



# Kindergarten Handbook

A Guide to Our Program



17811 Arnold Drive, Sonoma CA 95476  
Phone: 707-996-3849 Fax: 707-996-4369  
Email: [office@woodlandstarschool.org](mailto:office@woodlandstarschool.org) [www.woodlandstarschool.org](http://www.woodlandstarschool.org)



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*welcome!*

*We are so happy that you are here.*

*This handbook serves as an introduction to our program and to let you know, as much as possible, what to expect from your kindergarten experience. It is also meant to inform you of our expectations of you as a parent in both the kindergarten and in the wider school community.*

*Here at Woodland Star, we strive to develop strong bonds between the teachers and the children, between teachers and parents, among the parents, among the teachers, and among the children themselves. To this end, it is helpful when we are all on the same page. Please take the time to become well acquainted with this handbook as a starting point. And from here, we will go on to have a fruitful, enlivened, and inspiring educational experience.*

*Aimee, Cheryl, and Sallie*

### Flyaway Ceremony

The Flyaway is our kindergarten graduation. For children moving on to First Grade and their families, this simple, reverent festival marks in a gentle way the transition out of kindergarten into First Grade; the kindergarten teacher consciously hands the children over to the new First Grade teacher. The Flyaway typically takes place in the evening before the very last day of school.

### Recommended Reading List

Simplicity Parenting, by Kim John Payne

Soul of Discipline, by Kim John Payne

You are Your Child's First Teacher, by Rahima Baldwin Dancy

School as a Journey, by Torin Finser

Waldorf Education, A Family Guide, Edited by Pamela Johnson Fenner and Karen Rivers

and perform in the vignettes to the utter delight of children and families. There is usually food available and live music; the festival takes place in the late afternoon/early evening on a Saturday in late October and typically costs a modest amount to attend.

#### Dia de los Muertos

Dia de los Muertos is a tradition with rich history, especially in Mexican culture. Through our Spanish curriculum we honor this tradition at school each year with a joyful and reverent celebration of our loved ones who have passed away.

#### Winter Spiral

The Winter Spiral is a beautiful and touching way to mark the deepest time of dark and quiet in the year; in the Main Hall, we create a spiral path of pine boughs and in gentle candlelight and quiet, the children walk the spiral path. A simple festival of reverence and inner quiet, this one is celebrated in kindergarten through the younger grades and takes place in the early evening towards the end of December.

#### Cinco de Mayo

Cinco de Mayo is a celebration of our wonderful Mexican culture at Woodland Star. Padres Unidos makes and serves traditional Mexican food and our Woodland Star Mexican Dance Group performs traditional Mexican dances; this festival takes place in early May in the evening.

#### May Day/Grandparents Day

May Day/Grandparents day is a lively and joyful celebration of spring for the whole school community. Students make and wear flower crowns and perform Maypole and folk dances; special activities for grandparents are sprinkled throughout the day. The festival takes place during the school day and ends with a picnic, strawberry shortcake, and games on the playground.

## The Two-Year Kindergarten

Waldorf education believes in the slow and steady unfolding of the human being and in the wisdom of allowing plenty of time for every phase along the way. Consequently, we want children to have as much time as possible in the magic and dreaminess of early childhood before moving on to the gradual awakening into feeling and imagination and thinking in the curriculum of the grades.

At Woodland Star, we require that children turn six by June 1 in order to be considered for First Grade. Being six by June 1 helps to insure that most children are fully ready for the rigor of First Grade and fully finished with the work of the kindergarten.

If your child turns 5 before Dec 1, s/he may start kindergarten in August of that year. S/he would then proceed to do a second year of kindergarten and be turning 7 soon after the beginning of First Grade.

If your child turns 5 after December 1, s/he may enter kindergarten as soon as s/he turns 5 if there is space available. S/he may also begin kindergarten in the subsequent fall as an older kindergartner. In this case, s/he would do only one year of kindergarten.

Every year, in each kindergarten, there are both older and younger kindergartners, including some children who, by virtue of when their birthday falls, will only do one year of kindergarten before moving on to First Grade.

