept in their backpack and are not taken out until school is over and they are exiting the school grounds.

Attendance

Daily attendance is kept on all children during on-campus and home learning periods. All absences should be excused. A note to your child's guide concerning the nature of the absence or a call to the office will suffice.

Nature's Way feels your child's attendance at school is important. Much goes on in a day that is planned for his academic and personal growth. Although we have no attendance policy for preschoolers, we strongly encourage attendance for the continuity and comfort it gives your child.

Arriving on time is essential for all communities. Students who arrive late will miss the transition time which allows for a smooth entry into the class between 8:15 and 8:45 a.m. Late entries also disturb the smooth flow of the class. If a child has excessive absences or is consistently late for school, we will request a conference to seek a way to avoid this. All late arrivals will be organized through the office and a staff member dispatched to follow our screening procedures prior to the child exiting the car.

COMMUNICATION

Communication with the School

Please limit your phone calls to the classroom guides during regular classroom hours. Occasionally you will reach our voicemail. Please leave a message and someone will return your call as soon as possible. It is often more expedient to leave a written message with a staff member. This can easily be accomplished during drop-off and pick-up times. E-mailing the school or a guide is another good method of communication.

If you have an urgent message for your child's community staff in the morning please consider enclosing a note in their school bag, emailing the teacher, or leaving a message on the school's answering machine. **Do not hold up the line of cars with a lengthy conversation** dismissal time.

Communication from the School

We want to keep you informed of your child's experience at school and of important events and information.

Each class sends e-mails and/or newsletters as needed throughout the year. The office also emails parents with important and timely information. Other places to get news are from our weekly **News You Need**, our website at natureswaymontessori.com and Facebook page. Our News You Need is sent from Constant Contact on a weekly basis. If you do not receive them, please check your spam folder or social/promotional tab.

Special Information from Home

In the event that a significant change occurs in your home, please consider informing your child's guide and/or an Administrator, Mary Smith/Amber Engel/Terri Needham. All information will be regarded as confidential. We will accept your judgment as to the kinds of changes that may affect your child's behavior, security, and general well being. Common causes of distress include: either or both parents being away from home for an extended time; new persons living in the home; illness of either parent; illness of a sibling; any hospitalization, divorce, accident or death in the family; moving; and death of a pet.

The guide or administrator will keep you informed of any significant changes in the school environment that may affect your child.

Custody Information

Under situations where the responsibility and custody for children is shared between separated parent households or other guardianship arrangements involving relatives or non-family members, the school requires that a copy of the arrangement is provided to the office.

Conferences/Contact

Parent-guide conferences will be scheduled during the year. We suggest you take full advantage of these conferences and ask for additional conferences if needed. We do ask that you refrain from discussing with us any problems related to your child in his presence. Please ask for a conference whenever you feel the need.

Frequent parent contact is an important goal of all the staff at NWMS. If you feel you would like more personal communication concerning your child, please ask! The director/assistant director is available to join a conference with a guide and parent upon request

Early Intervention

Nature's Way considers itself an *early intervention school*. The guides in each class have extensive experience with the developmental stage of the children in the community. They are able to observe a difference in the child's social, emotional, intellectual, educational, behavioral, and physical adjustment. Our guides will adapt to the needs of the child automatically in order to aid that child in maintaining a positive self opinion while they work to grow in the affected areas.

The director and the parents will be informed by the lead guide when extensive adaptations are made for a student. The parent will be asked to seek outside screening procedures and intervention to support the results of the observation and testing when necessary. The results of a careful screening will give guides the tools they need to support the investment you have made in their education. As you have taken the time to research and place your child in a school concerned with individual needs, it makes sense for us to be concerned that all children are reaching their potential.

Parent Participation

The spirit of Montessori emphasizes the importance of parents' or guardians' participation in the education of their child. The school grows not only by the quality and longevity of the staff, but by the individual efforts of the parents who provide valuable services and contributions to the school.

