



Westminster Presbyterian Church Preschool

Parent Handbook

Whose Child is This?

"Whose child is this?" I asked one day
Seeing a little one out at play.
"Mine" said the parent with a tender smile
"Mine to keep for a little while;
To bathe his hands and comb his hair
To tell her what to wear;
To prepare for him his daily food,
To teach her that she may always be good."
"Whose child is this?" I asked again.
As the door opened and someone came in.
"Mine" said the teacher with the same tender smile;
"Mine to keep for a little while.
To teach him how to be gentle and kind,
To guide and direct her little mind,
To help him live by every rule.
And get the best she can from school."
"Whose child is this?" I asked once more
Just as the little one entered the door.
"Ours," said the parent and teacher as they smiled
And each took a hand of the dear little child.
"Ours to love and guide together.
Ours, this blessed task forever."

Author unknown



Welcome to Westminster Presbyterian Church Preschool!

Our developmental preschool program is growing and changing, but our foundation is steady and true. Being part of the community since 1971, WPCP is committed to helping your child develop his or her social and emotional skills which we believe ARE the foundation for cognitive learning. Our program believes in the value of play-based learning. Learning is going on in everything we do. WPCP is a unique, creative place where innovative education programs inspire children in their first 5 years of life. Your family will be a part of a child-centered learning environment that is developmental and nurturing.

Our program sets the stage for a child's life-long learning and we are happy you have considered us to be a part of this. WPCP has long been a leader in early childhood education; our philosophy insures a child-centered, age appropriate, well supervised, safe environment for your child to grow and create new friendships. As part of this community, these early years will establish who your child is as a learner.

Some of our goals will include building a strong foundation for reading and writing, problem solving and set a tone for life long learners. We will also increase your child's amount of time spent outside in God's creation as we connect with nature.

I encourage you to explore this Parent Handbook to become familiar with all we can offer you. Feel free to ask questions.

On behalf of the administrative team and our many talented staff I wish to express how excited we are to be with you during this part of your family's wondrous journey!

Sincerely,

Judy Hightower, Director

Philosophy and Mission

Westminster Presbyterian Church Preschool is a ministry to children based on the Christian faith that provides all children an opportunity to grow spiritually, emotionally, socially, intellectually and physically. This is done in an environment which is nurturing and child centered, providing a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Based on the theory children learn through play, classroom routines encourage active involvement, meaningful experimentation and reinforcement through repetition. Schedules are designed to balance teacher directed activity and free choice, as well as active and quiet times.

Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

Recognizing that children grow in predictable stages, we treat each child as an individual by allowing him to work and play at his own level. We teach a love of learning by allowing children to fully experience their own stage of development without pressure. Both our indoor and outdoor environments are carefully planned to encourage independence and choices. A wide variety of activities are offered in the areas of creative art, math, science, cooking, tactile play, music and movement, large motor, practical life, dramatic play, language arts, fine motor and manipulatives.

Goals

The goals of WPCP are achieved through maintaining small groups of children, usually no greater than 16 children, who are warmly directed by two teachers. Some of the specific goals are:

- To help the child feel comfortable relating in a social setting other than their own family.
- To promote cooperation.
- To increase independence in meeting and solving problems.
- To promote confidence.
- To promote language development.
- To help the child develop large motor skills such as climbing, running, jumping, balancing, pedaling, etc.
- To help the child develop small motor skills such as cutting with scissors, building with blocks, working with puzzles, stringing beads, manipulating play dough, controlling crayons, holding a paint brush, etc.
- To foster an appreciation and acceptance of the multicultural world we live in.
- To further intellectual development by fostering cognitive learning, concept formation, self-awareness and curiosity
- To develop the imagination through fantasy play.
- To foster creativity through open-ended art and music experiences.
- To help the child learn how to follow directions, complete tasks, and develop impulse control.
- To encourage the expression of feelings in acceptable ways.
- To encourage a positive attitude which, along with competency, develops a positive self-image.

Programs

WPCP offers programs for children ages 2 to 5 years.

