



FAMILY HANDBOOK

2023-2024



TREEHOUSE

CHILDREN'S SCHOOL

Reggio Inspired in the Upper Valley

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OVERVIEW & MISSION

OVERVIEW

We've been in business a long time, evolving in response to the changing needs of families in the Upper Connecticut River Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire. The Treehouse Children's School was founded in 1971 by a group of local parents in need of high quality, affordable child care. They purchased a distinctive red A-frame house from a local homeowner who decided to sell after the completion of Interstate 91, a major highway which runs adjacent to our school. What a boon for children. With its ups and downs and twists and turns, the building structure itself is a playful invitation to wonder—what might be around the next corner?

We are a warm and welcoming community, a non-profit organization licensed to serve 65 children, aged 6 weeks to 5 years, in our early childhood program. For more than 50 years, we have served a diverse cross-section of Upper Valley families. We are committed to diversity and accessibility and base our sliding-scale tuition on family income. Many families receive discounted tuition and, in any given year, we award more than \$20,000 in scholarships to families in need.

In 2020, our Board of Directors began a process of reimagining our place and possibilities in the Upper Valley. With our 2022 shift in philosophy and practice—from that of a daycare center to a children's school—Treehouse Children's School (TCS) offers a new early education model to Upper Valley families, a Reggio-inspired approach. Currently more than 5,000 "inspired" schools around the world have adapted the Reggio philosophy in their own cultural settings. TCS is one of them.

TCS MISSION

Educate creatively. We provide high-quality early education and afterschool programs based on a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach.

Serve broadly. We welcome, value and honor children and families from all backgrounds, believing that diversity strengthens community.

Learn continuously. We continually refine our early education understandings, practices and offerings for the benefit of children and families.

Partner meaningfully. We are a positive and involved community partner with our parents and families, other early education providers, and local organizations.

Grow sustainably. We steward the school into the future through sound fiscal management, reducing our environmental impact, and nurturing relationships over time.



EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY & APPROACH

CURRICULUM APPROACH

We are committed to providing an enriching educational environment built on relationships and playful exploration. We are undergoing a shift to a Reggio-Emilia inspired approach to early childhood education. Drawing inspiration from the Reggio schools in Italy, we use emergent and inquiry-based approaches to curriculum design, where topics emerge from the interests and questions children bring into the classroom.

CORE REGGIO PRINCIPLES

In a Reggio-inspired approach, children's learning is guided by five distinct and equally important principles.

Our “image of the child” matters above all else. Reggio educators start with the image/understanding that each child is competent, creative, empowered and curious, full of potential and ambitious desires from the moment he or she is born. Every child is a mystery for us to discover. We always are in the process of learning more about, and more from, the children we work with. We learn through our relationships: how we listen for and nurture children's “one hundred languages,” how we aim to be fully present and pay attention, how we allow children space to express and to figure things out for themselves. We value children for exactly who they are right now, not for who they might become.

Children have one hundred languages. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio approach, describes the “infinite ways that children can express, explore, and connect their thoughts, feelings and imaginings.” We believe children have countless ways of “seeing and being” and offer them a large palette of languages: dancing, dreaming, playing, questioning, singing, reasoning, imagining, listening, laughing, crying, loving, hating, painting, sculpting, exploring, experimenting...

Children are the protagonists in their learning. Children's interests propel the curricula and they take the lead as they play, explore, hypothesize, experiment and co-construct knowledge with their teachers. After setting up fascinating learning spaces, teachers “step back” more often than they “step in,” asking questions and offering guidance only when asked or needed by children.

The learning environment is a third teacher. Children thrive in learning spaces that are responsive to their emerging interests and developmental stages. Reggio-inspired classrooms are welcoming, aesthetically pleasing, culturally representative of the school community, and filled with natural and purposeful materials. Room layout promotes relationships, communication, collaboration, and exploration through play. Our teachers invest thought and energy into creating ever-changing classroom spaces that are rich in variety and that allow children the gift of time to actively explore at their own pace.

Adults are collaborators in children's learning. Learning is an interactive, co-constructed process between teachers and children. Children plant the seed of interest. Teachers then bring *their* creativity to the forefront, designing learning spaces and investigations to jumpstart fascination and engagement, based on children's interests. Teachers thoughtfully make "offerings" to spark children's questions, creativity, problem solving skills, experimentation and play. Then they step back to observe and document, taking time to reflect:

- How are children responding to the learning spaces and materials?
- What are children expressing or discovering for themselves right now, perhaps without words?
- What is motivating the child who is engaged and animated in play?
- How are children interacting with one another and what is this expressing about their next social steps?
- What is a possible next offering or "provocation" that will broaden or deepen children's understandings and give them a new "point of contact" with this area of interest?
- What might inspire children to explore, productively grapple, and express themselves in new and more complex ways?

Through this cycle of inquiry, an ever-evolving "emergent curriculum" assumes shape. Curriculum and topics of exploration are not predetermined or prescribed by teachers. Teachers may decide to introduce a theme or topic of exploration based on *their* passions, but if children show no interest, teachers pause to consider why, and then respond with something different or new. The Reggio approach naturally lends itself to differing curricula from one year to the next, as children, families, teachers and the classroom space collectively determine the learning paths. Authentic, animated engagement is our ultimate aim.

DOCUMENTATION: MAKING THINKING VISIBLE

As you walk through our school house, you'll see documentation on many walls, "mini stories" that capture children's original thinking and learning, along with moments of pure joy. Documentation benefits multiple audiences. It lends parents a new perspective on their child's work and play. For teachers, it's a vital pedagogical tool. To document a

child's learning, we need to draw very close to notice all that is taking place: what does a child know and what can they do? What sparks his or her motivation? What might we offer next to deepen or broaden a child's evolving understandings? Our aim is to tune into children's learning process rather than an end product. We invite families—and children too—to see and reflect on children's work in new ways. Above all else, documentation sends children the message that their ideas are important: You matter most of all.

ARTS IN THE ATELIER

Our Center has a designated “atelier,” art studio. Our Atelierista (art director) brings together small groups of children to express creative ideas and experiment with a variety of art tools and media. Designed to spark curiosity and creative thinking, the atelier is “the heart” of a Reggio-inspired school. Transparent canisters full of natural objects, loose parts, and tools line the shelves and create a whimsical, magical atmosphere. Children investigate materials and bring imaginations to light with a focus on the creative process, not preconceived products. Preschool children take field trips to the Hood Museum of Art, a short public bus ride up the road into Hanover NH, where we partner with museum educators.

EMBEDDED EARLY LEARNING STANDARDS

With our emergent curriculum, literacy and numeracy are naturally interwoven throughout children's play and projects. During every form of exploration—block play, dramatic play, art and music, loose parts and manipulatives, active outdoor play—our teachers embed letter and sound recognition, early writing, number sense, fine and gross motor development, social and problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, conflict-resolution skills, and more. Our practices support children in problem solving, negotiating with others, thinking independently, and seeking answers to their own questions. With these foundational competencies and dispositions in place, children from Reggio-inspired programs tend to thrive in kindergarten and beyond.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

Child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play is a core component of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) as described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC defines “DAP” as “methods that promote each child's optimal development through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning. Educators build on each child's unique strengths—physical, cognitive, social, emotional—and design learning environments to help all children achieve their potential across all domains of development. DAP recognizes and supports each individual as a valued member of the learning community. As a result, to be developmentally appropriate, practices must also be culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate for each child.”

Our Reggio-inspired, “constructivist” approach is tailored to meet the interests and developmental levels of children rather than expecting children to adjust to a prescribed curriculum. Our work with children is highly personalized. We hold an “image of the child” as competent, capable and curious, and our focus is on children’s strengths, rather than deficits. This is true for all children, including those with special needs/rights. (Reggio tends to talk in terms of “rights” rather than “needs.”) In situations where children require extra support (e.g., speech and language services) that our teachers cannot provide, we partner with service providers who are considered an integral part of a classroom team.

