

Ms. Hilary's  
3's Class Handbook



2023-2024



Hi! I'm Hilary Madsen, your child's 3's class teacher. I'm looking forward to getting to know your child and your family this year. So much growth happens at this age and I can't wait to see all the ways your child develops over the course of the year. It is truly incredible!

I have two main goals for this class. The first is to instill a sense of wonder, develop a love of learning, and create positive associations with school and learning. This is accomplished through child-led learning, meeting the child where they are, and play. A child will be most excited to learn about something they are interested in and enthusiastic about. At this stage of learning, what they learn is not as important as learning to learn. I will pay attention to what the children love and try to explore these topics. I also believe children will learn what they need to learn when they need to learn it. This class will not focus on preparing for Pre-K or Kindergarten, it will focus on exposure to new ideas and topics, building on strengths, and developing positive associations with school. My second goal is to focus on social-emotional learning. Skills like making friends, cooperating, and problem-solving are not only key to success in school, but in living a happy life. We can help children develop these skills by listening to them, giving gentle suggestions, and guiding them toward empathy. I strongly believe these are the most important components of early childhood education; they are my purpose in being an educator.

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# **A LOOK AT OUR DAY**

## **Preparation at Home**

Each child will have a cubby and hook to store his/her coat and backpack. Sending your child with a backpack each day helps them to be prepared and successful at school. Please always keep an extra set of clothes in your child's backpack, as well as layers for outside play (we will go outside unless weather is extreme). Please do not allow your children to bring to toys, stuffed animals, money, valuable objects, candy, or gum to school.

## **Working Parents Arrive 15 Minutes Prior to Class Start Time**

We will use this time for any last minute set-up and for me to run through the day's activities with you. Please make every effort to be on time or call/text if you running late. We cannot allow parents to drop children off unless all working parents are present. Working parent job descriptions are in class for you to use (I have also included them it the back of the handbook). It is the working parents responsibility to find a sub if he/she cannot make it.

## **Student Drop-Off**

Please park your car in the lower parking lot and walk your child inside through the upper lot doors. (For safety, we do not use the upper parking lot during school hours.)

Upon entry, take your child to wash his/her hands in the bathroom before entering the classroom. You will then help them find their name tag in the hallway and sign in on the clipboard. After doing so, walk your child into the classroom to hang up their backpack. Next, they will find their job on the jobs board and show you where they sit at circle time. At this point, you will say goodbye and they will find a tabletop activity to do for the first fifteen minutes of class.

## **First 15 Minutes of Class**

It is important that children have time to relax for a few minutes and focus themselves in preparation for class. Please do your best to arrive on time so this can happen. There will be tabletop activities, play dough, puzzles, books, a listening station and/or a sensory bin available during this time. Working parents, please help guide children to activities placed around the room if they are uncertain of what to do. When a child is finished with an activity, help them return the activity to its box and/or back to the shelf. Teaching children to return the materials is a very important part of learning to be responsible. It does take a while for the children to know they are expected to take responsibility for the environment. Help them by quietly reminding and offering to help carry if necessary.

## **Welcome Circle**

The goal of this first circle time is to encourage and welcome each child, practice listening skills and turn-taking, and come together to build community. As a working parent, your most important job during circle time is to model attentive listening and appropriate body language. If any child is struggling, a gentle hand on their back or pat may help them settle down and focus. The child may be asked to look at a book in the book area if not attending. They may return to the circle when ready.

## **Small Group Activities**

We will sometimes break the class into smaller groups after circle time. This will be an opportunity for children to work in a more focused way with a working parent or me. As a working parent, please engage children and help them get their names on their work. Add notes or labels to drawings if appropriate and welcomed by the child. Completed work will usually go in mailboxes located near the classroom entrance.

## **Free Choice Time**

We will open up the far side of the classroom by removing the cones placed near the closet. At this time, children are free to choose from a variety of activities available during this time.

Listening will be one of the most important jobs you have in the classroom, especially during this hour of less structured play. When children, just like adults, are listened to, they feel they belong. By listening and using a calm voice, you can help children problem solve. This is one of the best techniques for helping children solve their own problems: a quiet voice with an encouraging tone (not scolding). Sit down or kneel down to be at eye level with the children whenever possible. Facial expressions, silent nods of encouragement and understanding eyes are a very important part of the communication process.