Two Year Olds: The Parent-Toddler Program is the program for two year olds and their parent. This two-hour class meets one day a week in the morning offering appropriate indoor and outdoor play experiences in a safe environment. A parent discussion takes place under the leadership of an experienced child development specialist while the toddlers experience a separation transition under the careful supervision of another teacher.

Three and Four Year Olds: A half-day morning preschool, is available two or three days per week. The children are grouped by age into small classes of no more than 16 children with two qualified teachers.

Four Year Olds: A half-day preschool is available five mornings a week. This program is designed for the older, or more mature, four year old who can handle the expectations of attending everyday. Class size and teacher ratio are the same as the two and three day programs.

Five Year Olds: A Transitional Kindergarten program for children who are age eligible for kindergarten but who may not be developmentally ready for the rigors of kindergarten is available five half days per week. The class may have an enrollment up to 20 with three qualified teachers.

Summer School: A summer school program is regularly offered to currently enrolled children of the preschool. The nature of this program is subject to the availability of teaching staff and the number of children enrolled. A separate enrollment process takes place in the Spring with fees and tuition set each year.

Orientation for Parents and Children

We offer the opportunity for a short visit in the indoor and outdoor classroom about a week before school begins in September. It is designed to help your child get acquainted with his teacher and other classmates to see the classroom before the first day. Also, teachers often share classroom handouts as well as answering any general questions about the first few days of school.

Teacher and Parent Conferences

Conferences to discuss a child's development or any school concern can be arranged at the request of parent or teacher. A meeting will be set by the teacher at a mutually agreeable time.

Formal conference appointments will be held in February to discuss your child's activities and development. An appointment sheet will be posted near the sign-in sheet. This is your best opportunity to learn what your child really is doing at preschool, so we cannot overemphasize the importance of attending this conference. Please make this one of your top priorities for this school year.

It is inappropriate, however, to discuss your child at the classroom door or while visiting in the room. Limit your doorway concerns to classroom news, gathering belongings and hugging your child. In depth questions about your child's day are often embarrassing for your child, unfair to the teacher who is not prepared to thoughtfully respond, and to parents and children who are not interested in your discussion. Please allow your teacher to indicate when it is appropriate to talk with her.

Health Policy

The Preschool is only licensed to care for children who are well. All children entering are required by law to have a pre-entrance physical examination and a completed Department of Social Services Physician's Report. Immunizations and TB tests are required for attendance in a licensed child care center and requirements change from year to year. Please consult with the director or office personnel if there are questions.

For the protection of all children, please keep your child home if she has any symptoms of illness. The teacher will give a visual health check to each child before she is admitted to school each day. Your child should stay home if he or she has any of the following symptoms:

- fever
- diarrhea
- sore throat or swollen neck glands
- upset stomach and vomiting
- head cold or any other communicable disease
- bronchial infection
- conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- contagious rash or skin eruptions
- acting listless, drowsy, headachy, flushed face, lack of appetite or any behavior out of the ordinary

Please note: Your child must be free of fever and diarrhea for at least 24 hours before attending class.

Children are not considered ill in the following cases:

- runny nose due to allergy
- mucousy discharge due to allergy or the final stage of an upper respiratory infection
- coughing due to allergy or as a result of a lingering upper respiratory condition
- rashes that are not contagious
- sprains, stitches or broken bones

Medications will be administered in special cases and only with the written permission of the parents and doctor. Special cases should be discussed with the director.

Please report to the preschool discovery of the following health conditions:

Chicken Pox	Impetigo
Ringworm	Fifth Disease
Lice	Conjunctivitis
Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease	

The presence of these conditions in a classroom, by law, need to be reported to all parents as a means to controlling an epidemic or spreading throughout the class and school.

Allergies and Asthma

Parents must inform the director and teacher of any allergies suffered by the child. Food allergies are posted in each classroom as a precaution for all staff members or substitutes who may be serving snacks. Allergies to insect bites or pollen should also be mentioned to the teacher. Medications for severe allergic reactions and inhalers for asthma attacks can be kept at school. Follow licensing requirements for permission to use medications.

