

# WALNUT LAKE PRESCHOOL AND DEVELOPMENTAL KINDERGARTEN PARENT HANDBOOK

## **Mission Statement**

The Walnut Lake Preschool addresses the needs of young children whose emotional, behavioral and developmental challenges are interfering with success in regular preschool or day care settings. Our comprehensive, multidisciplinary model combines the best practices in early childhood education with an innovative psychoanalytic understanding of child development. In our therapeutic classroom we blend an educational curriculum with therapeutic services to strengthen the child's emotional resources, social capacities, cognitive development, motor skills, speech and language. We work individually with each child, while strengthening the group experience, social development and enhancing the parent-child tie. Our curriculum is designed to enable your child to enter a regular classroom when ready.

## **History**

Since 1957, the Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute (MPI) has been committed to improving the quality of life in the community by promoting programs for better mental health. Walnut Lake Preschool developed out of the Center for Early Childhood Development as an outreach program of MPI begun in the 1990s, designed to improve the social and emotional life of young children. The main activities of the Center were an education series of public dialogues with parents and future parents on child development, training of early childhood education teachers, consultation to day care and preschool programs, as well as collaboration with community agencies to devise programs for parents on principles of child development. The Walnut Lake Preschool is made possible by the generosity of the Estate of the Stanley and Catherine Elias foundation.

## **Philosophy**

Our philosophy is centered on a firm belief in the importance of the growth and development of the individual child. The program is structured to enable each child to learn to make choices, take initiative, develop preferences, and find positive ways of problem solving. To become loving and compassionate with self and others, and learn to express and master feelings in appropriate ways is the intersecting goal between a therapeutic curriculum and any excellent early childhood program.

We engage each child with new materials, experiences, ideas and people at a level appropriate for the preschooler. Activities are devised to enable children to feel competent and secure. We focus on emotional and social development, as well as language development in an atmosphere that is accepting of individual needs and differences. The therapeutic component of our program makes us

highly specialized. We focus on the individual needs of children and ways of developing emergent curriculum to meet their needs, spark their curiosity and encourage growth and development in all areas. This is a curriculum that is attractive and relevant to the child and evolves from the interactions between the teacher and children.

### **Our Approach**

Teachers collaborate with parents, family consultants, clinical staff and each other to create a learning environment that supports creativity and growth in each individual as a whole person. A special feeling is created in the classroom – a warmth, respect and sense of humor touch the interactions between the teachers and children, as well as among the children themselves. Parents are appreciated as knowledgeable about their own child and respected as their child’s first and most influential teachers, advocates, and supporters.

Clinical staff provides psychoanalytic expertise and therapeutic experience, which they bring to the assessment, intervention, and identification of appropriate programming and services. Each child’s progress is reviewed weekly by members of the multidisciplinary preschool team, which in addition to the classroom teachers includes at least one of the school’s clinical co-directors and the family consultant, along with other specialists that have been brought into the program for that child.

We provide sensory-appropriate setting, materials, and teachable moments to develop each child’s sense of mastery. We find that children learn best through play. It is in the process of using materials and exploring the environment that the learning and ‘aha!’ moments occur. We know that some children rely on auditory processing, others are visual learners, and still others use kinesthetic feedback. We strive to provide experiences that incorporate these learning styles while at the same time we are mindful that education flourishes within healthy relationships.

### **Limit Setting**

We provide a safe environment in which limits and boundaries are established and monitored so that children develop inner controls. When helping to settle conflicts we are mindful of allowing the child to save face – reminding and helping them to express themselves verbally rather than in physical aggression or withdrawal. We work to empower children to resolve differences with others in cooperative and constructive ways. Teachers facilitate this process by remaining calm, acknowledging and labeling feelings, gathering information, restating the problem, and offering or asking for solutions. Corporal punishment and shaming are never used at school.

Our students tend to be **more** ... more spirited, more sensitive, more affected by transitions and unexpected changes to their routines. All children, no matter what their needs and challenges, bring special gifts and strengths with

them. We believe that it is imperative to teach with those strengths and gifts in mind.

