

Odyssey Preschool

Parent Handbook

May 2016

1151 E Hillsdale Blvd, Foster City, CA - 94404

www.odysseypreschool.com – Ph: 650-5251727

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Our Mission

Odyssey Preschool is a child-centered learning community committed to respecting the unique personality, gifts, and development of each student. We promote a culture that fosters kindness, curiosity, and cooperation. Our goal is to cultivate both independence as well as an awareness of our global interdependence.

Our Philosophy

Our philosophy is developmental, incorporating the philosophy and methodology of Maria Montessori with those of other developmental theorists, including John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Loris Malaguzzi, Lev Vygotsky, and Howard Gardner.

This translates to a classroom where children explore in different areas with structured freedom. To quote Maria Montessori, “It is a method which cultivates and protects the inner activities of the child.” The emphasis is on learning, not teaching. By means of modeling, questioning, and reflective dialogue, teachers serve more as guides than leaders. Rather than offering undue explanations, they help the children construct their own understanding through actual work in problem solving. As Piaget said, “construction is superior to instruction.” The environment is thoughtfully designed to provide materials adapted to the needs of the children, allowing them to explore and grow at their own pace. The carefully sequenced activities help the children sort out their experiences, master the skills they need, and make it possible for them to feel success at every step.

“The true test of intelligence is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don’t know what to do.”

John Holt

Preschool Curriculum Areas

Montessori classrooms are known as “prepared environments”, and a great deal of thought goes into making them feel like the “Casa Dei Bambini”, or Children’s House, that Montessori named her first school. It should be a child’s home away from home, and be as attractive and comfortable as possible. It is an environment created to reinforce the children’s independence and intellectual development, and to stimulate discussion and collaborative learning. Within the classroom, the curriculum areas reflect not only the interest area for which each is named, but also their connections to all the other areas, supporting and expanding their knowledge of the world.

Practical Life:

Activities in this area, also known as Daily Living, help children learn valuable skills necessary in caring for themselves and their environment, such as dressing, cleaning, and food preparation. As important as these useful skills are, even more crucial are the developmental goals achieved through this work.

- Order: A sense of order is an essential foundation for learning. While it cannot be taught, per se, it is encouraged and nurtured in the child in several ways. There is a clear, logical and consistent order in the layout of everything in the external environment, which is internalized over time. The schedule of the day also follows a consistent order, as do the beginning, middle and final steps within the presentations of activities. This is very important to children at this age, as they are in their sensitive period for order, when a logical, consistent predictability is both reassuring and comforting, freeing them to successfully focus on new challenges.
- Concentration: Again, this is a developmental trait that cannot be taught, but can be encouraged. It grows in tandem with a sense of order, and its growth is most supported through repetition of activities. For this reason, children are allowed to decide for themselves when they are “finished” with their work, because their sense of completion of the work-cycle will typically

include many repetitions. It is also for the advancement of the child's concentration that the children choose their own activities. Despite the old saying about "the concentration of a two year old...", in fact even a two-year old can and does show amazing focus on self-chosen activities.

- Coordination: Movement and manipulation play an essential part in young children's learning, and so the development of both fine and gross motor coordination is directly related to their cognitive growth. Practical Life exercises are perfectly designed to improve both whole hand and finger strength and dexterity, particularly the pincer grip needed for writing. As Piaget said, for young children "the hand is the teacher of the mind."
- Independence: This is paramount, and is inculcated in a variety of ways. It begins with encouraging children to choose their own work, and giving them choices in other areas as well. Teaching them the practical skills needed to be successful in their work and daily activities further develops it. Introducing new skills and concepts in graded steps and allowing them to work at their own pace keeps learning fun and engaging, never overwhelming. This leads to the development of a deep-seated self-image of capability and competence, which they will carry with them their entire lives, giving them the confidence to take on new challenges whenever needed.

Sensorial:

In their exploration and investigation of the world, young children are much more multi-sensorial than adults. Adults take in most of their information about new things by looking and listening, but young children need to also touch, manipulate, sniff, and even taste the things they encounter, especially upon first introduction. Activities in the sensorial area are specifically designed to stimulate all their senses, and give them the vocabulary to name and compare these sensory experiences. As much as possible, the materials in all the curriculum areas are made to encourage manipulation and multi-sensorial exploration, just as the sensorial materials, along with all other curricular activities, support the developmental goals specially promoted in the Practical Life area.