Hand Washing Procedures

In order to maintain as healthy an environment as possible, the teachers carefully teach and supervise proper hand washing procedures. Regular hand washing has been proven to be the MOST EFFECTIVE method for preventing the spread of mild illnesses. The preschool will never be a sterile environment but the spread of much illness is controlled by washing properly.

We teach the children to wash after toileting, touching animals, coming in contact with mucous (nose picking, sneezing, or wiping a runny nose) or when hands seem extra dirty. Children always wash before eating, especially since most snacks are finger foods. Lathering with liquid soap and water for at least ten seconds is encouraged, followed by thorough rinsing in running water and drying with a paper towel. We appreciate any efforts parents make at home to reinforce these procedures.

Arrival and Departure Procedures

At WPCP, arrival and departure are taken very seriously for one very important reason. These are potentially the most unsafe times in the preschooler's day. Doors are open, many people are coming and going through the doors, cars are moving in the parking lot, and children are often distressed, especially at the beginning of the year. Therefore, we have very specific procedures for dropping off and picking up children.

Prompt, even early, arrival allows you and your child to be relaxed. Your child's transition from home and parent to school and teacher is facilitated by allowing her to start her day when the other children start-not arrive after the others are involved in their play.

- 1) If you must arrive late and the class is on the play yard, **it is imperative you make contact with your child's teacher.**
- 2) Prompt retrieval of your child is very important if you are to build trust in your child. Children fear abandonment when all the other children are picked up and they do not see their parent.
- 3) If for any reason you find that you will be late picking up your child, it is **imperative** you call the school. Repeated late pick of your child could result in a fee and dismissal from the program. If your child has not been pick up within ten minutes of dismissal time, he will be brought to the office where school personnel will attempt to locate you.
- 4) The daily sign-in/out sheets at the classroom door are a legal document. Your signature indicates the transferring of responsibilities for your child to the preschool. **This must be done in ink and with your legal signature.**
- 5) If you have designated an Authorized Representative to pick up your child, this individual must show a picture identification with their name before the teacher or director will release your child to this individual. There are no exceptions to this.

Separation

Leaving your child at school for the first time may be more uncomfortable for you as a parent than your child. Your child may go off happily to play with the others from the first day. On the other hand, your child may cling to your leg, cry or verbally refuse to be left at school. We see both scenarios, which reinforce our belief that children are complicated beings with personalities, temperaments, and life experiences that are at different stages of psychological development. All children, at some point, must go through a separation process. When and to what degree depends on the child. Please do not worry that your child is not ready for preschool or that you have done something wrong in your parenting. We understand children's separation anxiety can be embarrassing and difficult for the parents. We suggest the following tips to help your child pass through the separation anxiety.

- Do not discuss preschool excessively before starting in September.
- Do not try to talk your child out of his or her feelings. Acknowledge them and accept them. But do not change your course of action.
- Arrive on time or early if possible. Children do better when they do not have to face other children.
- If your teacher invites parents to participate in the opening circle time, this may be all that your child needs to feel comfortable.
- If your child needs to have you stay, feel free to stay in the classroom or on the play yard but we urge you not to participate or play with your child. This is setting up an expectation that you will not be able to fulfill in the long run. Sit in one place and allow your child to move away from you, as he feels ready. The teacher or other children may encourage your child to play. When your child accepts this invitation, it is the first sign he is comfortable with his independence.
- Never leave your child without saying goodbye. Even if she is engrossed in an activity, you must let her know you are leaving and will return at the end of the preschool day. Many parents avoid saying goodbye, especially to an unsure child, because they think the child will remember their insecurity and start crying. Unfortunately, slipping out the door only reinforces your child's insecurity because you have confirmed that if she doesn't hold onto your leg, you might disappear. Always say goodbye even if it triggers upset. Let the teacher comfort your child while you leave.
- Be the first one at the door when it is time to pick up.
- Children may cry upon seeing you even if they have not cried during school. Children often hold in their emotions as part of the adaptation to this new expectation. They are not at home and we often see their best behavior until mom or dad appears. We see these as tears of joy and relief.
- If your child has extended periods of crying and no amount of comforting helps, we suggest a routine of very short stays at school (perhaps 30 minutes) that are gradually lengthened each day.