You will be asked to fill out a Parent Participation Form when you first register your child. Please let us know at any time of special services you would be willing to offer the staff or children of the school.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Illness/Injury/Transmittable Conditions

A sick child does not belong in school, both for his/her own welfare and for the health of the other children. Your child must remain at home until he has been symptom-free for 24 hours. This includes fever, upset stomach, vomiting, diarrhea, pinkeye, head lice or nits, ear infection, rash, or a contagious disease.

If your child has been diagnosed with a transmittable illness, please let the office know so the condition can be reported to the parents of the child's community.

If your child becomes ill at school, you will be notified immediately and requested to come and pick him/her up **within the hour**. By acting promptly, you reduce the amount of time a contagious condition might have to spread in the classroom, free the staff to continue with the everyday routine with the remainder of the class, and facilitate the comfort of your child. Please refer to our [COVID School Safety Doc: "COVID-19 Symptoms and COVID-19 Cases in School"](#) p. 9-12.

Minor incidents with injury occurring during the school day receive prompt and careful attention by staff members. In the event of serious illness or injury, the family is notified at once and arrangements are made for the child to be transported home or to a medical facility. An Incident Report is filled out immediately after the mishap and is filed in the student's file.

We cannot emphasize too strongly the need for parents to inform the school immediately of any change of contact information during the year. We must be able to contact one parent **at all times** in case of emergency. It is the parent's responsibility to inform the office of any change in contact information.

Food Allergies

We recognize that a food allergy is one of many differences that a student can exhibit at our school. Each year approximately 16% of our population is allergic to something known. Approximately one-half of those are allergies to a food substance. The school is responsible for an overall policy about safety for all children and specifically the child who has an allergy to a common food item.

The school will adhere to the following procedures:

1. We will provide a questionnaire to all parents of children with allergies to define how severe it is (airborne, contact, or ingestion) and what form the reaction takes.
2. All staff will be aware of the allergies of each child enrolled in case that child happens to be in their care during the school day. Staff will be aware of how to help the child should s/he come in contact with the allergen.
3. Children with life threatening allergies will be asked to wear a medical alert bracelet stating the nature of their allergy.

4. No snacks, projects, lessons, etc., will contain the food allergen of a severely affected student in their classroom.
5. Parents who have a student in the affected classroom will be asked to avoid sending the allergic food substance in their child's lunch or snack.
6. Staff will help to educate the children about the importance of taking care of each other and honoring the differences of every child.

Medicine

All medications must be received from the parent or guardian by a staff person. It must be accompanied by a Medication Form. Medication forms are available in every classroom. The form can be found below for your reference.

A medication form must be filled out if your child comes to school on any medicine. Side effects (hyperactivity, diarrhea, sleepiness, etc.) must be noted on the form.

Medication Form

A staff member must receive all medications. Please do not send medications in lunch boxes. Medicines need to be in the original prescription container, labeled with the child's name and include the physician's directions for use.

Child's Name _____

Class _____ Date _____

Name of Medication _____

Purpose of medication _____

Dosage _____

Time(s) to Administer _____

Prescription _____ Over the Counter _____

Special storage requirements _____

Possible side effects _____

Parent Signature _____

To be filled out by a staff member administering the medication. Form to parent with any unused medication.

Time(s) administered: M _____ T _____ W _____ TH _____ F _____

Initialed by staff _____

Date unused medication returned to parent _____ Parent's Initials _____

Everyday Safety

Your child(ren)'s safety is always on the mind of every staff member. The following are everyday procedures at Nature's Way that limit the access of our campus to unknown persons or alert us to the presence of unknown persons.

Our greatest assets are our opportunity to be in visual contact with our surroundings, and our large staff. Unlike many other schools, we have extensive visual access to the approach ways in our school. Every room has large windows along two sides. There are five classrooms with a total of 10 staff members that have window views of the drive. Staff members in those classes call the office if they see anything they are uncomfortable with including unfamiliar persons on the property.