Language:

The Montessori philosophy is very holistic, stressing the importance of all the developmental needs of the child, physical, emotional, social and cognitive. Accordingly, the Montessori language curriculum also takes a holistic approach, looking at language in its entirety:

* Speaking: Conversational skills begin development at birth, when children enter their most sensitive period for language. Language development goes hand in hand with emotional and social development, as oral language is learned only through interpersonal conversation. The best computer or television program in the world cannot replace the warm, human connection necessary for speech to grow, from the loving, pre-verbal back and forth between mother and baby during nursing, to actual speech in only two years. The brain is absorbing language at astonishing rapidity at this stage, and so it is vital that children are “bathed” in rich, beautiful language by all who care for them, even before they are able to verbally respond. Expressive language (speech) follows, and is dependent upon, receptive language (listening and understanding).

* Listening: As speech is dependent upon listening, improved listening skills lead to improved verbal ability generally. There are many games and activities to increase auditory acuity in the sensorial and language areas, as well as those done at group time. In addition, providing children with opportunities for a wide variety of conversations throughout the day helps them expand their vocabulary. In fact, children with this kind of verbal enrichment enter kindergarten with vocabularies two or three times as large as those from less verbally stimulating backgrounds.

* Reading and Writing: While still in their sensitive period for language acquisition, when children learn to understand and speak in a joyful, effortless absorption of the language around them, they can also learn written language in a similar fashion. The Montessori method of teaching phonics is wonderfully logical and efficient, employing the didactic principles mentioned earlier: making use of

multi-sensorial activity, movement and muscular memory, and graded steps of difficulty.

It starts with helping the children form a phonetic awareness; a recognition of the separate, discrete sounds of which words are made, isolating first the beginning, then ending, then middle vowel sound. Once a child can hear and identify the “buh” sounds in *baseball bat*, the relevance of “buh” to the written letter “b” is meaningful, and is therefore more easily learned and retained. (In Montessori, the sound a letter most typically makes is taught before the letter name, making phonetic blending easy and natural.) Breaking words into their phonetic components helps children build words phonetically at an early age. The point, though, is not early learning for early learning’s sake, but to allow children to learn written language at the age when it is absorbed most easily, so that children feel the joy of learning, as well as the joy of language.

English is not a completely phonetic language, however, and even after the introduction of phonograms and sight words, a good deal of the early reading experience is guessing, from context and from the process of elimination: “does that *sound* like a word I’ve ever heard?” This is when a large vocabulary becomes particularly useful – the more words a child knows, the easier it will be able to puzzle it out. Many experts have said that the “reading gap” in young children could more accurately be called the “vocabulary gap”. Bridging this gap is crucial, because by third grade, children are no longer learning to read, but reading to learn.

Mathematics:

In Montessori math, children learn by working with manipulative materials that graphically demonstrate what is taking place in a given mathematical process, rather than by rote learning, without any real understanding or ability to put their skills to practical use. They work through a graded progression, as in all curriculum areas, using hands-on materials that make abstract concepts clear and concrete, such as “all vs. none”, “more vs. less”, and quantity (number) vs. symbol (numeral). They can literally see what is going on, as they develop a strong foundation for success in mathematics and geometry.

For instance, in the introduction of the decimal system, the basis of our

mathematical system, children are presented with concrete representations of units, (one centimeter beads) tens, (bars of ten unit beads strung together) hundreds, (squares made of ten ten-bars) and thousands (cubes made of ten hundred-squares). Laid out, right to left in vertical rows from one unit to nine thousand, they form an impressive visual and intellectual tool. The students gain real understanding of place value as they fetch quantities from their decimal system “bank”, and learn to perform the functions of the decimal system (addition, multiplication, subtraction and division) with large numbers, a real point of interest for young children.

The Cultural Subjects:

Montessori grouped the studies of science, physical and natural, with geography, physical and cultural, in order to make clear how inter-connected our world is. Our understanding of the natural, biological world, for example, is contingent upon understanding basic principles of physical science, and one cannot understand how a culture was formed without learning something about its geography, and culture clearly impacts nature, and... round and round it goes. Making connections is what real education is all about, and that is why this area of the curriculum is at the heart of our program. That is also why, whatever topic, whether its plants, the globe, or the Lunar New Year, there will be cross-curricular applications.