Occasionally a child may not be ready for a preschool experience. The teacher and director will discuss this with the parent and options will be explored.

It is common for children to experience separation anxiety even months after the beginning of school, even if they seemed very happy to that point. This again is part of typical development. Acknowledge your child's fears and concerns but reassure him you know he is safe and the teacher will take care of his needs.

Children's Birthdays, Holidays and Celebrations

The children's birthdays have traditionally been celebrated in the classroom with a birthday crown, made by the teacher, and recognition in the circle time. Parents are invited to read their child's favorite book or the child may bring a favorite game. Birthday party invitations may be distributed in the classroom cubbies only if all children are invited. You are encouraged to use the class address roster if a party is planned for only a few children. Please indicate to the teacher your interest in celebrating your child's birthday during school and arrange a date.

Many holidays are recognized and celebrated at WPCP. Parties may be a part of some recognition, such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Valentine's Day, Easter and Christmas. Room Parents help coordinate the details. Please remember that the meaning of holiday celebrations is most significant to young children after they have experienced the entire event. For example, handing out Valentines and receiving them from friends makes sense on the day it is done.

Many holidays celebrated by our families may not be familiar to our teaching staff. This gives parents the wonderful opportunity to share their families' traditions with others in their child's class. This is encouraged as a reinforcement of the home-school connection and a validation of the child's personally meaningful experiences at home. Please talk to your child's teacher to make arrangements to share during class time.

Join us on Open House, the Halloween Parade, the Christmas Sing-Along, Dad's Night and other school events. You will have many opportunities to get to know the teachers, the other children and their parents in his or her child's class. This is an important bridge between your child's home life and school experience.

"Share Time" and Personal Belongings

The teachers at WPCP realize that part of the adjusting process for a three or four year old in a new environment may include bringing something special from home to class. While items of value should remain at home, one item brought to school can be incorporated into the class "share time". In addition to helping the transition from home to school, share time also promotes language development, helps to expand vocabulary and encourages social interactions among the children. Please do not send fragile toys, toy weapons of any kind, or toys with small parts. (The child's excitement and anticipation of sharing something with other children can soon turn to disappointment if parts of that share item are lost!) Each classroom will have its own "share time" procedure and your child's teacher will inform you about this at the appropriate time.

Your child has her own "cubbie" specifically to hold jackets, artwork, share items, school paperwork or special "transitional" objects such as a small blanket or favorite possession. Transitional objects are often comforting for your child while they are at school. We welcome them if they are needed. The cubbie is a clean, safe place to house that transitional objects and it can be found when your child needs it. Children will learn to only touch the items in their own cubbie.

Personal belongings left at school will either be stored in your child's cubbie or in the Lost and Found box in the teacher's office.

Clothing and Shoes

Playclothes

Learning can be messy and children need to feel free to explore with mud, water and paints. Therefore your child should wear clothing that is washable and encourages independence both in play and toileting.

The following clothing guidelines are suggested:

- Elastic waisted pants for children new to toileting.
- T-shirts, sweatshirts, loose tops and "everyday" dresses are great
- No overalls, jumpsuits, or one-piece outfits
- No jewelry, chains, cords or dangling accessories because they often get in the way and are not durable for preschool activities. (They can be interesting "share" items, however.)
- No "party dresses" or "Sunday Best" because it often inhibits your child's freedom to participate.

Shoes

Although we do allow bare feet at times, we insist on safe shoes for certain play activities, such as bike riding.

Please label jackets and sweatshirts with your last name. Misplaced clothing items may be located in our lost and found box. One set of extra clothes (underpants, shirt, long or short pants and socks) need to be brought to school the first day in a plastic bag marked with your child's name on the outside. These clothes will remain at school and be used in case of toileting or spilling accidents.

Preschool clothes should allow for maximum freedom with minimum concern.

Assessments of Children

Assessing your child's development is an important facet of teaching preschool. Our teachers are trained in recognizing the developmental milestones of young children. These are tracked through observation, documentation and samples of the children's work. In some cases, written assessments are shared with parents as a basis for discussing and planning for a child's individual needs and development. Written assessments and documentation are kept in the children's files during their enrollment at WPCP and for the subsequent three years.