STANDARDS & LICENSING

NAEYC ACCREDITATION

TCS prides itself on meeting the highest professional standards. We are accredited through NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) and meet or exceed all required NAEYC standards..

VERMONT STANDARDS & LICENSING

TCS qualifies as a “5 STAR” program, top ranking in Vermont’s quality recognition system for early childhood programs. We adhere to licensing regulations set by the state for child care/preschool centers. Copies of the current licensing regulations are available in the TCS office or online at dcf.vermont.gov/cdd/laws-regs/childcare.

CHILD CARE CONSUMER CONCERN LINE

If you have concerns about any aspect of our operations, please contact the Director and/or reach out to the Child Care Consumer Concern line by phone or email: 1-800-649-2642 or ahs.dcfcdchildcarelicensing@vermont.gov.

CONFIDENTIALITY & ACCESS TO STUDENT RECORDS

All information and documentation concerning you and your child are held in the strictest confidence.

- Children’s files, including assessments, photographs, videotapes and medical and health information, are only accessible with granted parental permission.
- Parents and guardians always have access to children’s files and documentation and no prior notice is necessary to access your child’s records.
- Regulators (e.g., Vermont State Licensing, Vermont Health Department) and others with statutory authority for issues relating to the health, safety, and

protection of children (e.g., police officers) have access to children's files upon request.

- Program staff, including educators and administrators, need to obtain consent from a parent or legal guardian to access child information.
- We do not divulge information about one family or child to another family or child. Similarly, we ask that you refrain from taking pictures of other children while at TCS or on a field trip to protect children's and families' privacy.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Child Care Center is a private, non-profit corporation governed by a board of directors comprised of parents, community members and non-voting staff representatives. TCS actively seeks parent representatives to serve as members of the Board or its committees. The Board meets monthly.

All parents of enrolled children become members of the Corporation and are invited to elect representatives to the Board at the Annual Corporation Meeting. The Board also encourages all parents to participate in its annual fund raising activities. Because TCS maintains a sliding fee scale based on family income, and a "need-blind" admissions policy, tuition alone does not cover the cost of care. TCS relies on tax-deductible contributions from parents and community members, as well as grant awards, to balance its annual budget.

HOURS & DAYS OF OPERATION

HOURS OF OPERATION

The Center is open year round, Monday through Friday, with days off for holidays and professional development.

8:00 a.m.-3:15 p.m. Core Reggio Emilia-inspired Program

3:15 p.m.-5:30 p.m. Extension (Extended Day Program)

CORE REGGIO-INSPIRED PROGRAM

Children enrolled in our Core Program engage in a mix of Reggio Emilia-inspired indoor and outdoor play-based investigations which incorporate trail walks, gardening, cooking, music, and special projects in the atelier. Children eat snacks (school provided) and lunch (family provided) with their peers.

EXTENSION PROGRAM

Our optional Extension Program lasts from 3:15-5:30 PM and is available to families on a set schedule (no drop-offs). Children who attend the Core Program have the option of extending their afternoons until 5:30 PM for all or select days that they attend Core, per space availability. Extension includes snack time and a mix of indoor and outdoor play and enrichment activities.

UNEXPECTED CLOSURES

On occasion, we may need to close for reasons other than a planned holiday or in-service. If TCS experiences heating/air quality problems, no running water for an extended amount of time, or some other unforeseen building issue, we may need to vacate the building, either out onto the playground or to the Montshire Museum of Science. We will contact you and/or your emergency contacts to request immediate pick up.

In case of inclement weather, TCS looks to the lead of SAU70, the supervisory union governing schools in Norwich VT and Hanover NH. If SAU70 calls for a snow day/school closure, TCS will be closed as well. Decisions about delayed openings and early closures will be made independently by TCS; our decisions may or may not match those of SAU70.

Here's how to learn about Center closures/delayed openings due to inclement weather:

- Check your email and Brightwheel accounts. By about 6:15AM on snow days or days with delayed openings, all TCS families and staff members, including subs, will receive email and Brightwheel notifications.
- Log into [WCAX \(TV\) website](#). WCAX is the main feed that distributes news of school closings to all news outlets in VT. Search under "Treehouse Children's School". We will post by 6:15AM in the case of closure or delayed opening.
- Or log into [Vermont Public Radio](#) for more visually straightforward listing of closures. We post notices here as well.

ANNUAL CALENDAR

Each September TCS provides families with a detailed calendar of the upcoming school year. This is posted on our website and you can request a copy at any time from the

front office. A few days in advance of closures/early closures, we post notice on the entry doors as helpful reminders. Tuition is required for all closed days, whether planned or unexpected, as our staff are paid regardless.

SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

OPEN COMMUNICATION

Building strong relationships with families is a top priority of every teacher and staff member at TCS. We share in common with you the most important people in the world: our children. Teachers work in partnership with families, establishing ongoing, two-way communication in person, through email and on our Brightwheel platform. We acknowledge and treat all parents and children with the utmost respect. We recognize families as experts about their children and respect your languages and perspectives. We learn as much as possible about families' cultures and traditions so we can be responsive to your interests and perspectives in our curriculum, teaching practices, and learning spaces. Never hesitate to reach out with questions, concerns and creative ideas. Teachers look forward to "learning" your child, including his or her individual needs, interests and passions, to ensure that the transition from home to school goes smoothly each day and that your child is deeply known, engaged, happy and growing.

LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

Please let us know if it is difficult for you to communicate in English and we will arrange for someone to interpret for you.

We welcome children and families whose first language is other than English. We recognize the following:

- Language, in its many variations, reflects the experiences and identities of all people;
- Heritage and primary languages are instrumental in children's overall success in and outside of school;
- Multilingual individuals (adults and children) bring strengths to our community.
- As requested by families, we work with Early Intervention programs or school districts that provide English Language Learner (ELL) support.
- As well, we can help identify volunteers to join the classroom who speak the same language as your family and child.

INCLUSIVITY

TCS is committed to inclusivity and access for children and their families. All children are welcome at TCS, including those with diverse and special needs. TCS teachers are inclusive in their practices and committed to the delivery of developmentally appropriate education to diverse learners. Whenever warranted, we work in collaboration with school districts (for children age 3 and up) to line up special education services including, but not limited to, speech and language supports, physical and/or occupational therapy, and behavioral consultations and interventions. When a child under age 3 experiences a developmental delay (the inability to perform a skill typically seen in other children of the same age), we help families secure early intervention services through The Family Place.

FAMILY CONFERENCES

Conferences are learning opportunities for families and teachers both. TCS offers opportunities twice annually for teacher-family conferences, typically in January and July. We announce windows of time to sign up online for 30 minute conversations to discuss children's learning, developmental milestones and interactions with peers and adults. Teachers draw from observations, evidence of children's work, and related documentation they are required by the state of Vermont to enter into the Teaching Strategies Gold Child Assessment system.

Teachers also seek family input—questions, goals, concerns, bright ideas—to learn more about your child's needs and interests so we can provide children a continuity of care between home and school.

Parents and guardians don't need to wait for the conference windows to meet with teachers. We invite and encourage you to reach out at any time to arrange a meeting with teachers or the Director. We will accommodate you as soon as possible and, per licensing guidelines, no later than 10 days following your request.

FAMILY VOLUNTEERS

We encourage and welcome parent participation in our classrooms. Teachers will reach out with volunteer opportunities. For instance, a parent might lead or help with a cooking or painting project, or to play an instrument or talk about a special family celebration. Periodically we send out requests for parent volunteers to chaperone on field trips and provide an extra set of hands during the adventure.