Our cultural geography program is centered on the Montessori schemata of “The Needs of Man”. These are the needs that all people have, regardless of their time or place, and include food, shelter, family, the arts, health care, transportation, clothing, recreation, etc.. Using this very concrete framework, we can really delve into a culture, sharing real cultural encounters, eating their foods, wearing their clothes, dancing to their music, and telling their stories. Our art, music and dramatic play curricula are a part of our cultural studies. This approach allows us to make clear comparisons, and to illustrate how, even where cultures differ, we are similar in that we are meeting the same needs. We believe that tangible, meaningful cultural experiences build not only knowledge, but also understanding and respect.

Odyssey Preschool is in a unique position to foster cross-cultural experiences on a daily basis, as our school reflects the diversity of our international community of

families and teachers.

Parents of preschoolers may choose weekly small group enrichment language instruction in Hindi, Spanish or Mandarin Chinese, or enroll in our Mandarin preschool class. Our toddler program also offers a choice between the Mandarin class or English class with Spanish enrichment.

The Toddler Program

Age appropriate experiences from all the curriculum areas in the preschool program are also offered to our toddlers (18 months - two years) with special emphasis on cultivating the developmental goals of order, concentration, coordination, and independence, as well as language development.

We recognize, however, that toddlers need smaller teacher/child ratios, and more opportunities to work on their gross motor development. As they shift from parallel play to more interactive play, they need close supervision and positive role modeling. They also benefit from sharing their successes in learning to use the toilet with a close, family-like group of peers. Odyssey can offer all of this and more.

When both parents and teachers think the child is ready for the preschool program, the child, usually with at least one other friend, will gradually make the transition. All the two-year old children will sometimes visit the older children, as mixed age play offers advantages to both younger and older children, and will help prepare them for preschool.

The Kindergarten Year

The Kindergarten year is also a transition. With elementary school curriculum and testing getting more accelerated, many children find even the earliest grades stressful. At Odyssey, children build early reading, writing and math skills in a format that allows them to reach their full potential in each area without stress, in the manner and time frame right for them. This affords a significant advantage in meeting the challenges of elementary school. What is more important, our program

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instills the joy and confidence necessary for successful life long learning.

Kindergarten aged children may enroll for either our full-day or half-day program. We offer a special afternoon class for the kindergarteners, which your child may attend after morning kindergarten at their elementary school. A Montessori kindergarten year has the added advantage of letting you decide at the end of the year whether your child would be better served going directly to first grade, or entering elementary school at the kindergarten level; this is especially helpful if your child has a fall or late summer birthday. The teachers will help you weigh the pros and cons of being the oldest or youngest in the class, looking at your child's unique social, emotional, physical and academic strengths and needs. They can also help in deciding which elementary school would be best for your child.

Disciplinary Guidelines

Our approach to discipline is based on three general principles, and is carried out on an individual basis, with love and understanding.

The first principle underlying our disciplinary approach is the creation of an environment with an abundance of attractive, developmentally appropriate activities with which to engage and challenge the children. Harnessing their innate drive to investigate, learn, and gain mastery of both their own bodies and the world around them, we direct the children's energy and focus in positive directions. This greatly reduces the occurrence of negative behaviors.

When ground rules for the health, safety, or general functioning of the class are not being observed, we correct these behaviors by following the practice of Natural or Logical Consequences. This approach to positive discipline was developed by Dr. Theodore Driekurs in his book "Children: The Challenge", which we highly recommend. He writes that it is completely age-appropriate for children at this stage to experiment with their autonomy and initiative, and that rather than seeking to overly control these "experiments" it's better to guide them to what is appropriate behavior. When that approach doesn't work however, the reaction must be based on the action.

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For instance, if a child is careless while working with a water activity and finds a puddle of water on the floor, the teacher will respectfully and clearly direct the child in sopping up the water, giving just the help needed, and no more. Scolding or shaming is not necessary, nor is it effective in learning. The child in this scenario will know that carelessness will result in prolonged clean up, and that will inform future behavior. In the process, the child's self-image as a capable person who can solve and prevent problems is strengthened. Tears and tantrums may be part of the consequential follow up, and empathy should be shown for the child's feelings, but empathy does not mean rescuing. It means validating their right to feel their feelings, and possibly hugs, while nevertheless making it clear that they are expected to face the consequences of their actions before moving on to a new activity.

