

Westminster Nature Preschool Family Handbook



Westminster
A Nature Preschool
*Connecting children with the
natural world.*

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Registration and Enrollment

Enrollment

Enrollment is open to all children without regard to sex, race, national origin, political beliefs, or religion. Every effort is made to accommodate children with special needs to participate in the same routines and play experiences as the other children.

Accommodation will be made whenever possible and we will work with shadows and any specialists as needed to create a positive learning environment for the child.

Registration

Materials will be made available to anyone interested in registering for the following fall term during the end of January. In order to register for the following school year, currently enrolled families must be up to date with their tuition payments. There will be 10 days of priority enrollment followed by open enrollment, which will be detailed in the registration packet. We do not guarantee teacher assignments, as we move staff according to our enrollment needs.

Tuition/Payment Policy

Tuition is based upon the September through June school year. The total tuition is divided into 10 payments, one of which is required as the deposit. The remaining 9 payments will be billed from September through May. Members of Westminster Presbyterian Church receive a tuition discount. Families with more than one child enrolled in our school in the same year will receive a 10% discount on the lesser tuition. Tuition is due on the 1st of the month. A late fee will be assessed after the 15th.

Cancellation Policy

All notification must be made in writing. The tuition deposit is non-refundable.

Registration Policy

Registration will be on a first come, first served basis. If your child misses a class for any reason such as sickness or school closure, there are no make-ups.

School Closings Due to Inclement Weather

School closings will follow the Middletown Township Schools closings. If Middletown schools are closed, so are we. If Middletown schools are delayed, our half day programs are cancelled and our full day classes will begin at 10:30. Information about delays and closings will be posted on our Facebook page and our website.

Daily Procedures

Absences

If your child will not be attending school or will be significantly late please either call the office or email us to let us know. We do not reimburse or offer make up days for absences.

Arrival and Dismissal

Each child must be dropped off at their classroom. Pick up will either be at their classroom or at the playground. Remember to sign your child in and out each day. Please remember that school starts at 9:15. The teachers need time to set up their classrooms and get ready for the day. Please try and be prompt, many children do not like the attention of coming in late and it can make for a difficult transition. Additionally the teachers try to wait for everyone to arrive before they begin the morning circle.

Please also be prompt at dismissal time. Young children get very anxious if you are late picking them up, and many of our teachers have other commitments after class. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will be charged for an hour of aftercare (\$12). We know emergencies come up, so please call the office if you are going to be late.

You must notify the school in writing if someone that has not already been designated is picking up your child. Please let us know, in writing, if another parent is taking your child home.

In situations where the parents are divorced, the school must be informed as to the custody arrangements that have been made and whether the non-custodial parent is permitted to take the child from school. A copy of the court order stating these conditions must be on file at the school in order for us to act in the proper legal manner.

Clothing

Send your child to school in comfortable play clothes every day. Although smocks are provided for messy projects, children are bound to get messy in developmentally appropriate play. Please also try and dress your child in clothes that foster independence in the bathroom.

Sneakers or rubber sole shoes are a must for our playground and our walks. Open toe sandals, clogs and backless shoes contribute to accidents and discomfort.

Please dress your child appropriately for the weather. Remember we take walks in the rain, and play in the snow. If possible keep a pair of boots (labeled) at the school. Please send in mittens, hats, and leave extra socks in your child's bag. Please label everything!

Also, please send in a seasonal set of extra clothes for your child. This includes socks and underwear. PLEASE LABEL ALL CLOTHING!!!

Snack/Lunch

You are responsible for sending a snack and lunch (when applicable) in with your child. Please label their snack/lunch bag and label the drink you include. We ask that you do not send in any candy at snack time, and try and send in a healthy snack. Do not include too many choices. Children often become overwhelmed, and end up not eating anything. **REMEMBER WE ARE A NUT FREE SCHOOL.** Children are not allowed to share food due to allergies and other food restrictions.

Birthdays

We welcome birthday celebrations at school. However, we ask that the celebration be kept modest. Please discuss your child's birthday with the teacher before the day arrives. We celebrate birthdays during snack time. You are welcome to bring in cupcakes or another special treat. The treat must be nut free. We must know ahead of time that you are bringing in a treat so that any child with a food allergy can bring in his/her own treat.

In order to alleviate hurt feelings, if you are having a birthday party outside of school, please do not distribute invitations in school unless you are inviting the entire class.