Guides and the office regularly post, on the communal calendar inside the office door, any outside visitors for which they have arranged. Scheduled visitors are announced in advance to the entire staff. Staff News is posted in each building that details, among other things, the visitor schedule for the entire week and who is visiting the school that day. Visitors are instructed to come to the office before entering a classroom and are either escorted to their destination or the classroom is notified to expect them.

In addition to the above, our school does have an emergency/disaster preparedness plan covering most natural and other emergencies. This plan is reviewed with staff annually and as needed.

Personal Safety Policy

The Tennessee Department of Education requires that all children be taught personal safety as a deterrent to child abuse. Rather than using a program designed to teach personal safety, Nature's Way integrates those concepts in the everyday respect that is given and taught to each child.

At Nature's Way, personal safety is taught, modeled, and reinforced on a daily basis in all classes.

Children are taught that they have a right to an undisturbed working space. They learn to prepare a space, a mat on the floor or table, on which they place the work they have chosen. They are taught and practice how to walk around a mat on the floor so that they do not violate the space of another student. They are taught what it means to respect another's chosen work. They learn to wait patiently instead of interrupting another child who is working.

Children learn to negotiate when in conflict. They learn to use words instead of body parts to express themselves. They learn to tell how they feel when another person acts in a way that shows disrespect or emotionally or physically hurts them. Adults model these negotiating skills when dealing with the behavioral differences of all children.

Children are taught to use words to protect themselves or their space. They are taught to be assertive with their words so that their message has only one meaning. Phrases that are commonly modeled are: move away, stop, you can't touch me like that, etc.

Adults in the environment ask permission before they look at a child's work, touch or move their work or possessions, or touch their bodies. Examples: May I sit in the chair next to you? May I give you a hug? May I help you move your work to a more private place? If the child declines, the adult accepts that. By extending the child this courtesy, the child learns to extend it to others.

Our experience is that these daily procedures help make strong children who know when and how to protect themselves and feel the right to do so.

Students' Safety during Emergencies

We are required by law and have in place a thorough emergency/disaster preparedness plan covering most natural disasters and other emergencies that is reviewed with staff twice a year.

As parents/guardians, you play an essential role in keeping students safe during the unlikely event of an emergency. Please consider the following guidelines that are of particular importance to parents in emergencies so that you may help our staff respond effectively to an emergency.

- 1. Be prepared for early dismissals.** In some emergencies, such as in a snowstorm, school officials will deem it prudent to send students home early. A message will be placed on our school telephone line confirming early dismissal and we will also attempt to contact you by telephone. Please make sure you provide us with up-to-date contact information so that we can easily reach you if there is an early dismissal.
- 2. If we have not alerted you of an early dismissal, do not pick up children if there is an area emergency.** If you do not learn about an early dismissal from the school but learn of a school or area emergency, please do not rush to school to pick up your child. Traffic will block any needed emergency vehicles, and your presence in the school building during, say, an evacuation, may delay the process. Keep in mind that police will bar parents from school grounds in some emergencies. The safety of our students is paramount to us, and we have a plan that will reunite students and parents as soon as possible.
- 3. Get information from local media in an emergency.** In an emergency, stay tuned to local radio and television for current information, including how parents will be safely reunited with their children.

Emergency Closings

Nature's Way Montessori School announces its own closings on local TV broadcast stations WATE (ABC), WBIR (NBC) & WVLT (CBS). If the decision is not broadcast before 10:00 P.M., it will be broadcast before 6:30 A.M. The announcement for closings or delays will read *Nature's Way Montessori School*.

If school is delayed or closes early, our Early Morning Care and Extended Day programs will not be available.

The school may need to close for reasons related to COVID-19. See the [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#): "Closing School."

SCHOOL-WIDE DISCIPLINE

Classroom Expectations

Any child/student is free to work with any materials on display as long as h/she uses them with respect (i.e., does no harm to the material, to the environment, to herself or others) or does not disturb the activities of others.

