



Highwood Playschool Association
16 Harlow Avenue NW, Calgary, Alberta, T2K 2G1
403-200-0171
highwoodcommunityplayschool.com

Parent Orientation Handbook 2012 – 2013 School Year

Dear Parents,

We welcome you and your child to Highwood Playschool! We plan to have a wonderful year of learning through play together.

Keep this booklet handy to refer to through the year, and if you need an answer that it doesn't provide, talk to the teacher or anyone on the Parent Advisory Committee. Though our educational philosophy and program description are at the back of this booklet, they are the most important part of all! Please read those pages well so that you can fully understand what kind of school we are.

Remember that as parents, you are the most important teacher in your child's life, and we depend on you to be involved in his/her educational experience at Highwood Playschool.

Here is some basic contact information:

- Teachers, by e-mail:
 - Deborah Evans: highwoodplayschool@gmail.com
 - Jennifer Nahu: lynnae5@hotmail.com
- Registrar: Jackie Eddie: 403-701-2892
- Presidents (Past):
 - Jodi Hughes: 403-710-4321 &
 - Sumyu Neufeld: 403-252-8396

Have a great year!

The Highwood Playschool Parent Advisory Committee

What a Playschool Day Looks like...

For the T-T 3's Class, the order of these activities is (with approx. minutes): Arrival, 1st Group Time (15), Free-Choice Time (75), Gym/Outdoors 1-2x/wk (30), and 2nd Group Time/Dismissal.

For the M-W-F 4's Class, the order is:

Arrival, 1st Group Time (15-40), Free-Choice Time (90), Gym/Outdoors 2-3x/wk (30), and 2nd Group Time/Dismissal (30).

Arriving at Playschool each day...

On a school day, please arrive at the playschool about five minutes before the start of class, so that your child does not feel rushed, and so that you have time to help him transition comfortably. The Highwood Community Centre main doors are open at 8:45 am. It is important that your child is on time, as circle/group time is scheduled to begin promptly at the start of class. Arriving late results in missed learning opportunities for your child and is disruptive for the rest of the class. If your child is going to be absent or late, please call the teacher at 403-200-0171 between 8:45 – 9:00 a.m. for the morning classes or between 11:30am - 12:45 pm for the afternoon class.

For safety reasons, the main floor glass doors must be locked shortly after the start of class. If you arrive late and find that the doors are locked, or if you need to get a hold of your child in an emergency, you can either call the classroom or ring the doorbell located by the glass doors. Because this is disruptive to the class, please be considerate in using these measures.

Please help your child find him hang his coat and backpack in the boot-room every time he comes. You must accompany your child, not only into the building, but right up into the classroom. Your child should bring her snack-bag with her up into the classroom. The teacher will have a special shelf for the snacks in the classroom.

The classroom door will open right at 9:05 am (until then the teacher and parent helper are busy getting ready). When the door opens, please come right in with your child. The teacher will greet her and help her get her nametag on. After you say good-bye, your child will find a spot on the carpet for Circle Time. Please don't feel like you must rush out. If your child wants to show you around, or if you want to stay and observe a while, that's okay!

Free-Choice Time: Ever-changing as the learning evolves through the year, e.g.,

- Blocks (with vehicles, ramps, trains, etc).
- Dramatic Play (with costumes, puppets, props, dolls, animals)
- Science and Math (with puzzles, manipulatives, nature items)
- Art Studio (paint, clay, collage, drawing, sculpture)
- Sensory Play (with sand, water and related tools and toys)
- Literacy (quiet corner with reading and writing activities)
- Music (listening equipment and instruments)
- Other activities that come and go may include: cooking together, sewing, theme dress-up days, evening events, visiting speakers, gardening, woodworking, field-trips, etc.

Group Time: We all meet on the carpet to share ideas, discuss our projects and learning, plan experiences, read or tell stories, enjoy music and rhymes, play learning games, and laugh together! Sometimes we may hear from visitor.

Gym-Time: This is our large-muscle time, whether outdoors on the playground or field, in the gym, or in our own room. We play simple games, dance, do obstacle courses, go on nature walks, and more. The focus is often on health or nature.

Home Time (Dismissal): Again, parents, please come right up into the classroom to get your child, see their latest 'works,' check your Mail Pouch, and visit with the teacher. NOTE: Appointments to discuss your child's progress must be made in advance with the teachers.