Besides expecting children to be fully 6 1/4 years old for First Grade in the fall, we take a close look at older kindergartners in the spring to make sure they are ready for First Grade. Sometimes it makes good sense to let a child do an extra year in the kindergarten before moving on – simply because s/he needs more time to grow and to develop.

## The Rhythm of the Kindergarten Day

In a Waldorf school, there is a rhythm to the year, to the week, and to the day. Just as the change of day into night and back into day again and the change of one season into the next provide security and constancy to the human soul, a reliable rhythm to the day provides security and nourishment to the growing child. Creating a world that is not only loving, but also predictable, reliable, and secure is one of the greatest gifts we can offer our young children.

Though the rhythm may change from one kindergarten to another or from one year to another, there are elements that are universal. During the day, the rhythm flows from a teacher-led activity that requires the attention and cooperation of the children into a more freeform, open activity in which the children are allowed to follow their own creative play impulses. Circle time (focused) moves into Playtime (more free form) into Cleanup and Snack (focused) into Outside Playtime (free form) into Story time (focused).

Circle Time: The teacher leads the group in song, movement and verse. In this playful whole-group activity, the children are building the foundation for literacy, language arts, healthy movement, spatial and body awareness, and social interaction.

Indoor Playtime: During Playtime, the children are allowed to play throughout the room with a wide variety of natural materials, which inspire deep imaginative play. There is very little interference or influence by the teacher, if possible. Instead the children follow their own initiative and play impulses.

Clean-up: With teacher's help and direction, the children all work to tidy up and put the classroom back in order.

Snacktime: The snack has been prepared and the tables set during playtime. At snacktime, the children wash hands and all come to the table to eat together. When we are all done, the children help clean up before going outside to play.

Outside Playtime: Most days we go to the kindergarten playground to play. Like indoor playtime, the children are free to play as they wish. One day a week, we play on the "big kid's" playground.

## Festivals

Part of the rhythm of a Waldorf school year includes the celebration of several seasonal festivals. At Woodland Star, our festivals have become wonderful community events that are looked forward to year after year by the children and families. In a mass culture that is increasingly isolating and materialistic, it feels particularly satisfying to come together to mark moments in the passing of the year.

Here are our typical yearly festivals (please look at the current calendar for specific dates). Also, know that our festivals may change year to year, depending on that year's calendar and the ever-changing culture and needs of the community:

### Rose Ceremony

This is an all-school assembly that welcomes the new First Grade class into the community of the grades at our school. It typically takes place first thing in the morning during the first week of school. Kindergarten classes sometimes attend this festival and sometimes do not (depending on the needs of the particular class).

### Harvest Festival/Pasta Dinner

This is an early evening festival where our Charter Council prepares and serves pasta with sauce (often made fresh from our school garden!!!) for the whole school community; it is a great "welcome back" party. This festival usually takes place one evening near the very beginning of the school year.

### Back-to-School Night

The whole school community is welcomed to the new school year with an introduction to the curriculum of each grade and to the school's faculty and staff. Back-to-School Night typically takes place on an evening in September, within the first few weeks of school.

### Sprites Night

Sprites Night is a great alternative to the sugar-filled, commercialized overwhelm of Halloween; every grades classroom is turned into a little vignette depicting a story from that grade's curriculum; parents create

It is important to be aware that if you choose to let your child have screen time at home, s/he will most likely bring it into his/her play and conversations at school. What you are doing at home then negatively impacts all the other children in the classroom as well as your own child. Do your best to support our whole community as well as your own family as you make decisions about what to expose your child to and when.

We will do our best to support parents as they navigate the terrain of being in a Waldorf school and we expect that you will do your best to create a home environment that is relatively media free and supportive of the school experience.

Many parents have found success in creating a "school night" boundary for media. No media is allowed during the week when school happens the next day, but weekends are a special time for perhaps a family movie.