Many of the children who benefit from our multidisciplinary approach have some impairment in the capacity to gain mastery through repetition and play. They may have difficulty suppressing disturbing thoughts and feelings, which may lead to intense anxiety, or have problems in the ability to recognize and understand social rules and social responsiveness. They may have difficulties containing emotions and forming relationships and may have sensory systems that may be insufficiently or excessively reactive. These difficulties in self-regulation may interfere with basic rhythms in their sleep and eating cycles, as well as maintaining attention and controlling impulses.

### **The Classroom**

A therapeutic classroom works with the individual child's multiple needs and strengths, while at the same time facilitating group cohesion. This kind of small and specialized program is necessary for some children who have difficulty functioning in a regular classroom. We believe that successful learning can take place employing this integrative model only when teaching to the whole child. Our programs are designed to benefit children, parents and the community and are based on the premise that normal development depends upon the successful integration of a range of psychological, environmental and neurobiological factors.

We are much more interested in process rather than in final products at Walnut Lake Preschool. You are not likely to see precut art materials that end up assembling into identical 'whatevers.' We provide a wide variety of materials and techniques, but the individual is encouraged to express and create whatever s/he wants. Sometimes, in art for example, experimenting with line, color, textures, or even the feel of the brush (or finger) dragging paint across a paper is valuable in itself. We try to encourage children to talk about their work when they wish to do so, and often these conversations become dictated stories. We use written language throughout the room and program, and the classroom is an environment suffused by the written word, as well as the work of the children.

Reading and story telling are important parts of the day, as are music and movement activities. Science and Math are integrated into our curriculum. The natural world provides a limitless source for investigation. Plants, insects and animals, weather, our garden, physical changes, our bodies, magnets, light and shadow, etc are all typical areas that we may explore in the course of the year. We endeavor to integrate areas of the program, and the different areas of the room frequently reflect a current topic of investigation. Science, language arts, creative movement, music, art materials, dramatic play, and learning centers may, at times, deal with aspects of the same subject. We try to build our curriculum from the needs and interests of the individual children in the class. Thus, each year's program will reflect these differences. Our teachers explore the world along with the children to stimulate ideas and problem-solving strategies in interpersonal relationships as well as educational areas.

A journal is maintained for each child, which contains examples of their work, photographs, observations, in-put from families, and dictated stories. These journals belong to the child and are available to the child and family at all times. They serve as documentation of classroom moments and as a way of encouraging reflection among the children, as well as a means for illustrating to parents the “work” and learning the children do. They are a reflection of the journey and growth of that child while at the Walnut Lake Preschool and a great connection between home and school.

Certain materials are continuously available to the children. Sand or water play, blocks, dramatic play areas, open art and manipulatives (puzzles, Lego, parquetry, etc), play dough or clay, the book corner and outdoor play area are always choices available each day. We do go outdoors throughout the school year unless rain or extreme cold makes it impractical. Indoor gym equipment allows for alternative large motor play.

### **Family Consultants**

Family Consultants are child development specialists – psychoanalysts, psychologists and social workers – who act as unique resources to Walnut Lake Preschool families. Through weekly observations in the classroom, discussion with teachers, staff meetings, and individual meetings with you, your family consultants are here to support your understanding of your child's growth. Through these meetings, information, insights and questions brought by parents can be linked with the observations, knowledge and understanding of the consultant, teachers, and other parents.

Meetings with your Family Consultants are an integral part of our program. Since our philosophy is based upon the integration of the child, teacher, and family it is essential that at least one parent participate in these meetings. It is one of the aspects that makes our program particularly effective.

### **Communication**

Calendar events and other information of interest to parents will be displayed on a bulletin board in the hall, and there will be weekly updates with school news and important reminders by email with paper copies available.