Departing from Playschool Each Day...

Please arrive promptly to pick up your child from class. Late pickups interfere with the teacher's cleanup, prep and lunch time, and they can be stressful for children.

Sometimes our class will be outside or in the gym for the last part of class-time. Please don't try to collect them until you see that we have sung our goodbye song. Before you leave, please make sure that the teacher knows that you have collected your child.

You must advise the teacher in writing, including your signature, if anyone new will be picking up your child from playschool. Write down the full name and telephone number of that person.

**** Late Drop-off/Pick-up:** If a family is repeatedly or excessively late in dropping-off or picking up their child, the teacher reserves the right to contact the family to discuss the issue. If the issue remains unresolved, the family will be sent a warning letter signed by the Executive. Failure to comply with the stipulations set out in the letter may result in withdrawal from the program.

What should your child wear to school?

For playschool, please dress your child in comfortable, washable clothing, and slip-proof, 'sport' type shoes (not dress-shoes). Please label your child's coat, shoes, mittens, backpack, etc.

Your child must wear shoes in the building always, in case of emergency evacuation. To help keep our floors/carpet clean, your child will need a separate pair of shoes to be worn indoors. These shoes are to be kept in your child's backpack so they are available to be worn in the classroom daily.

On mild winter days, we may start the class-time by going directly outside to play in the snow, so watch for an email or sign on the door that asks you to leave your child's winter gear on when you arrive.

What should your child bring to school?

In a backpack or bag, please send two things:

1. A change of clothes, including socks and underwear. Even if your child never has toileting accidents, she may need to change if there's any kind of spill.
2. A healthy snack and drink. Your child's snacks should be nutritious (e.g.: fruit, vegetables, yogurt, cheese, crackers, granola bar) and should be from two different food groups. We can provide a copy of the Canada food guide if you want one. Please do not send sugary or 'junk' snacks, as these do not provide adequate energy to the children. **Everything your child brings should be labeled with your child's name.

Remember NO NUTS, or foods containing nuts! There are severe allergies in the classroom. We regret that we will have to confiscate any foods with nuts, for safety reasons

About Snacks

Our classroom has a specially designated snack table, with napkins (and sometimes a vase of fresh flowers!), and the children's snack bags are stored nearby. During playtime, children are free to come enjoy their snack whenever they want it. The teacher/parent volunteer will ensure that the child washes her hands before eating, and will help her open containers, etc. Each child is expected to remain seated while eating, and to clean up her own snack afterwards. The snack table is a great place for friends to visit over their applesauce!

We do not have a 'snack time' when all the children sit down together. There are several reasons why we chose to let children eat at whatever time suits them during the free playtime:

1. When the entire group has to line up for hand-washing, wait for the teacher's assistance with their snack packaging, then wait for everyone to finish eating, the whole snack time takes at least a half hour. Children miss out on valuable play and learning time, while waiting around.
2. The method we've chosen also reduces waste. Children go through fluctuations in how much fuel they need, due to growth spurts and varied activity levels. Many opened, unconsumed snacks and drinks get thrown away, when children who aren't really hungry are required to sit with the group for the snack time.
3. Also, this method is to help children begin to recognize their own body's signals of hunger and thirst, which can help them form healthy eating habits that they may keep for life. Sometimes children don't want a snack but will eat more at the next meal. The teacher will remind children about their snacks and give a 'last chance' warning before the end of playtime.

The social benefits of eating together are still experienced with our system, because usually the children will eat in small groups. The teacher and parent will also be nearby to join in on table conversations.

Allergies

If your child has a serious allergy to a substance or substances (bee venom, peanuts, etc), you must advise the teacher in writing of the details of the allergy and allergens and a description of the necessary steps of precaution and emergency treatment. The "Severe Allergies" form must be completed when the student is first registered or when the allergy is diagnosed. You are also required to provide the teacher with a current photograph of the child, and a current, unexpired injector or other medication, if prescribed by a physician. The medication will remain in the playschool, and will accompany the child on outings and field trips. It is the parent's responsibility to check the medication regularly and replace it before it expires.

We are a nut-free school, and will do our absolute best to enforce this by regularly reminding other families to send only nut-free snacks, and by looking over the snacks eaten by all the children. The child's first name, class and allergy will be posted in a visible place near the snack table. We will also try to work with families to protect children from any other substances they may be allergic to.