Holidays

Your child's teacher will let you know how your child's class is going to celebrate the various holidays. However, please note that it is school policy that you not bring in edible treats to be sent home. Due to allergies, we try to celebrate holidays with activities rather than with foods.

We do have big school wide celebrations for Christmas and Mother's Day that include refreshments. These celebrations include family members and you will get more information from your child's teacher when the date nears.

Toys from Home

We request that your child leave his/her toys at home. Your child may bring in nature items to share with the class. (Exceptions will be made if your child needs a transitional object.)

Special Guests

A few times during the year, we invite special guests from the community to share their talents or information with the children. If you have a special interest or talent you would like to share with the children, please let the teacher know.

Clergy Support

Pastor Joe visits the children, and contributes to creating a kind, caring atmosphere in the school. Pastor Joe is always available to our families to discuss any personal or spiritual concerns you may have.

Kindness

Being part of a community and performing acts of kindness are a central part of our school philosophy. Being kind to one another is part of our everyday life in the school. In addition we share with the greater community by donating food grown in our garden, and by collecting food for the pantry. We also collect toys and clothing during the holiday season.

Conferences/Communication

Communication between you and your child's teacher is crucial to the success of our program. At the beginning of the year, we ask you to fill out an information sheet about your child. It helps us to know what your child enjoys doing and if he/she has any fears. We also ask that you share any unexpected events occurring in your child's life. You are always welcome to ask your teacher to call or email you after school hours. Please do not engage the teacher in a lengthy personal discussion at drop off or pick up. You are welcome to call the school to make an appointment to speak with your child's teacher either before or after school. The teachers and directors will always make themselves available to discuss any concerns you may have.

Class/School Emails

Your teacher will email you monthly newsletters. The director will send out periodic emails highlighting school events and news as well as links to interesting articles and community events.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Formal Parent teacher conferences are held twice a year for the 4's and kindergarten classes. The fall conference is a time for you to tell us about your child, and to share any noteworthy behaviors that are occurring at home. During the spring conference, you and your teacher will discuss your child's growth and development over the year. Placement for the following school year will be discussed. Samples of your child's work as well as anecdotal records will be shared.

The 2 ½ year old and 3 year old classes will offer conferences on an informal basis. You should not hesitate to ask for a conference if you feel you would like one.

Family Visitation/Open Door Policy

Our school maintains an open door policy. Parents/guardians are encouraged to visit and observe our program at any time during our regular operating hours. Arrangements may be made with the director or the teacher in order to be sure that the visitation will not disrupt class dynamics or the class schedule. Family members are also invited to help with special projects and walking trips.

Westminster Nature Preschool Discipline Policy

The primary rule for "discipline" at Westminster is to redirect the child, and help them begin to resolve conflicts using their words not their hands. Our goal is to teach kindness. We want to raise assertive, non-aggressive children.

1. Anticipate trouble- Know each child. Know where and when s(he) might have difficulty. Review rules and limits with children.
2. Give gentle reminders - "Remember to keep sand in the sand table."
3. Direct to a positive model or activity- "I like the way you are sharing the blocks."
4. Use your sense of humor but never use sarcasm.
5. Offer limited choices
6. Offer encouragement -" It's hard to zipper. I'll start it and you can do the rest. "
7. Clarify messages - Be specific.
8. Overlook small annoyances.
9. Reconsider the situation - Be flexible. Always reevaluate your rules to make sure they make sense for the group.
10. Teach empathy.
11. Help the children with conflict resolution skills.

At Westminster we **never** isolate or threaten a child.

Expulsion Policy

In rare circumstances it may become necessary for the school to terminate a child's enrollment. Possible causes are when the child or his/her family continually violates the rights of others to learn or feel safe at school, the family breaks school policies, the family threatens physical or intimidating actions towards a staff member, parent, or a child, the tuition is overdue, or the program does not meet the educational needs of the child.

Safety and Health Procedures

We do not have a nurse on staff. All of the teachers are up to date on their CPR and First Aid Certification.

Administration of Medicine

Medication will be administered to your child only under the following circumstances:

- The child's health care provider has provided written authorization detailing the necessary steps to be taken.
- The parent/guardian has also provided written authorization.
- Medications are labeled with the child's first and last names, the date that either the prescription was filled or the recommendation was obtained from the child's health care provider, the expiration date of the medication, and instructions for usage.

Sunscreen/Bug spray

Please apply sunscreen and bug spray every day. If you want your child's teacher to reapply either one, please make sure you have filled out a permission slip.