THE RIGHT TO EXPRESS CONCERNS

If you have a concern about a classroom practice or teacher, begin by taking your concern directly to the teaching team. Ideally, arrange an in-person meeting, conducive

to the most productive conversations and important to ensure privacy without other parents or children within earshot.

If this avenue of conflict resolution doesn't alleviate the concern, please set up an appointment with the TCS director. Serious grievances should be put in writing to the director and, if they constitute a possible licensing violation, brought to the attention of the Department of Children and Families. As needed, the director will inform the Board President.

Every concern and grievance will be taken seriously and fairly considered from the perspectives of all involved. A response to written grievances will be issued within one full week, if not sooner.

ADMISSION & WITHDRAWAL

NON-DISCRIMINATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS

TCS does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, color, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic level under any circumstances, including our policies of accepting children into our care, employing staff, or appointing members to the Board of Directors. Children are accepted without regard to family income.

Children with special needs participate in our program under the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act. TCS is an equal opportunity employer. Our staff work with families and support staff to develop plans that address any health or needs of the child. Our staff will make adaptations and accommodations for activities, interactions, teaching strategies and materials to support the child's needs and development.

ENROLLMENT

Our Core Reggio Emilia-inspired educational program runs from 8 AM-3:15 PM and is followed by an optional Extended Day ("Extension") program from 3:15-5:30 PM. Families may choose to enroll just in the Core program or, as space is available, to extend to 5:30 PM for a longer school day.

We require a 3-day minimum weekly enrollment, although 2-day spaces sometimes become available by default. We discourage and rarely accept a 1-day enrollment since infrequency in attendance works against children's integration into the classroom community.

Prior to your child's start, you will fill out enrollment materials including admissions forms, developmental history questionnaire, family information, authorized pick up form, immunizations and wellness exam forms, field trip permission slip, medication permission, and information on tuition payments and our food program. Most of these can be completed online or we can provide you with a hard-copy packet. We must have all forms completed before your child's first day at TCS.

POSTPONED ENROLLMENT

If a family wishes to postpone enrollment to a set future date, a holding fee of 100% of tuition will be charged. This fee covers the holding period only and is not applicable to future tuition.

VISITING DAY

If a family desires, TCS will arrange for an enrolled child to have a visiting day prior to his or her first day of attendance. The visit typically comprises several hours in the morning when children are involved in free play and explorations indoors and outside.

WAITING LIST

There is a \$30 non-refundable fee charged per family to be on the waiting list. When a space becomes available, first priority goes to the children of current TCS employees. Second priority goes to siblings of current families at TCS. All remaining slots are filled based on the date the application and fee were received. TCS administration will contact waiting pool families as slots arise. Applicants also may reach out to us to check in on their waitlist status at any time.

REGISTRATION FEE

Once a family is informed of space availability in our program, we charge a one-time, non-refundable registration fee of \$100. This fee is waived for lower-income families and reduced to \$50 for siblings of children currently enrolled at TCS. Registration funds are used to defray the cost of classroom books and supplies.

ABSENCES

Please inform the office and your child's teacher/s on any day that your child is absent. If your child will be on vacation, let us know in advance for planning purposes. In the case of prolonged absence due to illness (two or more consecutive weeks) 50% of the normal tuition fee will be charged. A written statement from your physician is required.

If your preschool child receives tuition funding via Act 166 (Vermont Universal Pre-K), he or she is expected to be in attendance for all registered Pre-K hours. Excessive absences may affect a child's Act 166 funding.

UNIVERSAL PRE-K IN VERMONT

Vermont offers a Universal Prekindergarten program called “Act 166” to all Vermont children who are 3, 4 or 5 years old at the start of the school year in any given public school district. Act 166 subsidizes 10 hours of preschool per week over 35 weeks per year (September-mid June), reducing families’ tuition bills during those months of the year. If your child turns 6 mid-year, funding will end on his or her sixth birthday.

It is families’ responsibility to register children through their local Vermont public school to access Act 166 funding through TCS. If a family enrolls at TCS, but does not enroll with their local school district in a timely way, our unsubsidized tuition rate will be charged. At this time, there is no equivalent universal PreK program offered to NH residents.

WITHDRAWAL / SCHEDULE REDUCTION

We request one month’s written notice of withdrawal or of a reduction in your child’s schedule. TCS charges tuition for one month’s attendance if notice is given within 30 days.

SUSPENSION / EXPULSION: WORKING WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

It is our priority to keep all children and members of the TCS community safe at all times. If a child exhibits disruptive behaviors that interfere with their or their peers’ ability to learn, we follow a set of guidelines to provide positive behavioral support. Our goal is to **limit or eliminate** the use of suspension, expulsion and other exclusionary measures.

1. **Analyze the function of the child’s behavior.** What purpose might this behavior serve? What might motivate the child to act this way; e.g., a desire to get or avoid something?
 - a. Identify the exact behavior(s)
 - b. Document on an “ABC” chart: Where does the behavior occur most often and at what time(s) of day? What happens before (“A”ntecedent), during (“B”ehavior) and after (“C”onsequence) the behavior occurs?
2. **Involve a team.** Involve and consult with parents, as well as other staff members who know the child well.
 - a. Start with strengths. What are the child’s interests and skills (physical, social, etc.)
 - b. Review the bigger picture. Are there environmental, medical, or family/social issues that may be contributing to the behavior? What about teacher styles and/or classroom management skillfulness?

- c. Make a best guess. Based on this expanded set of data, what do we think the reasons are for the child's behavior?

3. Implement and assess impact of positive behavioral supports

- a. Identify desired ("replacement") behaviors and behavioral goals
- b. Identify and develop teaching strategies that support the child's positive behavioral goals
- c. Involve all teachers and staff who interact with the child;
- d. Coordinate with parents, as possible, to ensure continuity across settings (e.g., use the same language at school and home)
- e. Ensure positive behavioral supports are consistent with family's cultural and family values
- f. Provide positive behavioral supports and document the child's response

If the child does not respond to positive behavioral supports and the challenging behavior continues, we often discuss with parents the possibility of referrals to community resources (pediatrician, early intervention, school district Special Education team, etc.).

If all possible interventions have been exhausted and there is agreement among staff that exclusion is in the best interest of the child, only at this time will exclusionary measures be considered. In this case, administration will offer assistance to the child's family in accessing services and an alternative placement. Our program will always comply with federal and state civil rights laws.

TUITION

SLIDING SCALE TUITION

Tuition is on a sliding scale basis. All families eligible for a tuition fee reduction on our sliding scale must provide income documentation annually.

The income documentation policy is as follows:

1. Each household/family unit must submit a copy of page 1, IRS Form 1040, and a copy of IRS Form(s) W-2 for the prior year to be eligible for a fee reduction.
2. Total Income plus Tax Exempt Interest Income will be used to determine the tuition fee category.
3. Dependent Care Benefits, retirement contributions, and other voluntary deductions from wages found on form W-2 will be added back to family income.

4. All non-tuition portions of scholarships, fellowships and grants awarded to parents will be considered personal income when determining income categories.
5. If a parent is self-employed, one half of the self-employment tax will be deducted from family income.
6. Any fluctuation in financial status (e.g., employment, unemployment, marriage, divorce, salary change or any other significant change) must be reported to the office to determine the effect on income and fee category. Documentation must be submitted within 30 days of occurrence. Any fee adjustment will be reflected in the following month's bill.

BILLING & PAYMENTS

As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, we depend on timely, consistent tuition payments in order to operate our program. Our financial policy is in place to help our center remain fiscally strong for the benefit of all our children.

Tuition is billed monthly. Invoices are emailed to families approximately 10 days before the start of the upcoming month. We ask families to sign up for our "ACH"/electronic payment option that withdraws tuition payments directly from your chosen bank account. If electronic bank withdrawal is not possible, we accept checks that can be placed in the "deposit" box next to the admin assistant's office.