The child takes the material that she wishes to use to an appropriate work space. After using a set of materials, the child returns it to its place on the display shelf in the order it was found so that it is ready for the next person to use.

The child “restores the environment” after an activity:

- When the child is through with her activity at a rug, the rug is returned to the storage area. If she has been working at a table, the chair or stool which she has been sitting on is pushed under the table. When a chair or stool is not in use, it is placed under a table and not left out in the middle of “traffic” or floor work areas.
- When a child spills such things as water or paint, h/she cleans it up with the appropriate materials provided. If she does not know how to do this, the guide demonstrates it. She never forces him if she resists. She may “do it for her” the first or second time by way of demonstration. Her intention is not to clean up after the child but to show how to do it in a satisfactory way; a way that will provide success and satisfaction for the child.
- This ground rule helps the child develop responsibility because it encourages him to accept the consequences of her actions. It develops a respect for materials and tools and a pride in work well done. It encourages respect and thoughtfulness of others, as a messy, uncared-for environment impedes the active progress of others who use the same facilities in common. Also, the habits of orderliness, cleanliness and gracefulness which are fostered by this ground rule are closely related to the development of body coordination and control.

Students respect the work space of others and do not touch or interfere with another student’ work.

This provides security for a child to choose and carry to completion the activity which is selected. The right to initiate, complete and even to repeat an activity undisturbed by others (both children and adults) must be protected by the guide. If the child must leave his activity temporarily, (e.g., toileting) the work is left with the security of knowing that, upon return, everything will be as it was left and the activity can be resumed.

A child may join another child who is using a specific piece of equipment only if permission is granted by the student who chose the work first.

While the refusal to be allowed to join a child's activity may result in a long wait for the equipment, this is part of real life conditions that promote the rights of others.

Students are never forced to share materials that he/she has chosen for an activity.

Generosity and the ability to share must develop from within the child and never be imposed from the outside. If sharing is imposed by the guide or strenuously suggested, the opposite attitude may well develop in the child and she may become excessively possessive in an attempt to protect her rights. As a child matures and feels secure within, sensitivity to the needs and rights of others will grow and generosity will expand. If there are enough materials, and ground rules are effective, sharing will come naturally in cases where sharing is appropriate or necessary.

Each child deserves the right to "do nothing at all" if he so desires as long as s/he does not disturb the activities of others.

So-called "doing nothing," musing, or just sitting is viewed as a positive pastime. A child may be observing others at work (and learning much from them) or she may be "thinking" or simply relaxing. The ability to be quiet and happily alone with oneself is a healthy sign of development.

Positive Discipline

Positive Discipline is a program of behavior management used by all staff at Nature's Way. Its criteria, concepts and tools complement the Montessori Philosophy and provide our school community with a consistent approach to all children. This gives parents the comfort of knowing that all staff will treat their child fairly and in the same careful manner. Positive Discipline is based upon mutual respect between adult and child. We encourage all parents to learn about and use Positive Discipline with their Montessori child. We have multiple Positive Discipline books and manuals in our school library that are available for parents to check-out.

FIVE CRITERIA FOR POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

1. Is **Kind and Firm** at the same time (Respectful and encouraging; neither punitive nor permissive))
2. Helps children feel a sense of **Belonging and Significance** (Connection)
3. Is **Effective Long-Term** (Punishment works short term, but has negative long-term results)
4. Teaches valuable **Social and Life Skills** for good character (Respect, concern for others, problem-solving, accountability, contribution, cooperation)
5. Invites children to discover how **capable** they are and to use their personal power in constructive ways.

Procedures for addressing behavior incidents

The focus of our problem solving process is to help all people who enter this school feel a sense of respect for themselves and every other person within our school community. Students, staff, parents and visitors are all important participants in the educational mission. Our problem solving process is built upon the following core expectation, which is fundamental to both Montessori and Positive Discipline. It provides a consistent thread and the basis of language used throughout the entire school community and nearly every expected and appropriate behavior fits within this core expectation:

I will show respect for myself, others, and my environment.