Third, and most crucially, the Montessori Education For Peace model is employed to teach communication and conflict resolution skills throughout the day. Children learn to recognize and identify their own emotions and those of others, and are then helped to peacefully express these feelings in a meditative dialogue that also includes listening to the feelings of others. Over time, they learn to successfully and independently solve their own problems. Equally important, deeply ingrained attitudes of respect, compassion and empowerment are developed.

Admissions

Prior to admission to Odyssey Preschool, parents must tour the school. After the tour you may return the application with a nonrefundable application fee of \$100.00. If applying for a sibling as well, the second application fee will be waived.

After submitting the application, if we have a spot open for your child we will contact you to set up the second visit, the play-date and orientation. Both parents should come for this visit, as well the child. At the end of this visit, you can sign the "Tuition Agreement and Acknowledgement of School Policies" form and pay the deposit (one month's tuition). The forms required by State Licensing, with a copy of your child's vaccinations, must be submitted on or before your child's first

day of school. A Physician's Report form must be brought no later than thirty days after your child has begun. Please make a copy of all forms for your own records. In addition, for children coming from another school or center, we may request that the child's current or past teacher complete a form telling us about your child.

We accept applications year round, based on space availability, and maintain a wait list for those applications we are unable to accept.

Tuition must be paid in full before the 5th day of the month; late payments will be charged a \$5.00 per day fee. There is a 5% sibling discount.

Our latest pick up time is 6:15p.m., to allow your child to share the highlights of the day, gather all belongings, and ward against unexpected traffic delays. The school closes at 6:30, and a late fee of \$2.00 a minute will be charged the following day. This late charge applies to late pick up at other scheduled pick up times as well, e.g. 12:00, end of the morning class, and 4:00, end of the afternoon class.

Parents will be notified at least 30 days in advance when there is a change in school policies or fees.

Reasons for Terminating Enrollment

Odyssey Preschool reserves the right to terminate enrollment in the following circumstances:

- Unpaid fees
- Behavioral issues we are unable to accommodate
- Non-adherence to school policies or philosophy

Snacks and Lunch

Snacks are provided by the school. Snacks typically include cereal, crackers, or

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bread/rolls, fresh fruit or vegetables, and organic milk, though parents are welcome to send their own (nutritious) snacks. Often food from home helps to ease the transition to school.

Parents are responsible for their child's lunch; you can either send a lunch or order a catered lunch. If packing a lunch for your child, please include at least one serving of a complex carbohydrate, preferably whole grain, a protein, and a fruit or vegetable. You may include a treat, but no more than one, in a child sized portion.

Any snack or lunch containers brought from home should be clearly labeled. A permanent marker such as the Sharpie brand works really well for this purpose. Feel free to borrow one of ours. Many children have identical, or similar, snack containers or bottles, so without a name, the odds of getting lost are high. Boxes or bags should also be labeled with the name on the outside.

We are a nut-free facility, meaning you may not send peanuts or other nuts, such as almonds, cashews, walnuts, etc. Seeds and seed butter, such as SunButter made from sunflower seeds are fine.

Nutrition and Feeding Guidelines

Here at Odyssey, we frequently hear from parents of toddlers “Will the teachers feed my child? He/She can't chew, eats only pureed food, and can't handle a spoon yet. Or can feed him/herself, but doesn't eat as much as we want him or her to eat, so we force feed him or her.”

Of course we encourage and model good eating habits and table manners, but we feel we must let you know how child development experts and nutritionists would address the statements above.

*Toddlers can eat many of the same foods you eat .According to the website healthyparents.healthychildren.ca, “Babies can start on solid, non-pureed food before they have teeth. Your baby may have to try several times before he figures

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out how to swallow foods with more texture. As he gets used to this new way of eating, gradually change the texture, making it a bit thicker.

Babies move through texture stages at their own pace. Most babies only need pureed food for a short time and move on to lumpy foods very quickly. **As babies get older, they need food with a variety of textures to help them learn how to chew** (italics added). If your baby stays on pureed textures too long, he may refuse different textures of food. Mild gagging can be a normal reaction for a baby learning to eat a new texture. Gagging is not the same as choking”.