DECLINED PAYMENTS OR INSUFFICIENT FUNDS

If an ACH payment is declined or your check is returned to TCS for insufficient funds, a fee for insufficient funds will be charged. Declined for Insufficient Funds fees are as follows:

- \$20 - 1st payment declined/returned
- \$30 - 2nd payment declined/returned
- \$50 - Any additional payments declined/returned

LATE PAYMENT PENALTIES

A late payment charge of 3.5% per month will be applied to all past due bills. Payments are considered late if received after the 10th day of the month being billed.

If your account is not paid in full by 5:30 p.m. on the 10th day of the month, you will be charged a penalty and your child may not return to TCS until your account is paid. TCS reserves the right to cancel your child's enrollment in the program if you fall more than one month behind in payments. Please contact the Director immediately if your financial circumstances change and you are unable to make your tuition payments. We will work with you to apply for tuition assistance and/or develop a payment plan.

TUITION STATEMENTS

Families may request a financial statement at any time. Financial statements for all tuition paid during the prior calendar year can be issued in January for tax purposes.

CHILD SICK DAYS / VACATIONS

Tuition is due for all contracted days, even if a child is absent. No credit is given for family vacations, holidays, sick days, teacher in-service days, emergency closings, etc.

EXTRA DAYS

Families whose children are enrolled fewer than 5 days per week may request to add days during a given week. Space is available at the discretion of the Director to maintain appropriate staff/child ratios. Extra days aren't available if classrooms are at capacity. "Extra day" charges are billed at your contracted daily tuition rate and broken out separately from monthly tuition on invoices. Extra days must be requested and approved in advance through the office; teacher approval alone is not adequate.

VT CHILD CARE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CCFAP)

Families receiving financial assistance from the State of Vermont are responsible for submitting all required documentation to the State. It can take a month for the State to process applications. If our staff reviews your application prior to its due date, a one-month tuition grace period may be granted. Your child may continue to come to TCS while the application is pending. It is important to re-apply for a subsidy a minimum of 4 weeks before your certificate end date. TCS staff can help you complete a new application. If your subsidy application is denied and your child has been attending TCS for the one-month grace period, the full tuition rate for the one-month grace period will be immediately due to TCS.

TCS FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP FUND

TCS maintains a generous scholarship fund, funded partially through grants, and provides scholarships to families in need, typically those with annual family incomes less than \$50K. We also provide support when families find themselves in unexpected circumstances or emergencies. Please contact the Director to apply or learn more.

ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES

BUILDING SECURITY: DOOR ACCESS CODES

Our two main doors (by the upper and lower parking areas) remain locked at all times. Each enrolled family is given a door entry access code to enter the building. Codes are

deactivated upon a child's withdrawal. Please keep these codes confidential, shared only with authorized pick-up persons. Let us know if you would like a new code for any reason.

DROP-OFF & PICK-UP: OVERVIEW

Drop-Off and Pick-Up times are arguably the most important transitions of a child's (and a parent's) day. We go out of our way to ensure these transitions from the hands of one caregiver to another go smoothly, with warm welcomes and goodbyes and reassurance that children will see the caregiver again soon—be this the family member dropping off in the morning or the teacher saying farewell in the afternoon. These are also times when families and staff have opportunities to touch base, an important home-school partnership for a child to witness. There typically isn't time to have extended conversations, but quick "catch-ups" can greatly support a smooth transition, especially if there is something out of the ordinary to relay (e.g., if the child had a challenging time before school, one parent is away on a trip, etc.). Families are welcome and encouraged to request more in-depth conversations or conferences outside of transition times; never hesitate to reach out to classroom teachers who will schedule an in-person, phone or Zoom meeting.

DROP-OFF PROTOCOLS

The following drop-off routines help ensure safety and a smooth transition into school upon arrival each day:

- Children must be supervised by an adult at all times, even our older Pre-K kids who are growing in independence.. So please accompany your child all the way to his or her classroom, stopping to deliver belongings in their cubby en route.
- During colder weather, help your child remove outerwear and secure it in his or her cubby.
- Make sure an educator sees you and your child at drop-off so they can record that the child has arrived and is now in our care. This is also a time to share any helpful "catch-ups" with your child's classroom teacher.
- With teacher guidance, feel free to enter the classroom for a few minutes, as needed, and especially if your child needs extra love and care to transition into school. Our classrooms are *your* classrooms and it can be powerful for children to share their worlds with family members.
- Please check with individual classroom teaching teams about specific drop-off routines which vary slightly from room to room.

PICK-UP PROTOCOLS: SAFE RELEASE OF CHILDREN

- Children are released only to an authorized pick-up person, most often a child's parent or legal guardian. On enrollment forms, parents provide names of additional people authorized to pick up; there's no limit on number.

- As well, Vermont licensing regulations require that TCS be given the names of at least two emergency contacts who can be contacted if a parent cannot be reached; emergency contacts can be the same as authorized “pick-up” persons.
- It is important that you immediately inform the office of any changes in your emergency contact or “authorized pick-up” information.
- Be sure to inform us (your child’s teachers and the main office) if someone new will be picking up your child on any given day so that we are prepared to request and verify his or her i.d.

Release to an Authorized Person. All TCS staff members are trained in pick-up protocols to ensure that all children are safely released at the end of each school day. Under no circumstances is a child released until the pick-up person’s identity has been verified against the Master Authorized Pick-Up List by a staff member.

- If a staff member at the door does not recognize the pick-up person, he or she will ask for identification and cross reference this to a supplied Master Authorized Pick-Up List.
- If the person is not on the Master List, the child’s parents/guardians are contacted to verify the person’s identity. Any staff member can reach out to the parent. Often, classroom teachers or the Director makes contact via phone, email and/or Brightwheel.
- If the parent is unavailable, staff or TCS Director reach out to “Emergency Contacts” whose names have been supplied by parents. Emergency contacts will be asked to help locate parents so parents can either grant pick-up authorization to the person at the door or contact an authorized pick-up person to come and get the child.
- Staff will wait with the child as long as necessary until parents are reached to determine and authorize next steps.

LATE PICK-UP FEES

Thank you for respecting daily pick-up times so that our teachers can complete end-of-day tasks and depart on time. Our Core Reggio Program ends at 3:15 p.m. and “Extension” continues until 5:30 p.m.

- After the first late afternoon Pick Up, families are given friendly notice.
- For subsequent incidents, a late fee is charged: \$5.00 for any period of time up to 5 minutes late, and \$1.00 per minute thereafter.
- After three late pick-ups in a calendar year, a \$10.00 surcharge is added to the late fee. Our director may reach out to have a conversation and offer support.

- “Late” also refers to being in the classroom or cubby area after pick-up time, even if a caregiver arrives prior to that time.
- Each January 1st, the slate is wiped clean.

CAR SEATS

To comply with Vermont law, all children must be properly restrained in a child safety seat when traveling in a car on Child Care Center property. If necessary you may leave a labeled car seat in the lower entry if your child is being picked up by someone who does not have a car seat.

GATE CLOSURE

On behalf of children’s safety, make it a point to close all gates when you enter or leave the school or our playgrounds. Also for safety reasons, children are not allowed to climb the fences.

IDLING VEHICLES

We discourage idling vehicles in all of our parking areas. As one of our signs says: “Young Lungs at Work!” The only exception is if vehicles need to idle in extreme heat or cold to maintain interior or engine temperatures.



SAFETY AT TCS

MANDATED REPORTER / CHILD ABUSE REPORTING

All TCS staff are obligated by Vermont State law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the State of Vermont’s Department for Children and Families within 24 hours. Staff receives specific training on how to recognize child abuse and neglect and the reporting process. If parents have questions or concerns they may contact the Department for Children and Families at 800-649-5285.