**Helpful tips for the media issue:**

*\*Connect with other families that share your same values.*

*\*\*Be in charge. You have both the privilege and the obligation as a parent to do what you feel is best for your child. (Ideally, it is also in alignment with our school community values.)*



Storytime: The children wash hands and come inside for Story. In the Waldorf kindergarten, the story (usually a fairy tale) is told word for word by the teacher (as opposed to being read from a book). We often spend three weeks with the same story, letting it evolve from simply being told to being a puppet play to finally being a play that the children themselves act out. Needless to say, this deep immersion into a language-rich fairy tale lays a wonderful foundation for language arts, listening, memory work, and imagination.

**A helpful parenting tip:**

*\*Create rhythm in your own household. Have a routine for bedtime, for morning, and for mealtimes. Make it simple, predictable, and repeatable.*

## The Rhythm of the Week

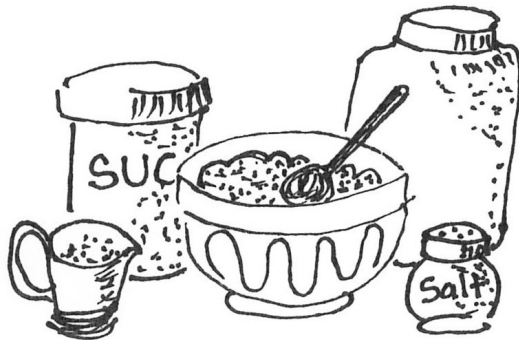
Each day of the week has its own activity and its own snack. This rhythm may change year to year or classroom to classroom, but the elements are essentially the same. Below are examples of typical activities and snacks:

- Painting / brown rice
- Drawing / oatmeal
- Bread making / homemade bread
- Veggie chopping / vegetable soup

Having a set rhythm to the week gives the children a feeling of predictability and security that supports them greatly as they take this first step away from the comforts of home and family. It is interesting to note that we call this the “rhythm” as opposed to the “schedule.” Rhythm is something that becomes internalized and held by one’s own will rather than by a clock or a calendar.

### A helpful parenting tip:

*Rhythm replaces discipline. The more deeply set a rhythm is (regular bedtime, meals, chores, etc.), the less likely it will be a point of argument, rebellion, or negotiation.*



### Helpful tips for being in the classroom:

*\*As you come in the classroom door, imagine that you are coming into a sacred space. Even though it may be much noisier or busier than a cathedral or a temple, it is sacred. As best you can, leave your hectic daily life outside the door and become present to the children and the environment.*

*\*\*Limit your conversation. Lots of talking pulls the children out of play. As “play” is the children’s “work,” it deserves a respectful space.*

## Visiting the School/Classroom

It is important that we track who is on campus during the school day. To that end, if you ever come to school during the day for any reason, please always check into the office and sign in before coming to the classroom. For regular pick-up and drop-off, this of course is not necessary.

## School Pledge

Our school's Waldorf curriculum includes many offerings that are not typically available in public schools; state and local funding is not enough to fully cover the cost of what we offer. Therefore, Woodland Star asks that each family contribute financially. Make sure that you connect with our office manager about how to follow through on your financial pledge.

*Please note: our school is a public school and we accept all families, regardless of ability to contribute financially. All contributions, including your school pledge, are voluntary.*

## Media

At Woodland Star, we are striving to create environments that support our children becoming creative, thoughtful, compassionate, and free human beings. To this end, we are extremely conscious of the negative effects of media exposure on children and we work to limit their experience of media in all its forms (computer, iPads, video, cell and iPhones, video games, television, movies). Because our curriculum is orally and experientially based, children must be able to listen to and absorb the spoken word in order to create their own mental pictures. Screen time of any kind undermines a student's ability to listen attentively and ultimately to succeed.

## Class Meetings/Parent Evenings

About 4-5 times a year, we will have kindergarten class meetings. At a typical class meeting, you will hear about what is going on in the classroom, have some pedagogical conversation/discussion, and deal with any class business that needs tending to. You can expect to feel more connected to the parent community and to your child's teacher, feel more connected to the curriculum of your child's grade, and to feel in touch with what is going on in your child's class and in the school. It is well worth the time!