Occasionally it becomes necessary to express concern about a child's lag in development. In most cases, these situations are corrected in time. On the rare occasion when this does not happen, the teacher or director may suggest the child be evaluated by another professional. It is in the best interest of the child to follow through with such an evaluation because early detection and intervention of most developmental delays or disorders can make a substantial impact on the child's opportunity for improvement. The preschool has a list of community resources available for parents.

Emergency Procedures

Fire drills are practiced regularly so that children and teachers know exactly how to respond in case of a fire. Drop drills are also practiced monthly to protect your child in case of earthquake, severe storm or eminent danger from nature or an intruder. "Lockdowns" are procedures in which teachers lock the doors, close the blinds and keep the children either under cover (as in a drop drill) or inside the classroom until it is safe to leave. Our telephone public address system is a valuable tool in communicating urgent messages should the need arise.

Since we live in earthquake country, minor tremblors can be commonplace and may not upset our daily routines. Chances are, in the event of a minor earthquake, your child will carry on in a normal fashion. It is up to the parent to determine if the circumstances warrant picking up their child from school.

Obviously, in the case of a severe earthquake, you would need to pick up your child as soon as conditions allowed.

Emergency Procedures are outlined and posted in every classroom. Please feel free to review them. In case of a fire or earthquake, children can be picked up in the area designated by our local fire department, most likely in the grassy lot on the corner of Lakeview Canyon Road and Watergate Road. The preschool has emergency supplies available and procedures are in place should a severe earthquake occur. Your child will be comforted and cared for while waiting for you or your emergency contact to retrieve her from school.

Discipline

The Preschool practices a very positive form of discipline. Children are never punished, spanked, scolded or treated harshly in any way. It is our belief that children misbehave as an attempt to meet a need in a way that doesn't work. Our job is to help them learn a way that does work.

The process for this includes teaching words that describe feelings, needs and desires. Children are aided in identifying their feelings or needs and are taught words and ways in which to get those needs met. Although this process is time consuming, in the long run it is the most successful because children eventually internalize the value of appropriate behavior.

Time out is not used because we view it as punitive. There may be occasions when a child needs to be isolated from the other children but a teacher will sit with the child during those times.

Cell Phone Use

Cell phones provide important functions in our society, especially in cases of emergency. However, they can interfere with parent-child relationships, safety and teacher communication when used at the preschool. Therefore, we request that parents refrain from talking on their phones while delivering or retrieving children, attending a preschool function with your child, or while driving through the parking lot.

State Licensed

Our school is fully licensed by the State of California and our license is displayed at all times in our main office. We are inspected annually by regulatory agencies in the areas of health, fire, safety and child and family services. Please see the bulletin board in our main office for state mandated postings.

Parent Involvement

Parents often want to know what they can do in the way of volunteering or helping their child's class or the school. There are several ways parents can participate in the life of the preschool.

- **Join the Parent Advisory Board:** Members of this group seek ways to support parents as they transition to the next stage of parenthood, involve parents in the extracurricular activities that come up during the year, and manage some fundraising events. New board members are always welcomed.
- **Room Parents:** These parents work directly with their child's teacher as liaisons to the Parent Advisory Board or the director. Jobs are usually not time difficult or time consuming but are very helpful to the teacher.

We appreciate our volunteers and recognize our job is made lighter and more meaningful when we have the support of our parents.

Snacks and Good Nutrition

Your child will be offered a healthy and appealing snack midway through each session. The snack menu calendar is posted in each room near the parent bulletin board. We attempt to include a protein each day while presenting a variety of fruits, vegetables, breads, cereals, cheeses, crackers, meats and dairy products. Water will be served with the snack. We avoid sweet and fatty foods, regular fruit juices, colas, and snacks with low nutritional value. We also attempt to provide food from all cultures so our children are being introduced to novel tastes.

Parents are encouraged to bring or, better yet, prepare a snack with the children during classroom time to share during snack time. This is a very concrete way to show children how families eat different foods. Teachers occasionally bake, cook or prepare snack with the children as a creative experience.