Parent Involvement

1. In-Class Parent Helpers: Our playschool will be wonderful because of families! It is a requirement for each family to take its turns sending an adult helper (mom, dad, grandparent, aunt, etc) for the class. This fulfills the legal ratio for the group. Our Volunteer Coordinator will assign the dates on a monthly basis. If you are not able to attend on your assigned date, it is your responsibility to find a replacement.
2. Playschool Work Bees: There will be three Work Bees scheduled throughout the year (i.e., Nov, Feb, Jun). Each family is required to send an adult to one Work Bee. When you attend you will receive two things: your "Cleaning Bee Deposit" check, and the satisfaction of having helped improve your child's classroom environment! Our Work-Bee Coordinator will schedule each family for one cleaning session. If you are not able to attend on your assigned date, it is your responsibility to find a replacement.
3. Fundraising: We are a not-for-profit society and our school runs on a very tight budget. So to keep fees low we will have several fundraising efforts throughout the year. The annual fundraising goal is approximately \$100.00/families to meet the playschool budget requirements. We value your ideas, participation and support. We also believe that our teachers are one of the most valuable resources to our program, and as such we wish to offer competitive salaries to attract and retain quality staff. A large portion of your monthly tuition fees goes to compensation for the staff, and the day-to-day operations of the playschool. Thus the revenue for nice-to-have items, upgrades, special activities must come from fundraising.
4. Out-of Class Roles:
 - Parent Advisory Committee (Executive): Our playschool is run by a committee of parents, who lend their creativity and skills to managing the playschool program from the top. There are several different roles on the committee, each with differing time requirements. Please review the description of Executive Positions and let the registrar know if you're interested!
 - The Playschool's Parent Advisory Committee meetings are held regularly and minutes will be made available to all. One parent/representative from each family is encouraged to attend the meetings. Please do not hesitate to approach the teacher or committee members if you have concerns or comments about the playschool, or matters you wish to bring before the PAC.

- Other ways to get involved: The children love to hear from various people in the community, who can share about their hobbies or jobs in our group time. If you love to sew or do woodworking, there may be a project or two just for you. We can also use someone who is willing to make play-dough. There are endless ways you can enrich our playschool this year, so please sign-up for a job that matches your interests and suits your time.

IN-Class Parent Helper Details

Several times during the school year, you will be scheduled to accompany your child to her class and stay as the Parent Helper. Having a Parent Helper in the class brings us into compliance with the legal ratio of caregivers to children (two required with 7+ children). The Parent Helper gets to assist the children and teacher with various activities, and observe their child within the playschool setting. It's a good opportunity to get to know your child's peers and teacher. Please remember to keep confidential any information about the children and families of our Playschool.

On your day, please come to the school 15 minutes early, and knock on the classroom door to be let in early with your child. The teacher will have some special tasks for you. (You will come in contact with paint and cleaning solution, so you may want to dress accordingly).

A class parent coordinator will place parents on a rotating schedule, and each month the schedule will be provided as part of the school newsletter. You can notify the coordinator a month ahead of time, if a certain day in the future will not work for you, or if you'd like to be helper on a specific day. We will always try to schedule a parent to help on or near their child's birthday. If, after you've been scheduled, you need to change the day, you must arrange to switch days with another parent in your child's class and inform the teacher of the changes. This is your responsibility. A phone list will be provided to each family with the schedule.

Only registered children may attend with the Parent Helper (due to insurance and ratio policies). Please do not bring other children (including siblings) with you on your volunteer day. Another adult family member (grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc) may serve as Parent Helper instead of mom or dad. We have a NO SMOKING policy in place on our premises, and it is also in effect any time or place children are in our care, including outings and field trips.

Newsletter

The Highwood Playschool will issue a newsletter at the start of every month (find it in your Mail Pouch). It will contain the Volunteer Calendar for your child's class, news about the class's activities and projects, useful resources for families. There will also be notices from the LAC and a note from the teacher. If you have ideas of what to include in the newsletter, please talk to the teacher or LAC members.