We do our best to schedule our class meetings well in advance so that you can plan for them. And we always offer free childcare. Please know that you must sign up in advance for childcare. And please, as soon as we have published the dates of parent meetings, arrange your calendar so that at least one parent can be there (but both are welcome!).

## Volunteering

We love to have parent help in the class! It is also nicely supportive for your child to witness you participating so directly in his/her education. Every year, the needs for volunteering shift. Stay tuned early on to learn specifically what is needed and requested by your teacher.

Volunteer needs vary from turning a jump rope during outside playtime, helping children make crafts, and joining us on hikes to vacuuming the classroom and building play equipment.



## The Beginning: Drop-off

The kindergarten day begins at 8:30. Children may arrive between 8:10 and 8:30, but please be on time every day. Our work with the children begins right away, so please do your best to say a graceful goodbye and let your child's day begin. When a parent lingers it can cause anxiety or confusion for the children as they try to enter the kindergarten day.

## The End: Pick-up

The kindergarten day ends at 12:30 right after Story time. We do not eat lunch during the kindergarten day, although we have a substantial snack at 10:30. You may pick up your child right outside the classroom at 12:30. Please double check that your child has his/her jacket and any other belongings before you go. Also, take a moment to check the parent file folder and the bulletin board for any news.

Many children go to Aftercare. It is important that you check the parent file folder and the bulletin board when you pick up from Aftercare. If the classroom is still open, double check your child's cubby to make sure everything that should come home is coming home.

### **A couple of helpful parenting hints:**

*\*Have your child carry his/her own things both to and from school. This is the beginning of independence and responsibility and self-care. Doing this develops the "will" which later becomes executive function.*

*\*\*When you say "I am going now" or "It's time to go now," go ahead and leave. Do not linger. This is the beginning of your child knowing that you mean what you say and that your words are trustworthy.*



## School Attire

In general, our school requests that students wear clothing that is non-distracting and logo-free and that allows for freedom of movement.

Specifically in kindergarten, we request that children always wear shoes that they can run, jump, and skip in (no flip-flops, no heels, no shoes that are extremely difficult to tie or to buckle). Clothing should have no cartoon or media characters or logos or sports insignias; overly sparkly or fancy clothing can become a distraction, also, and might be best saved for special occasions. It should also be absolutely okay for clothes to get dirty. Please remember to dress your child in layers; our mornings will be chilly and by mid-day, it is often very hot.

### **Helpful hints about clothing:**

*\*If you have a girl who likes to wear dresses, have her wear shorts or leggings underneath.*

*\*\*If your child likes to choose his/her own outfits, choose them in the evening at bedtime so that the morning can go smoothly.*

*\*\*\*Consider creating a separate drawer or section of the closet for “school” clothes and “weekend” clothes. This may help avoid disagreement or disappointment in the morning!*

## Absences and Independent Studies

Whenever your child is absent, please call the school office to let them know.

If you know ahead of time that your child will miss school (for travel, etc), please contact the teacher to set up an Independent Study. This is crucial for our school – the school loses significant funding every time a child is absent, but if an Independent Study is successfully completed, we regain the funding.

## Illness

If your child is sick, please keep her/him at home until s/he is completely well. Children should stay home for 24 hours after vomiting or having a fever. If there is a runny nose, please keep your child at home until the mucous is clear, not yellow or green. If your child becomes sick at school, we will call parents right away and let the child rest quietly until someone can come to pick up.

### **Helpful hints about illness:**

*\*Often children report that they feel “fine” after throwing up or having a fever. Indeed, a child may be begging to return to school. Please be the responsible adult and have your child stay home and rest for 24 hours. This accomplishes two important things:*

- 1) It insures that other children are not exposed to the illness.*
- 2) It teaches your child how to care for and respect her own body, to rest and fully recover after illness so that the body can come back even stronger.*

*\*\*We live in a culture that tends to want to medicate away fevers and ordinary childhood illnesses. However, the wisdom of past generations was often that allowing a fever or illness to run its course made for a stronger immune system and stronger body.*



## Birthdays in the Kindergarten

Birthdays are very special in the Waldorf kindergarten and we strive to celebrate each child's birthday in a simple, but meaningful way.