PROTOCOLS: SUSPECTED ABUSE OR NEGLECT BY TCS STAFF

Parents and guardians should contact TCS Director immediately with concerns about any TCS staff member, including suspicion or evidence of abuse or neglect of children. The Director will initiate an investigation in coordination with the VT Department of Children and Families, Child Development Division in the Vermont Agency of Human Services: (802) 241-2131. Depending on the seriousness of the concerns, the staff member will be put and remain on leave, pending results of investigation. All

communication to families will protect the rights and confidentiality of the accused staff person, along with children in the program.

DRUG FREE ENVIRONMENT

TCS is committed to providing all employees and children with a safe and healthy environment, including protection from the effects of individual negligence. Therefore, anyone who enters TCS appearing to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, whether prescribed or other, to any degree or who possesses or consumes these substances on our property may be asked to immediately leave the property without their child and law enforcement will be contacted.

NO SMOKING

There is no smoking allowed anywhere on TCS property—inside the school, on or near the playgrounds, or in any of our parking lots.

NO WEAPONS

A dangerous weapon is a gun, knife, razor, or any other object, which by the manner it is used or intended to be used, is capable of inflicting bodily harm. Families, children, staff or guests (other than law enforcement officers) possessing a dangerous weapon will not be permitted onto the premises.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

TCS has developed an emergency response plan with state professionals and Board oversight that details protocols and procedures for the following:

- Emergency Communication
- Emergency Backpacks/Supplies
- Classroom Safe Spots
- Building Evacuation Routes
- Outdoor Meeting Spots
- Evacuation
- First Aid
- Lost Child Response
- Shelter-in-Place
- Lockdown

The emergency response plan is *not* posted on our website out of security concerns. Enrolled families may request to review a copy at any time.

FIRE DRILLS

State licensing regulations require monthly fire drills. Records of monthly fire drills are posted in the back office. We try to perform these drills in all kinds of weather and at

varying times of day so children are prepared to respond no matter the situation. The Norwich Police Department comes periodically to observe, assist and offer feedback. It's important that our local responders become familiar with our building, community, and evacuation procedures.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION

In the event of an emergency evacuation, the Norwich Police Department will be called and asked to provide transportation and/or escort children to a safe location. Preferred locations are the Montshire Museum of Science (phone: 802-649-2200) or the Marion Cross School in Norwich (phone: 802-649-1703). As soon as possible, we will notify parents through Brightwheel where to pick up children. It is critical that we have families' updated contact information at all times.

SAFE DRINKING WATER

Lead exposure poses a particular risk to young children because they absorb lead into their systems more easily than do adults. Lead can slow down growth, impair development and learning, and cause behavior problems.

Our drinking water is tested monthly for lead or other contaminants. (See Attachments at the end of this handbook for our most recent Water Reports.) In the case of contamination, we notify the community and proceed to work with the state and a professional certified in water testing to follow remediation guidance provided by the Vermont Department of Health. While remediation steps are being taken, we post "do not drink/hand washing only" signs on taps and provide sanitary bottled water to all classrooms until follow-up testing confirms that our water is safe to drink.

HEALTH POLICIES & GUIDELINES

DAILY HEALTH CHECKS

Parents and staff share the responsibility for maintaining health and preventing the spread of contagious diseases. TCS will conduct daily health checks (visual inspections) of your child to ensure they are well enough to attend and participate.

IMMUNIZATIONS & WELLNESS EXAMS

- **Wellness Exams.** TCS requires that a complete Wellness Exam be completed before enrollment. Health exams are *not* required each year; rather, send us updated information if/when changes occur in your child's health.
- **Immunizations** need to be up to date. Vermont's School Entry Immunization Rule sets minimum immunization requirements for attendance at regulated child

care programs to protect students, staff and visitors against vaccine-preventable diseases. An updated record must be provided to TCS with each vaccine/dose administered to a child. If we do not have updated immunization records, per state regulations your child may not attend TCS until the update is received.

- If you are in the process of complying with immunization requirements(in accordance with the Vermont recommended immunization schedule), we request a completed VT Department of Health form.
- If you have an immunization exemption from the VT Department of Health, we will need a copy for your child's file.
- If a vaccine-preventable disease occurs at TCS, we notify families immediately and any underimmunized children (granted exemptions by the state) are promptly excluded from attending until it is deemed medically safe to return.
- TCS submits an annual VT Immunization Child Care Report to the state's Immunization Registry. A permission form for this submission is included in your registration packet.

HANDWASHING

Hand washing, a licensing requirement, is one of the best ways to help prevent the spread of illness and reduce allergen contamination. Children must wash their hands in these instances:

- upon arrival
- after using the bathroom
- before meals and snacks
- after communal water play
- after outdoor play
- after handling pets
- when moving from one group to another

Teachers assist children who are too young to wash their own hands effectively and periodically monitor children who wash independently.

Adults also wash their hands upon arrival, before and after handling food after assisting a child in the bathroom or with other bodily fluids and after handling garbage or cleaning. Adults follow proper hand washing procedures and introduce these to children:

1. Use warm running water and soap
2. Rub soapy hands vigorously for about 60 seconds (sing the "Happy Birthday" song 2 times as you wash your hands). Be sure to include the backs of hands, wrists, in between fingers, under fingernails.
3. Rinse well
4. Dry hands with a paper towel
5. Turn off the water with a paper towel, not clean hands.

CASES OF ILLNESS

When a child becomes ill or injured, we make every effort to notify parents immediately. All families must provide TCS with the names of two emergency contact people who can be called to pick up a child if the parent cannot be reached.

Per state regulations, we require that a child be picked up within an hour of notification of any of the following symptoms:

- Axillary (measured under the armpit) fever of 100 degrees, 101 degrees orally
- “Goop” around the eye that returns after being wiped away
- Conjunctivitis - an eye infection commonly referred to as “pink-eye.” The eye is generally red with some burning and yellowish discharge.
- Unexplained rash
- Two episodes of diarrhea if in underwear
- One episode of diarrhea not contained in a diaper
- Vomiting (one or more episodes)
- Severe cold (bad cough, constant runny nose, watery eyes, chest congestion)
- Bronchitis. This can begin with hoarseness, cough, and a slight elevation in temperature. The cough may be dry and painful, but it gradually becomes productive.
- Contagious diseases or infections such as bronchitis, strep throat, red or German measles, impetigo, chicken pox, mumps, bacterial meningitis, fifth disease, herpes virus, molluscum contagiosum, shingles, warts, cold sores, giardia, campylobacter, salmonella poisoning, polio, impetigo, diphtheria, hepatitis A, whooping cough (pertussis), scarlet fever, or roseola
- Infestations such as lice, scabies, pinworms, or ringworm

In the absence of any of these symptoms, the Administrative Team retains discretionary ability to send a child home who is exhibiting any type of illness-related discomfort. All families will be notified once a contagious disease is reported.

RETURN TO TCS AFTER ILLNESS

Before children can return to TCS after illness, they must be eating well, sleeping well through the night and ready and able to participate in a full active day both indoors and outdoors. Additionally, all of the following that apply must be true:

- If your child is sent home with a fever of 100 (armpit) or 100.4 (forehead thermometer) or higher, he or she may not return until fever-free for 24 hours without the assistance of any anti-fever medication within that 24-hour period.
- Your child has medically improved, meaning symptoms have resolved or are clearly on their way toward resolution, getting better and not worse.
- If your child was suffering from a communicable disease, he or she is no longer in the contagious stage of that disease.

- Your child has been on antibiotics for more than 24 hours in cases of bacterial infections.
- Your child has been treated for and is free of lice, scabies, pinworms or ringworm.