Parent Teacher Relationship

The relationship built between the teacher and the child's parents is very important to the child's playschool experience. If you have any concerns or questions about the playschool or your child's daily activities, or if you would just like to get to know the teacher better, please feel free to visit after class for a while. While we do not schedule regular 'parent-teacher interviews,' the teacher is willing to set up meetings with parents as requested. The teacher's email address is provided to you as well.

Children with Special Needs & ESL

If your child has a diagnosed disability, we would like to discuss with you what programming adjustments might be necessary to make his/her playschool experience a terrific one. Please be willing to meet with the teacher before the start of the school year. The playschool reserves the right to require the family of a child with special needs to provide an in-class assistant for the child (and can provide you with the information needed to attain one), in any case deemed necessary by the teacher. Both the child and the assistant will be as integrated as is possible into the regular routine and activities of the playschool.

Similarly, we value the participation of children and families for whom English is a second language (ESL). We believe there are many benefits of cultural and linguistic diversity for all children/families, as well as for the program as a whole. As to best facilitate a smooth integration of children/families with ESL, we strongly recommend that a family member attend with the child(ren) during the initial adjustment period. The goal of this parent involvement is to support the child's learning of the classroom routines and expectations as well as to facilitate the acquisition of a minimal level of English competence. The teacher and parents will determine the timeframe for this period on an individual basis.

Donations

If you have items you'd like to donate for the playschool's use (such as craft supplies or dress-up clothes), please talk to the teacher about it first. Donations of that kind are usually very welcome, but occasionally we have all we need of a certain item. A list of needed items will be posted on the parent bulletin board during the school year.

Our Educational Philosophy

At Highwood Playschool, we cherish the belief that children learn best through play. Through exploration of their environments, of materials around them, and of increased social interaction, children naturally discover and develop. The role of the teacher is to provide a safe, rich and inspiring environment in which each child can move toward his/her unique potential, and to encourage play experiences which promote the child's next steps in development. Play is a child's work, and will be honored and celebrated in our playschool.

We respect the fact that each child is one-of-a-kind, with a unique set of interests, strengths and rates of development. Through observation and relationship, the teacher will endeavor to identify the personal skills and interests of each child, as well as the ways in which that child is ready to mature. The teacher will attempt to provide the necessary opportunities for each child to develop naturally and positively, while maintaining and expressing his/her individuality.

Our program seeks to go beyond preparing children for kindergarten; rather our goal is to help prepare children for all aspects of life, by affirming them in their innate curiosity and desire to discover, imparting to them an appreciation of beauty and nature, building in them a healthy self-image, and encouraging altruistic attitudes toward others.

***Our philosophies and practices are informed by Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, Piaget's Cognitive Stages, Erickson's Developmental Stages, and the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Our Classroom

Believing children are capable of noticing and responding to the subtle beauty of nature, and knowing that natural elements are both soothing and inspiring, we endeavor to include as much of the outdoor world in our classroom as possible: real wood, wicker baskets, plants and animals, natural light and colors. We try to provide the children with real objects (e.g.: actual dishes, rather than only plastic

toy dishes), in order for them to better learn about their world. We reserve most of the wall space for the children's own art work, which are their interpretations of their world, and for realistic and classic representations that will encourage creativity in the children and adults alike. Documentation (complete with photographs, sculptures, and scribed stories) of the children's learning is often displayed in the room as well.

Play materials are well-organized and attractively displayed so that children feel invited to help themselves to anything around them, and can also easily put things away. A sense of ownership and responsibility for the room and materials is the goal.

Highwood Playschool Seeks to Support Child Development in these areas:

Cognitively: Language and communication skills (verbal and literal). Creative problem solving. Forming and testing hypotheses, drawing conclusions. Flexibility and divergence in thinking (new ideas). Acquiring new information about self, others and world. Introduction to math ideas (counting, shapes, sorting, attribute comparison, measuring) and science concepts (observation, prediction, logic, cause and effect, nature). Introduction to music, poetry and dance. Introduction to reading (letters, sounds, appreciation for printed materials such as books, lists, signs, etc) and writing (representation of ideas on paper through art, scribed storytelling, etc).

Physically: Body awareness, over-all coordination and strength. Skill in large muscle movements (jumping, running, balance), and in small muscle precision (pencil hold, cutting, fine motions). Increased self-care skills. Practice in healthy lifestyle, including exercise and good food choices. Use of all senses to build knowledge.