Typically the birthday celebration takes place during Story time (from 12 to 12:30) on the actual birthday of the child or close to that day. Parents are invited and siblings, too, as long as the sibling can stay for that half hour without being disruptive. The teacher tells a simple story relating to the child's birth and candles are lit. The teacher has a handmade gift for the birthday child and a birthday book of pictures made by all the children in the class. Then the candles are blown out and the gifts are opened.

That is essentially it. Simplicity is wonderful for children, especially around birthdays. Often, there is so much activity and hype associated with a birthday celebration that the child becomes overwhelmed. But keeping the celebration simple and sweet allows the birthday child to feel the specialness of the day in a way that s/he can happily manage.

### **Parent tips for birthday celebrations:**

*\*Keep cameras and all recording devices at home. If you really want a picture to commemorate the day, we can do that after the celebration. But otherwise, cameras are not welcome.*

*\*\*Your teacher may ask you to answer questions from which she will create the birthday story or celebration. Make sure you respond to that request so that the celebration can be made relevant and personal for your child!*

## Communication

We send lots of information out via email and our school communication system, ParentSquare. It is important to stay tuned in and responsive to email at least every few days. If you somehow end up without access to email, you are then responsible for finding out what is going on by asking another parent. Please make sure that you inform both your teacher and the office whenever your phone number, email, or address changes.

Occasionally, there are hard copies that need to go out. In that case, the parent file folder will be outside the classroom door. If you see it there, make sure to check it and take home any paperwork; this is for parents only to pick up, not children. (Each file is labeled with your child's name; we try to make sure there are always double copies so that two-home families stay equally well informed.)

We strive to be in good personal communication within the school community. Find out from your teacher how best to set up one-to-one conversation time when it is needed or wanted. All teachers make it a priority to be available for direct conversation.

Know that it is school policy to speak directly to anyone with whom you have an issue or concern or complaint. If there is discomfort with speaking directly, we will make sure there are supportive and objective facilitators for the conversation. Our school appreciates and thrives on good, clear communication and connection.

## Hike Days

One day each week in the kindergarten (please note: the particular day may change each year, depending on the overall schedule) is a Hike Day, and the entire kindergarten morning is spent at a local park. The day starts at the same time (8:30) as a regular kindergarten day, but pick-up time is earlier (12 noon) so that we can make sure we get everyone back in time for After-care, if necessary.

The location each week for the Hike Day is always posted on the boards outside classrooms as well as announced via email.

Please drop off your child at the designated park by 8:30 and pick up at 12 noon. If your child needs a ride back to school, leave a car seat when you drop off. At drop off, make sure you check in with the teacher and let her know your child is there. And when you pick up your child, make sure your teacher sees you and checks off that your child has been picked up.

Every child needs to bring to the hike day:

- A backpack that s/he is comfortable wearing
- A bottle of water



- A lunch with little or no trash (re-usable containers, please)
- A layer of warmth for the early morning
- Good shoes for walking
- *Please NO SWEETS and NO DRINKS other than WATER*

Hike days are probably one of the most impactful and wonderful experiences that we offer in the kindergarten. Children often do not get nearly enough time simply being in nature and having the freedom to move and to explore in an outdoor setting (a lack now called “nature deficit disorder”). As teachers, we do very little “teaching” about the natural world when we are on our hikes. Instead, we see it as the opportunity for the children to follow their own impulses, led by the many naturally occurring phenomena in the outdoors. Nature speaks to children and they hear and respond in their play.

### **Helpful parenting hints:**

*\*Allow your child as much time in nature as possible. It doesn't have to be a complicated outing. A patch of dirt, a pile of rocks, a fallen tree – all will end up being nurturing to your young child.*

*\*\*Create as many opportunities for walking as possible. Walking gives breath and rhythm to your child's body. And now is the right time to set a habit of walking at least as much as riding in the car (hopefully far more walking than riding!).*