#### **Daily Communication with Teacher**

A parent must communicate with the teacher daily about significant events that may help us understand your child’s mood and behavior at the start of the day: family visits, parent’s absences or trips, family or friends’ illness, new pets or pets’ illness or death, exciting family events, particular stress at home, and so forth. These have meaning and impact on your child. The more teachers know, the better they can teach and support your child.

Parent Conferences are an important time to discuss your child’s growth with his/her teachers and family consultants. We encourage both parents to

attend both conferences during the year. In addition to these planned conferences, the educational director/lead teacher is always happy to meet or speak with you outside of classroom time.

## **Getting Started**

This handbook is part of a packet of parent materials. Please fill out all forms and return them as soon as possible. **Each child must have a complete file: health appraisal, emergency card, child placement contract-before the first day of school, according to State of Michigan licensing regulations.**

We work to make the transition from home to school a successful one. Each parent-child pair is different and separates at his or her own pace. Some children take more time to separate, others less. We will work with you to make this transition a smooth one for both parent and child.

## **Absences**

Please notify the school **(248.339.6263)** when your child will be late or absent for any reason. This impacts teachers' planning and preparation for the day and helps them let the children know who will be in school that day. If you are taking vacations or trips while school is in session, please notify teachers and administrators as far in advance as possible.

## **Illness**

A child may not come to school when ill and unable to benefit from the day. This is also important to prevent further infection. It is often difficult to tell how ill a small child is, especially before s/he can tell you in words what s/he is feeling. Some guidelines to consider when deciding whether to keep your child home include:

- a child with a fever (100\* or higher) should stay home for 24 hours after the fever has subsided.
- typical symptoms of illness are: sudden onset of rash or skin eruptions, yellow or greenish drainage from the nose (allergic discharge is clear and may persist), wet or hacking cough, vomiting or diarrhea, excessive or unusual tiredness, inexplicable change from child's normal "feeling good" level of energy or mood.
- if a child seems too sick to participate in ordinary routines, check with your pediatrician before school attendance is resumed.
- head lice-children are subject to health check by staff and will not be allowed at school until lice and nits are no longer present.
- eye infections, until cause is determined, treatment (if any necessary) begun, and threat of contagion is over.

**ALL OF THESE GUIDELINES, ALTHOUGH DIRECTED AT THE CHILDREN, ARE APPLICABLE TO ADULTS AT SCHOOL.**

All teachers are trained in signs and symptoms of illness and in hand-washing and disinfecting procedures, as well as first aid and child/adult CPR.

Communicable diseases and conditions, such as strep throat, conjunctivitis, lice, Fifth's disease, etc., should be reported to the school so that parents may be notified.

Medication sent to school must be accompanied by a physician's note. All medication must remain in the original container bearing a label showing prescription number, name of medication, date filled, physician's and child's names, and directions for dosage. Epi-pens should be kept up-to-date. When appropriate, non-prescription medication can be administered with the parent's written permission, when a signed form is present and the medication is in its original container. Please inform the school before the start of the year of any allergies or special medical needs.

Your child's teacher will report any accidents or changes in your child's health. If your child has any injury to head or face, we will call you right away and let you know, so that you may decide whether to come to school immediately. If an illness or emergency arises at school, we will contact you immediately and ask that you pick up your child promptly. A staff member will stay with your child until your child is picked up.

If your child is very ill and we are unable to contact you or others you have listed for an emergency, we will call your pediatrician. In a serious emergency, we will call emergency services, 911. Should emergency procedures be necessary, a staff member will remain with your child until you or a designated substitute arrives.

**It is extremely important for your child's safety to update the school with any changes in your phone number, emergency numbers, and other pertinent information.**

### **Immunizations**

Walnut Lake Preschool requires all students to be fully immunized and all health records to be up to date. Should you need a medical contraindication form, these are available in the school office.

### **Clothing**

On the first day of school, please bring a complete change of washable clothes, including socks and underwear, labeled with your child's name in a large Ziploc bag. Please remember to replace soiled clothing and update seasonally for growth and weather changes.