Socio-emotionally: Therapeutic and pleasurable experiences. Positive, first-school experience. Eager curiosity, creativity, self-expression, investigation, experimentation, new ideas and questions encouraged. Respect for nature and appreciation for beauty. Independence and positive self-image (supported through child's own success and perseverance). Pleasure at own accomplishments and effort. Prosocial behaviors, e.g., honesty, kindness, responsibility, courage and inclusion. Increased skill in understanding and managing emotions. Improved empathy and listening skills. Increased skill in social interactions and negotiation. Use of imaginary play to make sense of own world and experiences.

Individualized Planning

Through careful observation and planning, the teacher tries to provide each child with the environment; materials and activities that will best promote his or her overall development (cognitive, physical and socio-emotional). The teacher records her observations of each child's interests, abilities and next steps of development, and then designs the programming accordingly.

Our Three Year Old Program is designed to be a gentle introduction to the school environment, emphasizing cooperation and group social skills. Learning-through-play occurs naturally while the children are led through age-appropriate and engaging learning themes (i.e.: Caring for Pets, Night-time, or Community Helpers). The Three Year Old Program helps to lay a foundation of basic school and social skills such as using words to express their feelings, asking for help when needed, taking turns and listening carefully. More importantly, the caring, safe classroom environment allows children to explore and discover confidently, and encourages them to follow their curiosity and satisfy their interest in the various materials and activities offered. Above all, they are shown that learning at school is FUN (a view which will serve them well now and throughout their learning careers)!

With the social and school-wise competency gained in the Three-Year-Old year, children are well prepared for the more complex learning in the child-directed style of the Four Year Old class. Over the past year, we have observed amazing outcomes by using the "Project Approach" with our older, 4 & 5-year old children.

The "Project Approach"

Because learning happens most effectively within enjoyable and curiosity-driven experiences, the teacher uses the children's current interests to create projects that evolve to last anywhere from a few hours to a number of weeks. The stages of each project are: initiation and planning, research and exploration, documentation, and celebration.

For example: In the case of a project on dinosaurs the teacher would first have noted that there was a general interest in the topic amongst the children. Then the teacher and children document what the children know about dinosaurs already, and what questions they have about them. The teacher then plans and provides a wide variety of activities and materials for the children to explore to satisfy their curiosity about dinosaurs. The activities are also carefully chosen to meet the developmental needs of the children. Early concepts of math, science, and literature (etc) are included in every project, as well as activities that promote physical and social development. Together the children and teacher document their learning about dinosaurs, through art, storytelling, photographs, sculpture, etc. The project usually concludes with a celebration of the learning, such as a dinosaur party or a gallery-display for the parents.

Possible projects might include the typical: insects, pets, transportation, doctors and hospitals; or range to the unusual: how to build a house, robots, plumbing, or babies. It all depends on what excites the children's interest, and what they are experiencing in their own lives. The subject is often a surprise to both parents and teachers! Though learning about certain topics (such as dinosaurs) is somewhat beneficial, the far more valuable gains are made in social, cognitive and physical development, as the children eagerly participate in the activities. This educational approach is also known as 'emergent' curriculum because themes are not planned far in advance, but are allowed to emerge naturally.

Our Approach to Arts and Crafts

The crafts and papers a child brings home from playschool are often seen as 'indicators' of the child's learning, but there is so much more happening at playschool than just paper crafts! Especially if your child doesn't favor the art center, you will want to check out the other creative things they do: puppet theatre, dramatic play, building block structures, dancing and making music, experimenting with nature materials, making up stories, and more. The teacher will try to record these other activities (through scribing and photos) so that the child's various languages of creativity are captured.

We encourage, but do not pressure, the children to participate in every available activity. Children are so unique in their interests and stages, which will soon be apparent which parts of the classroom is the favorite of each. If a child feels pressured to do an unappealing activity, he will usually resist all the more. In extreme cases, the teacher will try to overlap activities for the child's benefit (e.g.: Try drawing the block tower you just made).

When children are in playschool, they are still just beginning to explore art materials and gain small motor control, so their art projects may seem very abstract and meaningless to you. Developmentally, those messy scribbles and collages are very valuable. Ask your child to tell you about the work he brings home. Often he did not mean to make a 'picture' of anything, but was just learning how to use the medium, or was exploring with color. This is an important stage of learning.