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION

We highly recommend that if your child needs medication, you administer it to him or her at home. If your child has taken medication in the morning prior to arriving at school, be sure to communicate this to your child's teachers. If medication needs to be administered during school hours:

Prescription Medication. TCS will administer prescription medication with a Medication Form signed by the family and a written order from the child's physician. Medications must come with specific written instructions for administration. Medication is given to children only by staff who have completed a Medication Administration training through the state of Vermont. The medication must be in its original container and clearly labeled by the pharmacy with name, dosage, content, schedule, date and phone number of the physician.

Safe Storage of Medication. All prescription medications are stored in locked medication containers safely out of reach of children.


Special medical management procedures. If a physician has ordered a special medical procedure for a child, an adult trained in the procedure will be on site whenever the child is present. Examples: asthma action plan (use of nebulizer), allergy plans (use of epi-pen), diabetes management plan (insulin monitoring and injections).

Topical applications. Written general permission is required each year from parents prior to the application of ointments, creams, sunscreens, tick and insect repellents, and other topically-applied ointments and lotions. Permission must be updated each time a new brand or type of product is introduced.

NOTIFICATION OF INFECTIOUS DISEASE

All families and staff will be notified by email and Brightwheel if a child or staff member has been diagnosed with an infectious (communicable) disease (e.g., whooping cough, pink eye, mumps or measles, strep throat). We will specify the disease, the date the child or staff member was last in school, and possible symptoms. Information sheets pertaining to the illness will be provided when available.

MEDICAL EMERGENCIES

- All staff, including subs and work-study students, are trained in First Aid/CPR.
 - Permanent staff are trained in Medication Administration.
 - For a minor bump or bruise, TCS staff will administer first aid and the parent will receive an accident report.
 - For a more significant injury, TCS staff will administer first aid, take immediate action to protect the child from further harm, and contact parents as quickly as possible.
 - In serious medical circumstances, TCS staff will call 911 to request emergency medical care and transport to a local hospital. Staff will contact parents or emergency designees immediately.
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IN OUR CLASSROOMS

TEACHER/CHILD RATIOS

- Robin's Nest, Nursery - 6 weeks to 2 years old. 1:4 ratio - 2 teachers for 8 infants
- Butterfly Glen, Toddler - 2 to 3 years old. 1:5 ratio - 2 teachers for up to 10 toddlers
- Songbirds, PreK - 3-5 years old. 1:10 ratio - 2 teachers for up to 16 pre-K children (room capacity limited to 16)
- Fox Den, PreK - 3-5 years old. 1:10 ratio - 2 teachers for up to 16 pre-K children (room capacity limited to 16)

CLASS PLACEMENT

Healthy, sustained, growth-enhancing relationships are the foundation for everything that happens within our school house – relationships between teachers and children, children and their peers, and staff and parents/families. To develop and experience trusting relationships, children are placed in classrooms and remain there for the entire academic year (September - August). Whenever possible, we move classroom cohorts at the same time as they advance through our program. When placing children into one of our two Pre-K classrooms, teachers take into account a balance of boys and girls, nourishing friendships, and children's interests. Our goal is to give children continuity over time. Upon family request, sometimes an exception will be made for a child with a mid-September or October birthday who is ready to advance to rejoin peers in the next level of our program. We follow this policy for all ages: infants, toddlers and older children.

GENERAL DAILY FLOW

In the nursery, infant schedules are designed to meet the individual needs of each child. In Toddler and PreK classrooms, the schedule flows in the following general way:

- **Greeting & Morning Provocations.** Children are greeted with morning “provocations,” a diversity of thoughtfully-designed activities based on children’s interests or next growing step. Children are free to explore and participate at their own pace.
- **Morning Circle.** Toddler and preschool classrooms invite children to join in morning gatherings: children share ideas, songs and stories, problem solve, and get to plan and reflect on their play and learning journeys.
- **Snack and Outside Time.** After a morning snack, provided by TCS, children head outside—rain, snow or shine—for gross motor fun on the playground or hikes on the trails.
- **Lunchtime,** with food provided by families, encourages valuable communal conversations.
- **Rest time.** Children nap or rest quietly for at least 30 minutes. Quiet activities are offered to non-nappers.
- **Snack and Open Play.** Afternoon snack is provided by TCS and frequently by our Little (PreK) Chefs, followed by open play indoors or outside until 3:15PM pick up.

And... we call this a “flow” for a reason! The schedule is rarely precise. There will be artmaking in the atelier, cooking in the classroom or kitchen, special garden visits, family music concerts, cross-classroom projects, and other events that vary our days. Our daily flow allows for flexibility in response to children’s needs, levels of engagement, and wild imaginings.

OUTSIDE TIME

Nature is perhaps the most enthralling learning environment of all and the “outdoor classroom” is an extension of the children’s indoor learning spaces. Therefore, children engage in the outdoors year round. Teachers plan outdoor learning investigations along with gross motor opportunities. Sensory learning is a huge part of our outdoor learning experience and so children will explore water, mud, dirt, wind and snow. We ask that children have rain boots, hats, coats, gloves and snow gear when appropriate and always a seasonally appropriate change of clothes. We adjust the length of outdoor time accordingly based on cues from the children. In general, TCS teachers strive every day to allow children at least 90 minutes of supervised outdoor play on playgrounds, in our gardens, and/or explorations on our surrounding trails (and vernal pools), weather permitting. We use the Child Care Weather Watch chart as a guide when assessing outside conditions for children’s safety. When the weather is adverse, we try to get

outside for at least 30 minutes, but remain aware of extreme conditions—excessive heat and humidity, cold temperatures including wind chill factors, or poor air quality—that can affect children’s health and safety. If children can’t go outdoors, we provide at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous indoor exercise.

OUTINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

Our PreK children go on supervised field trips—to the Montshire Museum of Science, an apple orchard, the Hood Museum—and we encourage parents to join us. Permission Slips for each trip must be signed by the child’s family, including trips when parents provide their own transportation. For field trips, please dress your child appropriately for the season. Walking shoes are a must. Sandals and flip-flops are not appropriate for walking and make it difficult for your child. The correct use of proper restraint systems (seat belts) is critically important during travel to/from TCS as well as during field trips. If we are using any playgrounds while on a field trip, staff ensure these are safe, secure, and have the appropriate safety measures.

MOVE-UPS

The majority of “move-ups” (from one classroom to the next age group) occur in the fall as older children depart for Kindergarten. Children may also move up at other points in the year, most often when they “age out” of the current classroom cohort of friends. We take into account several factors when considering the suitability of a move up: 1) availability of space in a new classroom; 2) a child’s readiness to move into an older group; 3) the make-up of the older group and fit for the child; 4) family situation and desires. Parents, current teachers and potential new teachers are all involved in move-up decisions.

Once a move-up is approved, the new classroom teachers share “welcome” information with parents. For our Fall move-up, we schedule a Center-wide visit day when children visit their new classrooms. These visits happen close to the actual move-up date to avoid a long wait for children whose sense of time is much different than that of grown-ups.

DIVERSITY

TCS staff make every effort to celebrate and normalize diversity, and counter any potential bias or discrimination, by treating all children with equal respect and consideration. Teachers offer activities and discussions that build a positive self-regard and teach the valuing of differences. Classroom staff intervene when children tease or reject others and provide models and visual images in the classroom of adults and children with differing abilities, differing ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and differing primary languages. Teachers and families work together to help children participate

successfully in our program even when our professional values differ from the family values and practices.

We draw, in particular, from the “Anti-Bias Framework” developed by the organization Teaching Tolerance, ensuring that desired outcomes are developmentally appropriate. Here are examples of several “anchor standards”:

- Children will express comfort with people who are both similar to and different from them and engage respectfully with all people.
- Children will recognize that peoples’ multiple identities interact and create unique and complex individuals.
- Children will express pride, confidence and healthy self-esteem without denying the value and dignity of other people.
- Children will express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when they themselves experience bias.
- Children will speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias.