Clothing suitable for outdoor play is needed each day, even in winter. We play outside unless the weather is severe, raining, or below 20 degrees (including wind chill).

### **Snack**

Children are offered a nutritious snack every day. Special dietary needs will be accommodated according to the instructions of the child's parents and physician.

We provide an allergen-free classroom environment. A list of restricted food will be posted on our front door.

For birthdays or other special occasions, we will bake or prepare a special snack. Please feel free to discuss these plans with your classroom teacher in advance.

### **Toys from Home**

A child who is carrying and protecting ownership of his or her own toy is not available to use the classroom environment to its fullest. Therefore, we ask parents to help children leave home toys behind, in the car, or in their cubby. If a child depends on a special object to help with transitions, please discuss it with your child's teacher. Violent toys, such as guns or other similar weapons, are never permitted.

### **Classroom Visitors**

Occasionally there may be visitors in your child's classroom at specified times with advance notice and preparation. Visitors may include parents, prospective parents, relatives, visiting professionals, potential donors, and invited guests with special skills.

Regular volunteers are interviewed and screened before joining a class at regularly scheduled times, so children can be prepared for their participation. We will let you know if there will be volunteers in your child's class.

### **Picking Up from School**

For your child's safety, only an authorized adult may pick up your child. **Written authorization (not verbal) must be provided to the lead teacher,** either a) on the child information card or b) in a signed dated note submitted to the office or director. If we do not have your authorization **in writing**, your child will stay at school with a staff member until an authorized adult arrives. For your child's safety, any authorized person picking up for the first time will be required to show photo ID.

### **Parking and Playground**

We rely upon parents to ensure your child's safety in the parking lot at all times. Parents are asked to bring their children into the classroom each day and

to come into school at pick-up time. It is not safe to leave younger children unattended in the car in the parking lot, even briefly. Children may not leave the building unless accompanied by an authorized adult. Children may not play in the playground unsupervised.

### **Emergency School Closings**

Walnut Lake Preschool closes when the Birmingham Public Schools are closed. School cancellations are announced on radio, television, or the Internet. If Walnut Lake Preschool has to close at any other time, we will notify you immediately by phone and wait with your child until pickup. Should we have to cancel school for any other reason we will contact you by phone early that morning. If tornado or severe storm warnings occur during the school day, teachers are trained to protect children inside the building. We will notify you as soon as we are able.

### **Fire and Severe Weather Drills**

We are required to conduct fire and severe weather drills at intervals throughout the year. You will be notified in advance whenever possible, so that you know how we teach the children about them and when these will occur.

### **Tuition**

Please review the separate tuition payment and procedures form. A \$100.00 deposit is required with your child's application to hold a space in our program.

A signed contract must be turned in before your child begins school.



### **School Records**

Walnut Lake maintains a record of developmental progress for each child. Parents have access to their own child's file at all times. Teachers, administrators and family consultants have access to student files. Student records are kept confidential at all times. Student files are only made available outside the school with a release form signed by a parent.

### **Diversity**

Walnut Lake Preschool welcomes children from all ethnic, racial, religious, and national backgrounds and diverse family structures. Our school is accessible to children and adults. Our program is multi-cultural and non-religious. We do not celebrate religious holidays but do share and celebrate our diverse traditions and multicultural heritage. Halloween and St. Valentine's Day are not observed in "typical" ways. Halloween may offer the opportunity to examine things that are scary and the difference between real and pretend. St. Valentine's Day may find us creating at our own Post Office or reading stories about friendship.

### **Disenrollment**

On rare occasions, Walnut Lake may find that our program is not meeting the needs of a particular child. In those instances, Walnut Lake Preschool reserves the right to ask a family to leave the school. This extreme step is not taken without specific documentation of our stated concerns and team meetings to discuss them. Whenever possible, Walnut Lake suggests options for alternative placements.

Walnut Lake Preschool is part of a wide network of schools and agencies providing services to families throughout southeast Michigan. We work closely with parents to ensure children's access to the services they need, and to coordinate with other community programs.