In our class, we will occasionally do 'teacher-directed' crafts, such as decorating picture frames or making a magnet or group mural. Even when the teacher plans these crafts, opportunity for personal expression will be given.

Our Discipline Policy

Discipline describes the teaching and learning process by which children develop socially acceptable and appropriate behaviors as they grow to maturity. Discipline is something that adults do with and for children, rather than to them, to stop them from behaving in undesirable ways. Its intention is to help children move towards self-discipline. Discipline involves a continuous process of guiding behavior and is offered while acceptable behavior is displayed. It should be constructive, meet a child's needs and lead to a positive learning experience for the child.

The following measures will be taken to encourage children to learn socially appropriate behavior while at the playschool:

1. Staff will first use preventive measures to minimize the need for disciplinary intervention. This includes, but is not limited to, careful planning of activities that keep children engaged, thoughtful arrangement of the room and furniture, distraction from potentially inappropriate behavior, provision of sufficient materials and toys, modeling of calm problem-solving, clearly communicated expectations, praise for positive behaviors and effort, and sufficient friendly teacher-child interactions. Children will be informed of classroom rules through discussions at circle-time, and throughout the program. Rules are based on respect for self, others and property.
2. In the case of inappropriate behavior, the staff will use positively phrased explanations of what the child must do instead and why. The child will be given a chance to comply. In the case that the child does not comply reasonably, the staff will explain again and state what the consequence will be otherwise. The child will be given another chance to comply. In the case that the child still does not comply reasonably, the consequence will occur. The child will be reminded of the expectation. Consequences will be reasonable and logical (e.g.: switching seats at circle time to help one keep one's hands to one's self).
3. If a child poses a danger to himself, others or property, staff may need to physically move a child from the situation. If so, the staff will take care to be gentle and use as little physical force as possible.
4. Staff will always use a calm and positive demeanor when guiding a child.
5. The following methods of discipline are not used:
 - a. No physical punishment. The caregivers may not use any form of physical punishment such as striking, shaking, pinching, or rough handling.
 - b. No emotional punishment. The caregivers may not use forms of deprivation that could interfere with a child's emotional and physical well being, such as withholding food, isolation, depriving of basic needs or ignoring for long periods of time. 'Time Away' from a difficult situation is only used in situations with extreme forms of aggression or destructive

Time Away will be as short as possible while still giving the child a chance to recover emotional control.

6. Ongoing disciplinary issues will be discussed with the parents of the child, and an action plan that is acceptable to both teacher and parents will be decided upon. In such a case, the teacher and staff will begin to keep a log record of the child's behavior and follow-up so that progress can be assessed. Every reasonable effort will be made to work with the child and parents to resolve the issue. If a child is in repeated and ongoing conflict with the methods and expectations of the playschool, the family may be required to withdraw the child from the program under recommendation from the teacher, with approval from the Highwood Playschool Parent Advisory Committee.

Injury/Illness Policies and Procedures

Please do not send your child to school if she is sick. If your child has had a communicable disease or any of the following symptoms within the last 24 hours, she is not allowed to come to school: diarrhea, vomiting, high fever, and unusual rash. If your child is sleepy or lethargic from an illness, or if your child has nasal discharge that is not clear in color, please do not send them to school. This is for the protection of the other children and the staff, and for the sake of the child who is ill. Please do not medicate the child with Tylenol or other fever/pain medicine in order to send them to school. Sick children should be at home to rest and recover.

We can provide a list of communicable diseases to watch for, if it is requested. All cases of communicable diseases must be reported to the teacher, EVEN IF the child was not in contact with the other children during her illness.

In the case of an injury or accident at playschool, the teacher will administer First Aid, as she is required to hold a current First Aid certificate with CPR. If necessary, 911 will be phoned by the other adult, while the teacher provides First Aid. Any cost for ambulance or other outside help will be the responsibility of the parents.

If a child is injured or has become too ill to participate comfortably, the child's parents will be contacted and asked to come to the school to retrieve their child. If neither parent can be reached, the teacher will contact one of the emergency contacts provided by the parent.

Written incident records will be kept of moderate to serious injuries and accidents, and a copy will be provided to the parents, if requested. A parent's signature may be required as record that the parent was notified of the incident.