POSITIVE GUIDANCE & DISCIPLINE

TCS teachers encourage growth of autonomy, independence, social competence and self-discipline to the degree appropriate to children’s age and developmental levels. Everything in our learning environments aims to guide children towards the development of self-discipline and respect for self and one another. Learning spaces are safe and designed with intention so that all children have ways to creatively engage with learning materials and with one another. When children are engaged in fascinating play, they are less likely to get into “trouble” out of boredom. As well, there is less likelihood of discipline problems when positive responses and reinforcement are the norm throughout the day.

When conflict or challenging behaviors occur, teachers use “constructive” guidance and discipline, rather than “punishment” or directive methods. This takes different forms, depending on the situation:

- The provision of logical consequences
- Offering children choices and alternatives so they retain dignity of control over their lives
- Talking through the reasons for a behavior or natural consequence
- Modeling desirable behavior and words to empower children to express themselves, notice the feelings and needs of others, and negotiate to solve a conflict
- Demonstrating care and compassion and pointing out these social attributes in stories and play

- Communicating effectively with children, especially through active listening
- Communicating what children *can do* rather than what they cannot
- Staff offer and model words that children can use. Our goal is for children to become aware of when they need to manage their emotions and how to do so safely.
- Inviting and guiding children to be problem solvers when challenges arise.

Children are not told to "sit out" and "time out" is *not* used. Our teachers try not to react or intervene when children run into conflict; rather, they allow children space to make mistakes that help them learn and grow—while standing ready to step in and assist a child when necessary to keep him/her physically safe. When challenging behaviors persist, staff work together with parents and involve outside professionals, as needed, in the design of an individualized plan to support the child's continuous improvement.

BITING

Biting can be common among infants and toddlers, and sometimes among preschoolers. When biting happens, teachers care for and help the child who was bitten and help the biter learn a more appropriate behavior. Our focus is never on punishment for biting, but on effective behaviors that address the underlying and specific reasons for biting behavior.

Biting occurs most often among toddlers (13 to 24 months old) and is considered developmentally-appropriate behavior. Toddlers bite for many reasons. They may be using their mouth as a tool for exploring their world. They are learning to tell the difference between food and non-food items. They may be teething. They are starting to use words for the first time but inconsistently. Toddlers who bite may be trying to get a point across when they don't expect their words to work or they may simply be expressing frustration. For instance, a child may feel overstimulated or need personal space, but lack another in-the-moment means to express this. One study has found most bites occur early in the day and late in the afternoon; children may be especially tired at these times and less able to summon self-control.

Teachers take the following steps when biting occurs:

- Teachers talk with and comfort the child who has been bitten.
- They talk with the child who bit, firmly pointing out that "biting hurts."
- If the bite breaks skin, first aid will be administered and an administrator is notified.
- Both sets of parents are contacted, without the use of child names.
- The parent of the child who was bitten is advised to call their pediatrician; open wounds on the face or hands are the most vulnerable to infection.
- An injury/accident report is completed for both of the children.

- Teachers and parents of the child who bit confer about possible underlying motivations for the biting and about strategies being used at home and at school to address and curb biting behavior.
- To minimize biting incidents going forward, teachers “shadow” the child who has bitten, carefully observing and keeping a log to determine if there is a pattern of when biting behavior occurs. They take into consideration any overstimulating learning spaces or times of day, and observe peer dynamics throughout the classroom.
- Relevant articles are made available to parents and staff.

REST TIME

The Vermont Child Care Regulations require an opportunity for daily sleep and rest for toddlers and preschoolers. Infants nap whenever they are tired. TCS provides cribs in the nursery and mats for resting in each classroom. Each child should bring a blanket and a crib sheet in a “nap bag” for use at nap time. Nap stuffies (small stuffed animals) can be kept in nap bags. All nap gear is sent home weekly to be laundered.

DIAPERING

We follow Vermont licensing guidelines pertaining to the diapering of infants and toddlers. Staff are familiar with all of the regulations outlined in Section 5 concerning the health and safety of children. Diapering items include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Staff ensure that children’s diapers are changed when wet or soiled.
- Staff check for and change wet or soiled diapers (or pull-ups) when a child wakes up from a nap.
- Staff have a procedure for checking diapers regularly including visually inspecting children’s diapers at least every two hours.
- TCS ensures that qualifying rooms have sturdy diaper changing area with a clean, washable, and non-absorbent surface. This is never located in a kitchen area.
- Sinks used to clean hands after diapering are never used for food prep.
- Staff record all diaper changes.

TOILET TEACHING

When children are developmentally and physiologically ready, teachers work in partnership with parents to encourage toilet use. Children are encouraged, supported and applauded. No child is forced to use the toilet or a potty, or required to sit for long periods of time nor will children be given toys or treats as rewards. No child is prevented from moving into the next older classroom based on ability to use the toilet. When children start wearing underwear at home, they should wear it at school too,

even if children still have toileting accidents. Be sure to send in lots of changes of clothes when children are first wearing underwear.

CLOTHING

Each child is assigned a cubby and should have a complete set of extra seasonal clothes on hand in case of toileting accidents or outside fun that involves getting wet or muddy. Snowsuits, hats, boots and mittens are required every day in winter. Please label clothing from home with your child's name. We are not responsible for lost articles of clothing that are not labeled. Expect your child to get happily dirty during a day of activities; don't send children in their "best" clothes unless paint/clay/mud are acceptable adornments. Families provide diapers; we have extra on hand if a child's supply runs out. TCS supplies "mud/rain" suits for all children, including our infants. These are the property of and remain at TCS.

FOOTWEAR

TCS requires that all children (except non-walking infants) wear shoes or slippers indoors. Children should wear footwear that allows them to safely climb into lofts, walk up and down stairs, and do indoor gross motor activities such as dancing. Children must wear closed-toed, well-secured shoes (e.g., sneakers) to use the bikes or outdoor climbing equipment. Children wearing sandals or "party shoes" should have sneakers in their cubby to change into for unrestricted outdoor play.

TOYS FROM HOME

Personal toys can be comforting for children and exciting to show to friends. But since these are special, and often not easily shared, it's best to leave personal toys in the car for the trip home. Nap-time stuffies are the main exception. Teachers are not responsible for personal toys.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

In general TCS does not hold Center-wide holiday celebrations. Teachers may choose to have individual classroom celebrations and these are often family-centered. We invite children and families to share ways holidays are celebrated in your homes. In this way we remove our celebrations from the commercial bombardment that children face, yet acknowledge special rituals that children are eager to share with us. Is there a special part of a family holiday tradition that you could bring into your child's classroom, perhaps a cooking activity or a game? Would you like to read or tell a special holiday story to the class? If so, please speak with your child's teachers. Celebrations are much more meaningful and "come alive" for children when they come from you.

PEACE BOOKS

Peace Books is a community-sponsored celebration of literacy and multiculturalism. Our library of "peace books" opens children's eyes to the amazing diversity in our world and their place in it. Anyone can make a donation to our Peace Books fund in a child's name—parents, grandparents, family friends. Donations are *not* a requirement of participation; all TCS children participate in Peace Books. During a child's birthday month, he or she chooses a special book that gets adorned with a bookplate with the child's name. He or she brings the book home to read for as long as your family likes, days or months, before eventually returning it to live forever in our Peace Books Library and be enjoyed by children centerwide.

BABYSITTING / AFTER-HOURS CARE

TCS strongly discourages employees from providing after-hours care for families of children enrolled at TCS for a number of reasons: 1) to avoid any conflicts of interest, 2) to avoid the appearance of favoritism, and 3) to avoid liability issues. If after-hours care is provided, employees are required to notify the Director who will provide the employee with a release form to be signed by the parents of the child. This form releases TCS from any and all liability for damages or personal injuries that may occur as a result of the employee providing after-hours care. The employee will also be required to sign a Release and Indemnification Agreement, releasing and indemnifying TCS against any and all liability for damages or personal injuries which may occur as a result of the employee providing after-hours care. Employees are not to transport children to or from TCS if babysitting. The signed releases must be received before any outside care is provided. Employees are reminded that they have a commitment first and foremost to TCS and should not abrogate any of their regular duties and responsibilities in favor of outside employment.