Comment on what you hear and see, "I can see two friends both want to use the same truck. What shall we do?" If they are having trouble coming up with solutions; suggest a few. "We could use a timer, or write John's name on the card so he will be next... what do you think?" Listen again for agreement. Congratulate the children for solving a hard problem.

I also like to ask children, "what's your plan?" Often a child is not trying to be naughty or break a rule, but simply wants to explore something. You can redirect or give them the tools to accomplish that appropriately.

If a child has hurt or bothered another child, encourage them to "check in" rather than force a "sorry". Children at this age do not always understand the concept of "sorry" and "checking in" helps to build empathy without placing blame.

### **...Art Station:**

The art station will be open during free choice time. There may be a sample or "model for inspiration" for certain project, but always encourage children to make the art their own. Please remember it is the process not the product that helps children to learn and explore their creativity. Allow time for children to finish. We do not always have to comment on the children's art work- we want them to begin to depend on their own judgements. Sometimes comments can interrupt the child's flow and make the experience less pleasant for them. If you comment, please keep it on the topic of the process: "Those brushstrokes are so tiny... I like those colors together.. What inspired you?... Tell me about your art..." (Try not to ask, "what is it?") If a student shares something about their creation, it can be fun to write it on the bottom or backside. Remember to label work with the child's name as well. You can find a list of children in the class on the bulletin board above the art sink.

Some children will be less interested in art, oftentimes simply because their passion and attention draws them elsewhere. Encourage all students to visit the art station, but allow them to take a pass if they do not want to participate. \*There will be a few projects (such as Mother's Day gifts) where we will encourage participation more assertively.

### **...Snack Station:**

Snack is served to up to four children at a time during free choice time. Students will wash hands, find their placemat, and take a seat at the snack table. The Snack Parent will then serve them their snack. The Snack Parent should encourage language development and community building through conversation during snack time. There may be a questions to prompt discussion, or you can ask children about the pictures on their placemat. After the child is finished with snack, they should clean up their placemat and space, then wash hands before retuning to play.

If you are the Snack Parent, please be sure to ask all children if they are interested in having snack. Give a last call for snack ten minutes before clean-up time.

Snack Parents are responsible for bringing a snack to be served that day. Please supply something healthy. No juice or sweets (unless it is your child's Special Day). Good options might include cheese, fruit, veggies, muffins, granola bars, or crackers. Please have items ready to serve in appropriately-sized pieces. The school is a NUT-FREE ZONE.

2022/23 3's Class Allergies: \_\_\_\_\_

### **...Exploration Station:**

This station is very flexible. It is a place to explore and ask questions. The focus will largely depend on children's interests. It can serve as an opportunity to dive into scientific concepts, sensory experiences, or more detail-oriented work.

### **Clean-Up Time:**

The 5 minute warning for cleanup will be a drum. Please try to remind the children around you that they have 5 minutes to finish up/do any last things they want to do during free choice time. After 5 minutes, we will sing our cleanup song. Everyone helps with cleanup. This is a time to stress cooperation and being helpful and responsible. Make clean-up time fun by putting dolls to bed or making the dinosaurs talk as they get tossed in their bin.

### **Dance Circle:**

After clean-up we will gather briefly as a group on the carpet to dance. Dancing is an excellent way for kids to express themselves, practice large motor skills, follow directions, and learn about language through song (phonemic awareness and rhyming especially).

### **Outside/Downstairs Time:**

We will be going outside everyday if possible, so please don't forget jackets, hats, etc.

On the slide, encourage children to go "up the stairs, down the slide" and call out "all clear" before heading down the slide. When we do play downstairs, students must use walking feet. There will be a 2 minute warning before play ends. Children will then line up sitting on the wood in front of the gate when outside or along the wall when downstairs.

\*The Art Parent may stay in the classroom to finish art project clean-up if necessary. If the Art Parent is done with clean-up, the Snack Parent may stay in the classroom to vacuum the classroom (please leave the circle time carpet vacuuming for after class though).