Snack time is a valuable part of our curriculum for many reasons:

- Cleanliness is encouraged. Hands must be washed just before eating.
- Awareness of God is demonstrated. Children say a blessing before eating.
- Self-control is encouraged. Nobody starts eating until all are seated and the blessing has been said.
- Good manners are demonstrated. Children learn how to ask politely for servings.
- Responsibility is taught. Spills are cleaned up by the child. Trash is thrown away by the child.
- Language is developed. Much conversation takes place with everyone at the table.
- Good nutrition is reinforced. We want to support healthy eating habits by providing only nutritious snacks.
- New tastes are acquired. Teachers encourage children to explore new foods (even if it means just talking about the smell, taste, shape, or color of the new food.)
- Community is built. Eating together is a strong reinforcer of relationships.

Field Trips

Occasionally, special field trips are offered to interesting places away from the school. Transportation and supervision of the children require parent participation. If automobiles are used to transport the children, there must be a seat belt for each child. Car seats are required for all children under the age of six years.

Parking Lot Safety

The dangerous location on our campus is the parking lot. Please abide by the following guidelines:

- Drive slowly and cautiously
- NEVER leave any child unattended in the car no matter how quickly you think you will return or how inclement the weather.
- Keep children close as you walk them through the lot.
- Please refrain from using cell phones in our parking lot.
- Park in the designated spots only. *Never park in the handicap or red zones.* This is a ticketable offense.

Scholarships

Scholarships are available at Westminster Presbyterian Church Preschool and are based on financial need. The Preschool Director and Board of Directors reviews all written requests which are confidential and reviewed several times a year.

Discounts

Three types of discounts are available at WPCP:

- **Twin discount:** 25% reduction in second child tuition.
- **Family registration discount:** A single registration fee is charged per family regardless of how many siblings are enrolled.
- **Annual tuition payment:** 5% discount is given when the full year's (10 months) tuition is paid by October 1st.

Safety and Accidents

The preschool staff uses its best efforts to supervise children, prevent accidents and avoid aggressive conduct between children. Nevertheless, it is reasonably foreseeable that accidents may occur due to the inherent nature of the program and the young age of the children. Falls or minor injuries, as well as other incidents such as scratching and biting may occur during the school year. If the severity of the injury warrants parental notification, information will be given to the parent at pick-up time.

Because the State of California forbids the use of any medication for children in our program, the staff will only wash injuries with soap and water and apply a bandage for cleanliness. Ice packs may be applied in cases of potential swelling. Parents can take other medical measures once the child is back in their care.

In case of serious injury (head trauma, deep cuts, severe bleeding, sprained limbs, broken bones or other serious conditions) parents or emergency contacts will be notified immediately. Paramedics may also be called in these cases. Teachers are re-trained regularly in CPR and children's first aid procedures.

Director's Open Door

It is not necessary to wait for the end of the school year to discuss any aspect of the program or share concerns about your child's experience. Issues need to be discussed first with the person most likely to solve your concern. We ask parents to follow a simple formula:

Step One: Issues related to interactions in the classroom or on the play yard need to be addressed to your child's teacher.

Step Two: If the prior communications are unsatisfactory, the office staff or Preschool Director welcomes the opportunity to help by hearing your concerns over the telephone or in person.

Step Three: If the issues remain unresolved, grievances can be voiced to the Board of Directors.

Teachers deserve the opportunity to respond to your concerns because they are the most informed about your child's experiences at school. Likewise, teachers will consult with parents regarding decisions and interactions affecting their child. It is this teamwork that makes the difference between a good experience for your child and a wonderful relationship for your family.

Administrative issues should be discussed with office personnel.

Confidentiality

Trust is an important part of the family-school relationship. In order to develop trust the teachers and staff maintain the practice of respecting confidentiality and anonymity when it comes to sensitive information about a child. Therefore, teachers share details about a child's behavior, development or interactions only with his parents. All children's privacy is respected. We recognize children's development is emerging and our responsibility is to nurture and protect that growing and changing child.