Bathroom Policy

We encourage families to dress their children in clothes that allow them to be independent in the bathroom. We do accept children who are still in diapers or pull-ups. We will change diapers when necessary. We understand that children potty train at different ages and rates, and will work with the family to meet the child's individual needs. Please let the staff know your process.

Emergency Information

Please be sure that all of your emergency contacts, business addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and approved pick-up list are kept up to date.

In the event of an emergency in which evacuation from the building is necessary, we will take temporary shelter in the Middletown Public Library. If this happens you will be notified once we are safe.

First Aid

We do the very best that we can to keep our children as safe as possible, however, sometimes during play, accidents do occur. If a child receives a minor injury (a bump, a scraped knee) the appropriate first aid will be applied, and the parent will be informed at pick up or by email. If any serious injury or illness occurs, you will be notified immediately. Please notify us if any injury that occurred at school required a doctor's visit.

Food Allergies

You must notify the Director, in writing, of any food allergies that your child may have and we will make every effort to accommodate your child's needs. Additionally please speak with your child's teachers about your child's allergy so that everyone is clear about your child's needs.

It is the parent's responsibility each year to supply the school with the appropriate medication, labeled with your child's name, and an Emergency Action Plan signed by the child's physician to be used in the event of an allergic reaction.

If you are notified that a child with a severe airborne allergy will be in your child's class, we kindly request that you refrain from sending in products that contain the allergen in order to ensure the safety of the allergic child. **We are a nut free school.**

Health Information

We are required to have an up to date Universal Child Health Form, including immunizations, on file for each child. Each year flu vaccines are required for all children in our program. Proof of vaccine is required no later than December 15th of each school year.

Nutrition

Our program is dedicated to the development of the whole child, which includes proper nutrition. Positive habits learned in early childhood lead to a healthier, more productive life. We recommend that you refrain from sending in foods with little or no nutritional value. We also encourage healthy eating habits in a group social atmosphere where everyone sits down and eats together and participates in lively conversation. Significant portions of unfinished foods will be sent home so you have a sense of how much and what your child is eating. Please note that while we will encourage your child to eat, we will not "force" them to eat or punish them for not eating.

Illness Policy

According to state law, we will not permit any child who has had the following symptoms or illnesses within the past **24 hours** to attend school:

- a. Severe pain or discomfort
- b. Acute diarrhea, characterized as twice the child's usual frequency of bowel movements with a change to a looser consistency within a period of 24 hours
- c. Two or more episodes of acute vomiting within a period of 24 hours
- d. Elevated oral temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit or over
- e. Lethargy that is more than expected tiredness
- f. Yellow eyes or jaundiced skin
- g. Red eyes with discharge
- h. Infected, untreated skin patches
- i. Difficult rapid breathing or severe coughing
- j. Skin rashes in conjunction with a fever or behaviour changes
- k. Mouth sores with drooling
- l. Stiff neck

Additionally, a child must be fever free (without fever reducing medication) for 24 hours before returning to school. If a child becomes ill in school or exhibits any of these symptoms, the child will be brought to the director, and the parent or emergency contact will be called immediately to pick up the child.

Please be kind to your child and the school community, if you suspect that your child is ill, keep him/her home.

Donations

Donations of paper towels, baby wipes, tissues, masking tape, and stationery supplies are always welcome. The teachers also do recycling projects and art throughout the year, and will let you know what they need . (paper towels and toilet paper tubes, egg cartons, shoe boxes etc.)

Fire Drills and Lockdown Drills

Young children can become very frightened by safety drills. With this in mind, we do try and hold the state mandated drills very gently. We feel it is more important that the adults know what to do than the children, so we do not talk too much about them. Fire drills are held once per month and require evacuating the building. Lockdowns, which we call safety drills are held twice per school year. For lockdowns we sit in the hallway

outside the bathrooms. (There are no windows and we can “lock” ourselves into this part of the building.) We have to be very quiet and we have the children color pictures.

In the case of a true emergency that requires evacuating the building we walk with the children to the Middletown Public Library. In the event of a true emergency, we take the emergency phone numbers with us and would begin calling you once we reach the library.

School Photos

School photos are taken each year in October. We have a wonderful , child friendly private photographer take our photos outdoors in nature. She takes individual, sibling and class photos.

Parking Lot

Please drive very slowly in the parking lot. Children may run out between cars. Be very cautious.

Community

We are all part of the Westminster Nature Preschool community. Be kind. Have fun. Make friends! Please feel to contact your teacher or the office if you have any questions or concerns. We are here to help.