*According to the same website “Forcing a child to eat can make him dislike the food even more. Be prepared to offer a new food many times before your baby accepts it. His likes and dislikes, and the amount he eats, can change from day to day.”

*On the topic of changing appetites, according to a study by researchers at U.C. San Francisco, “After your baby’s first year, growth slows down by about 30 percent, and so may appetite. Infants need to eat about 35-50 calories per pound, while toddlers require roughly 35-40 calories per pound.” As a result, the study warns against pushing kids to eat more, or giving them rewards and praise for eating more. “Trust toddler instincts. Believe your child when she pushes her plate away or tells you she’s full. Otherwise, she’ll eventually start to eat when she’s not hungry - and that’s a slippery slope.”

A recent study from the Univ. of Pennsylvania found that many overweight and obese 5 -12 year-olds have lost touch with their own hunger cues. “Keeping a child aware of her hunger and fullness may go a long way to help prevent obesity” says study author Tanja Kral, Ph.D..

*The key is giving them healthy, child sized portions at meals and snacks throughout the day.

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But serve these meals and snacks on a consistent schedule, about 3 hours apart. “This helps keep your child at a healthy weight by *normalizing* hunger” says Jill Castle R.D., author of “Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters From High Chair to High School” “A child who’s always nibbling will never feel hungry. Plus, if your child skimps at one meal, you’ll both know there’s another opportunity to eat in a few hours”. If they are really hungry at other times, you can offer bite sized munchies such as veggies, fruits or whole grain bread or crackers, but, keep in mind...

*New research shows that when 3 year-olds are full when eating healthy food, they will stop eating, but when they are eating foods high in sugar, fat or salt, they can overeat, so portion control these foods, and let them follow hunger cues of more healthful foods.

Sign In/Sign Out

Each parent will electronically sign-in/sign-out. It is legally mandated that everyone bringing a child to school or picking up a child from school sign the child in or out. If that person is not the parent, the parent must give written authorization those people designated to pick up and drop off their child, and tell them your code or have them register for their own

Please notify anyone picking up your child whom the staff may not recognize to be prepared to show identification.

Drop Off and Pick Up

For your child’s successful acclimation to school, we recommend the “Love ‘em and Leave ‘em” approach. By this we mean modeling for your child how to go to a teacher, make eye contact, smile, and say hello. You may also give a quick message or ask a quick question, though it is important that any longer conversation be scheduled, either for a face to face meeting or a phone call, as the teachers need to be free to welcome everyone, as well as watch the children.

Then we ask that you say goodbye to your child (no “sneaking out”). If your child is expressing separation anxiety, the best thing you can do is to reassure your child that anxiety is normal in new situations, that soon he or she will feel better, and that until then the teacher will stay with him or her. Hovering, either in the room or in the parking lot or outside sidewalk, communicates that you lack trust in your child’s ability to cope, or in your child’s care, which of course is frightening for your child and counterproductive to your child’s adjustment to the school. Demonstrating that you have confidence that your child can and will get past their natural separation anxiety helps your child feel secure.

If you wish to drop in early to see your child in the middle of the day, you’re welcome. However, your child will expect that your arrival will mean that he or she will be leaving with you when you go, (and will probably be extremely upset if that expectation is not met) so please take your child with you after your visit.

Nap Time

If your child naps, please provide bedding in a labeled, non-porous (i.e. plastic) bag, and take it home each Friday to wash, or earlier if soiled. Your child will need a crib sheet, (they fit the cots perfectly) a blanket, and a pillow if desired - each item must be labeled, or we will write the name on.

Dress

For anyone new to the Bay Area, the cardinal rule for dressing comfortably here is **LAYERS!** We will play outdoors every day, unless it is actually raining, not just misty, or in an extremely hot heat wave, so please dress your child for our changeable weather. If your child is too sick to play outdoors, she is too sick to be at school.

If you wish your child to wear sunscreen, please apply it yourself at drop-off, and we will reapply mid-day to all exposed areas except the face. It takes a long time to get to every child, and there is usually resistance as they all want to be playing, and of course if it gets in the eye while they’re resisting there will only be more resistance in the future. Therefore we strongly recommend that each child wear a wide-brimmed sun hat.