Expected behaviors are reviewed with students in each classroom and staff and students will collaborate at the beginning of the year to develop age appropriate guidelines for their communities in order to uphold the behavioral and academic expectations that are consistent with our core expectation. All staff consistently model and teach respect through Grace and Courtesy lessons, Positive Discipline, and a monthly character development focus. Our goal is to foster our core expectation in each child and mitigate behaviors that negatively affect them, their peers, and the school environment.

We believe that:

- The learning environment should be protected.
- A misbehaving child is a discouraged child who is communicating a need through their behavior. At times, a student may need a break from their immediate in order to return to a social/ emotional state that is conducive to learning and interacting positively with others.
- There should be a consistent process that we utilize when responding to behavior that does not uphold our core expectation.
- Parents should have the opportunity to collaborate with the school when their child is engaging in behaviors that do not support the school's core value.

Inappropriate behavior will be addressed in a respectful manner focusing on teaching the skills needed for every student to be a part of the school community in socially useful ways. Teachers make decisions all day about whether and how to respond to behaviors. Some interventions include:

- Ignore behavior - it is isolated and/or intervention may exacerbate the behavior
- Connect with the student before correcting behavior - acknowledge feelings or intent of student before attempting to correct behavior - look for mutually agreeable solutions
- Offer a break from the situation
- Use class meeting agenda, ask other teachers/staff members for advice, seek assistance from administration
- Making classroom accommodations to meet individual needs
- Notify and collaborate with parents

Although most students will respond positively, over time, to the clear, consistent use of these and other strategies, it is recognized that intervention outside of the classroom may occasionally be required for some students. To meet this need, a specific set of procedures for an office referral has been developed. When a break from the classroom becomes necessary, classroom guides will communicate with administration and an available staff member will invite the student to accompany them away from the

classroom. When the student appears to have returned to a social/emotional state that is conducive to learning and interacting positively with others, the student will be integrated back into the classroom. A communication form describing the details will be completed. The form will be sent home for parents to review, sign, and return to the school. After three referrals within a given period of time, a conference between staff, parents, and student (when developmentally appropriate) will be scheduled, during which participants will problem solve together to create an agreement for future behavior.

A student may be sent home for the day if the behavior poses danger to the child, others or the environment. If necessary, an agreement for future behavior may be required before the student returns to campus.

Peer Conflict and Bullying

Normal peer conflict is a part of every child's life experience. As children learn about cooperation and social interaction, conflict naturally occurs. Children in the early years do not always think of others. Their goal in both friendship and play is egocentric, or self-centered. They are still learning self-control and developing a sense of personal space. A common response to frustration is one of rejecting the other child, both emotionally and physically. Pushing or getting upset about not being first in line, grabbing an item away from another child, disagreeing about what to play or how to proceed in a game, or saying, "I'm not going to be your friend anymore," are all examples of normal peer conflict. It is typically characterized by the developmental level of the children involved. Relationship and social struggles often surface in the early elementary years, as children become more independent and attempt to navigate friendships and group dynamics. Aggression and hurtful remarks are part of conflict at all ages; they do not necessarily mean that a bully-victim problem exists. With the use of Positive Discipline we work as a staff to ensure that conflict resolution skills are taught and practiced, giving children the necessary tools to deal with normal peer conflict.

Bullying is a series of repeated, intentionally cruel incidents, or threat of harm, that involve the same children, in the same bully and victim roles. It involves an **imbalance of power**, either real or perceived. It can be physical and/or verbal and may include racial, religious and sexual harassment. Additionally, it can include offensive gestures, inappropriate touching, intimidation, extortion and social exclusion. The behavior is designed to intentionally hurt, injure, embarrass, upset or discomfort the other person. Based on Montessori pedagogy, our emphasis is on **preventative measures** for such behaviors, by teaching children how to:

- Be caring and courteous
- Cooperate with others
- Deal with negative feelings (anger, jealousy, etc.)
- Stand up for themselves without being aggressive
- Engage in discussions to resolve differences, express feelings, and show empathy
- Respect and celebrate the unique qualities of every person

We closely monitor and observe the behaviors of students and staff to prevent bullying and we take swift action should an incident occur. The resolution of bullying at any one developmental stage will vary but will involve practices based on the most current information. In all cases the families will be notified and consulted as a bullying incident is debriefed and resolved in a developmentally appropriate manner.

SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Resource Programs

Nature's Way Montessori has traditionally supported several resource programs.

Lessons in the art studio with our Art guide are given to all communities. Additionally, TC and ECC staff have art lessons and materials available at all times in the classroom. To encourage creativity, the Art Program focuses on the process of creating rather than the finished product. When focusing on process, art skills may not immediately be mastered but the student has progressive successes. These successes help instill confidence and independence in the young artist. Art lessons include exposure to techniques such as painting, collage, sculpture, design, drawing, as well as vocabulary, artists, and more. A student's knowledge of art through study and practical experience is relevant to every area of academic pursuit. Art is one way to refine a student's perceptions and appreciation of life.

A Resource Guide provides weekly music classes for all Toddler through Upper Elementary age children. These classes expand the students' understanding of music by focusing on specific skills and concepts. Activities revolve around singing, rhythmic play, movement, instrumental play and listening/interpreting. The underlying goal is to develop and encourage the musical part of each child and provide opportunities for them to carry this into all aspects of their lives. Upper Elementary students are provided with music classes one day each week during the first trimester. For the remaining two trimesters music electives are offered as part of the self-expression program.

Spanish is one of the three most widely spoken languages of the world therefore, we feel it is important to teach this language at Nature's Way. Emphasis is placed on vocabulary, conversation, listening comprehension, cultural celebrations, and use of Spanish in the Nature's Way community. Spanish is offered to students in all classes.

Outdoor Environment/Adventure Playground

At Nature's Way we have an Adventure Playground, which is a space entirely dependent on the desires, interests, and abilities of the playmates (children). Loose parts are available to provide opportunities for a deep quality of play. Playworkers (outdoor staff) observe carefully in order to: Prepare a rich, ever-changing environment, protect the needs of each age and stage as it relates to free play, and assess risk.

We have three guiding principles that all playmates and play-workers adhere to:

- Respect your playmates and play-workers
- Respect your surroundings, living and nonliving
- Respect the desires, interests, enthusiasms and abilities of all

We consider our outdoor space as a learning environment in the same way we would a classroom. As such, the classroom expectations (see above) remain the same on the playground.

Early Morning Care and Extended Day

Child care is an extension of the Montessori program and is provided both before and after regular school hours. Early Morning Care is available starting at 7:30. Drop off for is between 7:30-7:45 for the 20-21 school year. Extended Day is available from your child's classroom dismissal time until 5:30. Please see our [COVID-19 Safety Plan](#), p. 5 for specific information about Early Morning Care and Extended Day.

Information about fees is available on our website.

Conservation Commitment

Nature's Way is committed to the environment and conservation. We were the first school to earn a Level 4 Earth Flag from the Ijams Nature Center. The Earth Flag program was designed to promote healthy conservation practices in the Knox County public and private schools. Nature's Way does the following:

- recycles all paper, glass, cardboard, aluminum, plastics, and tin cans
- composts at least 90% of our food waste and yard waste, and appropriate food waste is fed to our chickens **SUSPENDED FOR YEAR 20-21**
- maintains a nature preserve, herb garden, chicken coop, honey bee hives, bird feeders and boxes, and organic gardens
- plants trees
- protects a vernal pool area
- reuses paper and instructional materials
- uses rags and table crumbers for clean-up instead of paper towels
- uses washable dishes, utensils, and cups
- studies conservation

We encourage you to recycle, reuse, and reduce in your own home to reinforce what your student does at school and to conserve valuable resources. We can all be proud of the work we do towards building a sustainable future.