FOOD & NUTRITION

CACFP (FEDERAL FOOD PROGRAM)

TCS follows USDA dietary guidance and participates in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) run by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. TCS receives a monthly reimbursement to help offset the costs of approved snack foods. See USDA Non-Discrimination Statement and Civil Rights Complaint Procedure in the Addenda.

CENTER PROVIDED SNACKS & MILK

TCS provides a morning snack to all children between 9:15-10:00 a.m and an afternoon snack to all children between 3:30 and 4:00 p.m. We also provide milk during lunch.

Children bring their own lunches from home. Our snack menus are posted on the kitchen door (in the Common Room) where families can see them. The menus list food items that will be served, along with portion sizes. We welcome your ideas about additional delicious, nutritious offerings.

LUNCH FROM HOME

Our food program is designed to encourage children to build a healthy relationship with food. Please join us in promoting sound nutrition from the start. “Delicious and nutritious” is our guideline.

Per Early Education and Care best practice, we encourage all children to explore and try new foods, but no child is ever forced to eat, and food is never withheld or used as a reward. Since children tend to eat better when they have choices, we encourage families to pack multiple food items in your children’s lunches. Aim for a healthy balance of grains, proteins and/or dairy, fruits and vegetables. Vary food colors and textures too. When introducing a new food, couple this with an old favorite and emphasize “tasting” at first – we want to raise happy, confident tasters who will grow into healthy, confident eaters – and be aware that it often takes 8-10 exposures for a child to accept a new food item. Try, try again!

Each classroom is equipped with a refrigerator with thermometers where lunches are stored. In instances where refrigeration isn’t possible, we alert families and require you to place two ice packs in lunch boxes/sacks that contain perishable items.

FOOD ALLERGIES

On enrollment paperwork, please inform Center staff if your child has any allergies or food sensitivities and provide whatever emergency medicine is required in case of an allergic episode.

TODDLERS & PRE-K

Lunch is a social time in our toddler and PreK classrooms. Children sit together, enjoying conversation as they eat. We store lunches in classroom refrigerators, but cannot heat/warm foods at lunch time, other than bottles in the nursery. Toddlers are encouraged to feed themselves and the accompanying spills and drips are considered part of the process of becoming independent eaters.

ECO-HEALTHY EDUCATION

We believe it's never too soon to start shaping children’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviors toward the earth and all that entails: knowing where food comes from, appreciating the work of local farmers, experiencing the power of real/whole foods,

tending the earth, developing adventurous palates, playing a part in sustainability by reducing waste, participating in composting and recycling, and more.

Towards that end, we run “Little Chefs” and “Little Farmers” programs, directed by teachers who have passions for cooking and gardening for children of all ages. We also partner with Crossroad Farm (out of Thetford VT, with a farmstand in Norwich) to introduce local seasonal foods into our daily snacks. Our preschool field trip to the farm is a highlight of summer.

“Little Chefs” involves groups of preschoolers in weekly cooking sessions. Children and families suggest and provide recipes, often family favorites, and children do the cooking under the guidance of a Head Chef who makes it a point to incorporate local, seasonal, organic produce and herbs in recipes.

“Little Farmers” tend six raised garden beds installed on a sunny site on campus. Each winter/spring, farmer teams start planning and decide what to grow in our community garden: vegetables, flowers and herbs and their growing needs. Children prepare the beds, incorporating organic fertilizer and compost from tubs set on classroom tables during snack. They plant tender seedlings, water and weed. Harvest is an annual celebration with tomatoes, squash, cucumbers and more put to use by Little Chefs and offered to friends. Sample harvest recipes: kale pesto pizza pinwheels, apple butternut squash soup, sweet potato alfredo, zucchini brownies, and salsas of all kinds.

Gardening benefits children in multiple ways: engages all five senses, enhances fine motor development, encourages healthy eating, teaches responsibility, regulates moods, and introduces environmental stewardship. Families can visit and tend beds at pick-up time and on weekends.

PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK SIGN-OFF FORM

Welcome to the community of the Treehouse Children's School! We look forward to building a partnership with your family on behalf of the beautiful child we share in common.

This handbook gives you a basic understanding of our operations. There's a whole lot more to our school. Don't hesitate to reach out to classroom teachers or our Director at any time with questions or bright ideas.

I have read the family handbook and understand all policies and statements contained herein. I agree to abide by these policies as a member of the TCS community and will raise any questions I may have with the Director and/or classroom teachers.

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

ADDENDA

USDA NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at:

<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax:
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email:
program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

USDA CIVIL RIGHTS COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

Individuals and groups are never discouraged from submitting a complaint of discrimination. Complaints may be written or verbal. Complaints may be anonymous. The Treehouse Children's School instructs program participants to send complaints of discrimination directly to the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR). The complainant must file within 180 days of the alleged act of discrimination. The superintendent or appointed designee is responsible for implementing the Civil Rights Complaint Procedure. The complainant can file on their own directly with the USDA or report the complaint to the School Food Authority (SFA).

The contact information is found on the "And Justice for All" posters which are prominently displayed in all required areas.

1. All complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), or disability will be forwarded to the USDA Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights immediately.

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
fax: (202) 690-7442; or **email:** program.intake@usda.gov

Complaints should be put into writing, by the complainant, using USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027), (AD-3027) found online at: <https://www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint>. This form is available in English and Spanish.

- English version:
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>
- Spanish Version:
https://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/Spanish_Form_508_Compliant_6_8_12_0.pdf

2. In the event that a complainant makes the allegations verbally or in person and refuses or is not inclined to place such allegations in writing, the person to whom the allegations are made must record the details of the complaint for the complainant. Every effort will be made to have the complainant provide the following information:

- a. Name and contact information for the complainant.
- b. The date(s) during which the alleged discriminatory actions occurred or, if continuing, the duration of such actions.
- c. The specific location and name of the entity delivering the service or benefit.
- d. The nature of the incident or action that led the complainant to feel that discrimination was a factor.
- e. The basis on which the complainant feels discrimination exists within any of the protected classes.
- f. The names, titles, and business addresses of persons who may have knowledge of the discriminatory action.

3. If the USDA determines that a civil rights complaint warrants an investigation, it will occur based on established USDA Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) policy and procedures, and then finalized into a report. They will investigate the complaint and this is the sole responsibility of the USDA.

4. In addition to submitting the complaint to the USDA, the SFA will keep a Civil Rights Complaint Log on site. Maintaining confidentiality is crucial. As much information as possible will be documented, including:

- Name and contact information of complainant

- Description of incident including date, time, location, and persons present
- Relevant Protected Base(s)
- Name of organization and individuals alleged to have engaged in discrimination
- Date of referral to USDA
- The findings of any investigation conducted
- Description of the final disposition of the complaint including any corrective action planned or taken

5. The SFA will also notify Child Nutrition Programs at Vermont Agency of Education of any complaints of discrimination. The State Agency maintains the information in a confidential database with limited access. Child Nutrition Programs does not investigate complaints of discrimination, but ensures complaints are received by the USDA and will cooperate in the tracking, processing, and resolving of complaints of discrimination.

6. The Vermont Agency of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, creed, marital status, sex, disability, age, gender identity, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities. Complaints alleging discrimination related to the Vermont Agency of Education protected bases of religion or martial/civil union status, will be sent to Emily Simmons, General Counsel, at emily.simmons@vermont.gov or (802)-828-1518.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.