To aid their developing independence, please provide age appropriate clothing that is easy for them put on with little or no assistance, such as skirts or pants with elastic waistbands. If your child goes home with soiled clothing, be sure to replace the items the next day. If your child runs out of extra clothes, you may be called to come to school with more clothes.

Please do not send your child with expensive jewelry or items of great sentimental value, as we cannot be responsible for lost possessions. Also, necklaces cannot be worn as they may pose a choking danger.

Illness Policy

The welfare of your child is very important to us. These are some guidelines that need to be adhered to strictly for the sake of your child and others at the school.

1. Children need to be fever free, without the use of fever suppressant medication, for 24 hours before returning to school.
2. Children who have vomited or experienced 2 episodes of diarrhea may not return to school until they are completely healthy (i.e. normal appetite) for 24 hours.
3. Children who are too ill to participate in school activities, (such as playing outdoors) even without other symptoms, may not return to school until feeling better for 24 hours. Children who have been diagnosed with non-contagious illnesses, such as ear aches, will need to stay home as long as they are in pain.
4. Parents must notify the school if their child has any communicable diseases. All parents will then be notified that their children may have been exposed, in a manner respectful of privacy.
5. In case of emergency, 911 and the child's parents (or authorized emergency contact) will be notified and arrangements will be made for pickup.
6. If we have had to send your child home because he or she had symptoms of a

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contagious illness, your child may not return the next day, even if he seems better. (see 24 hour rule above)

If your child requires medication, you must first fill out a medication permission slip before we may administer it. All medications, creams, ointments, etc. must be in the original container and have the child's name on it. Children with asthma inhalers or Epi-pen's must have this form filled out immediately. Please make sure that your child's medication is current.

Please immediately inform us of any allergies your child may have, and the severity of the allergies.

First Day of School

Please make sure that your child has all the things they need for a successful school year:

- Photograph of your child for cubby.
- A plastic shoebox filled with a change of clothes, suited for the season and in your child's current size. This should include socks and two pairs of underpants. All items, including socks, should be labeled with your child's name.
- If your child wears diapers, please bring at least a weeks supply, and promptly bring more when needed.

In case of an earthquake or other emergency, each child is required by law to have an emergency packet. In a large ziplock bag, please provide the following items (all labeled):

- **8 oz bottled water.**
- 1 sweat shirt, 1 pair of pants.
- 1 pair of socks
- 2 pairs of underpants
- 2 non perishable dry food snack (such as a granola bar)

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- 1 4x6 index card with the child's name and emergency contact information clearly printed, including home address, all telephone numbers for parents, and emergency contacts with their numbers. One contact person and telephone number should be out of state. List of allergies.

In addition, all children's forms need to be submitted, if they haven't already.

Cultural Policies

1. Birthday Celebrations

We welcome celebrating your child's birthday at school. At the preschool level, parents are invited to participate as well, if they wish. In lieu of parties, we celebrate with a Montessori tradition called "the birthday walk". The ceremony takes about 5-10 minutes, and tells the child's "life story" with the aid of a form filled out by the parents and pictures. Toddlers' celebrations are simpler, and celebrated without the parents, unless the parents are able to take the child with them afterwards.

Based on parent feedback, we do not allow birthday cake, though you are welcome to bring a special low sugar snack, such as fruit salad, mini muffins or bagels. We also do not allow goodie bags or balloons. However, you can ask to see the class "wishlist" if you'd like to give a gift to the class.

2. Holidays

Odyssey Preschool is a non-denominational school. We celebrate a wide variety of holidays from many different cultures, some of which have a religious basis. However, we do not proselytize for any religion in our celebrations.

We encourage our families to contribute to our cultural curriculum by sharing their celebrations with us. You are welcome to come into the class, share books, music, clothes and other materials relating to a holiday tradition your family celebrates.

Rights of Licensing Authorities

The California Department of Licensing shall have the authority to interview children or staff and to inspect and audit child or facility records without prior consent. The licensee shall make provisions for private interviews with any children or staff member and for the examination of all records relating to the operation of the child care center. The Department has the authority to observe the physical condition of the child(ren), including conditions that could indicate abuse, neglect or inappropriate placement.