The pond you see in the front of the school was added in 1999. It attracts wildlife, and enhances our various animal habitats by providing water at ground level.

Celebration of Student Birthdays

Birthdays are a special time of sharing for the children. We enjoy celebrating your child's birthday with an optional **'Walk Around the Sun'** ceremony to symbolize the earth's yearly orbit. Summer birthdays can be celebrated in the last month of school and

vacation birthdays before or after the vacation. Elementary children sometimes choose not to have this experience.

The Celebration begins with the birthday child walking 'around the sun' (a yellow circle representing the sun). Each complete trip around the symbolic sun represents one year of the child's life. As the child walks around the circle, a statement is read about the birthday child's history for that year. This continues until the child has circled the sun the number of times equal to the birthday being celebrated.

Many things are gained through this ceremony. The children gain awareness of the time sequence of life and the special events that they may have experienced in that sequence. They enjoy sharing their lives with their classmates. They build confidence through increased knowledge of themselves. They expand their appreciation for the unique life journey their classmates are experiencing. The ceremony also reinforces the knowledge that they travel around the sun once each year.

Please plan the celebration with your child. Allow your child to choose the pictures and events that have special meaning. This will avoid the possibility of a child feeling uncomfortable and make the celebration more meaningful for him.

The following example describes one year in the life of a child and is provided to give you an idea of what we are looking for:

John was born in Denver, Colorado, on December 15, 2011. He was a happy, healthy baby. During the summer, he went to visit his grandmother in Austin, Texas. He took along his favorite toy – a brown bear named Oscar. When John was one year old, he stood up and walked to his dad. For his birthday, his cousins came to share his birthday cake. He made friends with the next-door neighbor's dog, Spot. So the first word John said was "Spot." Etc.

If you plan a birthday party outside of school, send invitations by mail. (Please email the office if you need the directory for your child's class.) Invitations distributed through the school cause disruption and may lead to feelings of upset and rejection for anyone not invited. *Parties are excellent events to teach your child kind and careful ways to include and exclude.*

Professional Development Days

During the school year, professional development days have been set aside for our staff. These will be utilized for visitation to other schools, collaboration & planning, educational seminars, and/or material preparation. These are important days for guides to plan ahead, refresh various skills, collaborate, or add to the materials in their classrooms. Although it may cause you some inconvenience as child care schedules are interrupted, the benefit to your child's school experience is immeasurable!

Fundraising at Nature's Way

Nature's Way engages in a variety of fundraising activities. The resulting proceeds are allocated in ways that benefit the school community as a whole. Monies raised go into either a general fund or are allocated for specific projects. The general fund may be utilized for a variety of purposes, such as, but not limited to, outdoor projects, scholarship fund, and school improvements. Campaigns for specific projects, such as the outdoor play structure and farm development, may also be instituted.

As a school entity, Nature's Way will not engage in fundraising efforts that are directed towards non-NWMS entities or projects that do not benefit the entire school community. Individual communities may elect to engage in philanthropic efforts as part of their educational experience.

We respect all families' philanthropic efforts and ask that non-NWMS fundraising solicitations be done outside of school. This includes outside organizations that meet at Nature's Way, including Girl Scouts. For product sales, they are welcome to post a **group** order form in the Teacher Prep Room for staff who may be interested in ordering. It is up to the organization leader to fairly assign proceeds from the group order form.

AGES AND STAGES

Preschool Age Children

Toddlers through Early Childhood Community children are very special people. They are in a constant period of transition from total dependence to considerable independence. A great deal of their time will be spent learning to dress, toilet, eat, sleep, and talk – most of which we as adults tend to take for granted. This is their work. Be proud of their accomplishments!