### **Goodbye Circle**

The closing circle will include a goodbye song. Children will then be dismissed by name, asked to collect any work ready to go home, and be given a stamp as they leave. Children of working parents will sit in the library corner with the TA while their parents finish up their jobs.

Please honor your child's creations by taking them home. This shows your child that you value what they accomplish at school. Often the art goes along with a theme and can be used as a conversation starter with your child about what they did at school. (I will be keeping some artwork at school for your child's portfolio and the classroom.)

I encourage parents to have their child wash their hands in the bathroom as they exit the school.



## **Working Parents Wrap-Up**

At the end of class, it is the responsibility of working parents to make sure items they used are put away/clean, vacuum the classroom, spray bleach mixture on bathroom surfaces, and take out the trash and recycling. Consult Working Parent job descriptions / cheat sheets for specific delegation of jobs, but also remember that this is a group effort and help where you can. Leaving the classroom tidy and clean for the next class is part of your responsibility as a member of the coop.

## **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

### **Focus on the Kids:**

The children are the focus during class hours. While it is important that parents to get to know each other and build community, adult conversations can be distracting during class. Please do your best to stay attentive to the children. Please also refrain from using your phone while you are in the classroom.

### **Special Days:**

Special Days are a great way to make your child feel loved, help us get to know each other better, practice sharing in front of a group, and build listening skills and empathy.

Every child will have a "Special Day". The child will wear a crown on this day and their friends will ask him or her about some of their favorite things. This discussion helps inspire drawings by friends to be made into a special day book for the child. \*It may help if you can discuss with your child some of their favorite things before class that day.

While we usually avoid sweet treats for snack, the parent may bring in a special snack if desired by the child on his or her special day. While it is not always possible, many parents sign up for snack on their child's special day so that they can provide this treat and also be there to celebrate their child.

### **Portfolios:**

I will be collecting samples of the children's work throughout the year. The Portfolio Parent for our class will be responsible for compiling this work and photos into a book personalized for each child. Please take photos in class and on field trips and share them with the Portfolio Parent. It is up to your Class Rep and Portfolio Parent to decide how you'd like to share photos this year.

## **Illness Guidelines:**

Please err on the cautious side and stay home if you or your child is experiencing signs of illness. Do not work in the classroom or send your child to school if you or he/she has experienced the following symptoms in the last 24 hours:

- a. A fever of 100.4 degrees or higher
- b. Chills, cough, sore throat, runny nose, or difficulty breathing
- c. Body aches, headache, or unusual fatigue
- d. Vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea

\*If your child is overtired, fussy, cranky, and acting like they don't feel well, even without fever, please keep them home. Your child will not benefit from being in class when they are not feeling well.

\*If a child begins to show symptoms during class, I will call their caregiver to come pick them up.

\*Be sure you know your class' system for substitutes, in case your child is ill. If you are not clear on this, reach out to your Class Rep.

\*If a community member tests positive for Covid-19 or other highly contagious illnesses, they must alert the NPCP Health and Safety Chair as soon as possible. (The ill family's identity will be kept confidential.) Working Parents may return to class on day 6 if they test negative or wear a medical-grade mask for days 6-10. Students who test positive for Covid-19 must stay home for 5 days, and return only on day 6-10 if they have tested negative. If they do not test negative before day 10, they need to isolate the full 10 days.

## **Fire / Earthquake Drills:**

We will practice fire drills monthly and earthquake drills twice a year. The procedures and an evacuation plan are posted in the classroom by the door.

### Fire Drill

- Smoke detector will be turned on
- Teacher or another adult will call out "fire drill"
- Parents and children stop everything and line up at the door
- Head count is taken and compared to sign in sheet
- Adult leads children out front door to the far side of the playground

### Earthquake Drill:

- Teacher or another adult will call out "earthquake drill"
- Adults and children will crawl under the tables- heads down touching knees and arms around head
- Remain under table until advised to come out. Be calm and quiet.

### **General Preschool Rules:**

#### **1) Respect ourselves**

#### **2) Respect each other**

#### **3) Respect our school**

This includes the following:

- Walking feet keep up safe
- Calm voices mean everyone can be heard
- We will learn to take turns
- Everyone cleans
- We focus on each other's strengths and support our each other

### **THE VALUE OF PLAY**

Research shows that the a key factor to success in a young child meeting educational goals is the amount of time they are allotted to play. Although it can be easy to focus on academics from a young age, it is actually through play that kids learn to regulate conflict, solve problems, become resilient, delay gratification, and take turns. These are the skills that our children need most to be successful in life- socially, emotionally, and academically.

On a social level, play-based preschools help children learn the skills they need to be a good friend and work as a member of a group through collaboration, learn to follow rules, use empathy, take turns, and self-regulate. These skills help children to learn the rules of social interaction that will in turn help them in relationships throughout life. Children in play-based settings get lots of opportunities to practice experiencing their friends points of view by working through conflicts about space, materials, and rules with support.

Academically, play promotes language, literacy, and mathematical thinking. Kids who frequently engage in play, particularly socio-dramatic (imaginative) play, show an increase in the total number of words used, the length of their sentences, and the complexity of their speech. It has been found that play also helps children to understand the relationships between things, which helps them develop the type of

reasoning that aids in mathematical performance. Play also helps build the skills of attention, concentration, and impulse control. These skills are integral to kindergarten success. Furthermore, if children are not comfortable in social free-play environments, learning to be so in later years can serve as a distraction from elementary school academics.

Play also provides an outlet for the expression of emotion in young children. Strong emotions, especially frustration, fear, and anxiety, can be overwhelming for children to process. Play provides an outlet to voice those overwhelming feelings. In play-based preschool settings, we provide children with the space to explore how they are feeling, what caused those feelings, and how best to express their feelings in a positive, safe, healthy way.

Playing is learning for children. What appears to adults as aimless pattering about with paints, sand, water, and blocks - in activity centers with other children or by themselves- helps preschoolers develop control of their bodies, investigate cause and effect, and follow-up on the innate human curiosity that is at the root of all high achievement. A good preschool program will permit children to explore their environment without fear of failure, without imposed adult expectations and adult learning priorities. This kind of curriculum helps develop self-confidence and a joy of learning that is the best possible motivation for formal schooling.

"Playtime doesn't get enough respect. Play gets overlooked. Society doesn't value it. Play is fun, but equally important, it makes kids smarter. Play benefits especially in terms of later development- especially when we look at creativity, flexibility, and ability to cooperate. Kids who have had a great deal of play are more able to function socially, emotionally, and physically as they move forward in school and life. Parents who want smart kids should realize that rolling around in the dirt is just as important as scoring well on standardized testing."

**"Play is the highest form of research."**

**-Albert Einstein**

**"It is a happy talent to know how to play."**

**-Ralph Waldo Emerson**

**"Take chances, make mistakes, get messy!"**

**-Ms. Frizzle**

**Here are a few guidelines to help promote learning through play (child- initiated activities):**

- Don't hover over children.
- Respect their uniqueness (and independence). Let them do it themselves.
- Allow for mess. Allow children to express themselves in their way.
- Honor each child's timetable for growth.
- Do not always model for children; allow opportunity for risk, to be different.
- Give the child tinkering time- time to put things together and take it apart.
- Let them be problem-solvers and negotiators. Help children find their own solutions if necessary.

## **2023-2024 Curriculum Themes**

Our classroom environment is rich and stimulating, designed to promote exploration by all children. Themes are used to help design learning experiences, but I try to be flexible and offer a variety of activities that are determined by the children's interests and opportunities that may arise. Please reach out to me if your child has a passion we could explore in class or if you have a knowledge or activity ideas you would like to share with the class.

### **MONTH**

### **THEME**

September - Routines, Unique & Special Me, Apples

October - Sunflowers, Pumpkins

November - Leaves, Salmon

December - Gift Making, Holidays

January - Winter & Artists

February - Friendship, Pete the Cat

March - Nature Exploring, Misc. Favorites

April - Celebrating Spring, Earth Day, Gardening, Butterflies

May - Mother's Day, Beach/Tidepools, Celebrating our Growth!