This may be your child's first "separation" from parents, and group experience. His/her familiar world may feel very different. Help him/her to minimize the change by doing the following:

1. Keep your schedule filled with routine. Be consistent in your activities before and after school and also the time of day you bring him and pick him up.
2. Be prepared to give your child extra attention during this transition period. He needs a one-to-one relationship with you as he has been with a group and others all day.
3. Talk to your child about things which will become familiar to him/her in the next few weeks – his/her guides' name, the way to school, and when you will return.
4. Avoid "babying" your child. S/he can and will do things for himself. An overriding interest is a desire to act grown-up. The most degrading insult to children is to charge that their behavior is similar to that of babies. If your child has an attachment to bottles and pacifiers, wean him/her prior to the start of the school year. The adjustment to school will be accomplished much more readily and your child will learn how to handle stress in a constructive manner.
5. Listen to your child. Even the youngest child has much to say. Repeat what you think s/he said and you will reinforce the desire to talk.
6. Support your child's attempts at independence. Negativism is a sign that a preschooler is beginning to understand that he is an individual separate from others and that he is forming personal ideas.

When a Toddler through Early Childhood child comes to school, the guide guards the secure feelings of the child and makes the child feel at home in his new environment. To achieve this aim, the guide is sympathetic, cheerful, and affectionate. Your interest and enthusiasm for his/her school activities will help in the development of secure feelings toward the "new" school environment.

Elementary Age Children

Elementary age children are entering the plane of development that Maria Montessori referred to as the “cosmic” stage. This name is a reference to the child’s blossoming realization that he or she is a part of a great big universe. Five and six-year olds begin to wonder about much larger questions and connections between themselves and the broader community. These new developmental milestones are accompanied by particular characteristics of Elementary age children and therefore present a need for a different kind of attention and opportunity. They include:

A lessening of the sense of and need for order that was so characteristic of their work in the younger classrooms. Elementary classrooms are louder, messier, and the materials can become disorderly.

A growth in abstract thinking. Children want to work less with the math materials and more “in their heads.” Jokes and puns float around the classroom and everyone “gets it.” Students are making connections between what they are reading and experiences in their own lives.

A new ability to imagine the wider world. It is for this reason that Elementary age instruction is referred to as Cosmic Education in Montessori school. The children, keenly interested in the universe and the world around them, are now better able to imagine the possibilities. This leads to many serious discussions about real world matters and sharing of opinions on these topics. Community meetings become paramount for practicing respectful ways of expressing opinions and problem solving.

Sassiness and rudeness. Montessori’s pet name for this developmental stage was “the age of rudeness.” Children are forgetting their manners and trying out new tones of voice with their friends and adults.

Conversations about fairness. These students are hard at work developing their own moral sense – good and bad, just and unjust, right and wrong. They spend a large amount of time negotiating rules to games or fort building. They may tattle. They may want or need an adult’s help, but, when possible, the work of problem solving should be tackled by them.

Important friendships. This is what parents will hear about most. Children in this stage of development love to work with friends on lessons. The classroom hums with conversation. Concentration and learning at this stage can sound and look something like play. These social interactions help the children learn, but can impede their work output. A problem with a friend can define the day and keep the children from being able to focus on anything else. Peer relationships are of utmost importance during this time in a child’s life and learning to be a friend is their most important work.

FINANCIAL DETAILS

Payments & Payment Guidelines

Please indicate on all checks to the school what the amount should be credited to (i.e., tuition, \$535.00; deposit \$35.00, Extended Day \$18.00). If you are making a payment in cash, put it in a labeled envelope. Please leave your payment in one of the brown tuition envelopes provided in each building or the tuition payment boxes.

Please review your enrollment contract and tuition agreement for further information.

Fees

The Deposit Fee is one month's tuition. All or part of the deposit, less any outstanding account balance, will be refunded within 90 days after your child has been officially withdrawn by written notification.

Requiring a deposit may seem to impose an additional financial expense. However, our program is planned and scheduled for the full 10-month academic year, and our operating budget is formulated for the same period. A tuition deposit is the fairest mechanism to offset budgetary problems created when a child leaves the school without his/her parents completing tuition payments.