



Playgroup Handbook



Receive the child in reverence
Educate him with love
Let him go forth in freedom

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Welcome to Playgroup

'Here, we have time'

For many families, this is where their journey with our school starts, and often where they encounter Steiner Education for the first time. Our way of doing things is noticeable the moment you enter the playgroup room; a warm, welcoming environment with small groups, dedicated to nurturing the young child's senses. Beautiful play corners with soft colours; natural fabrics and handmade toys; all these encourage children to engage in true, creative play and to develop their imagination.

Although playing is the main focus in Playgroup, the children are invited to be a part of the working activities, e.g. tidying up, cutting up fruit for morning tea, and putting dolls to bed. Primarily learning through imitation, they join in freely when the parents help the Playgroup leader clean up and pack away at the end of the session.

It is also a place where parents can find support in each other in an unhurried environment and where they can enjoy being with their little one while feeling safe to let their child step away from them to explore under their protective love.

We hope you'll enjoy this unique experience and take it home with you in your hearts...

Playgroup Rhythm

Although each Playgroup may have its own rhythm, certain elements will always be present; these form a strong, secure 'heartbeat' in which the young child can breathe in and out and feel safe to play and explore. These elements are:

- ❖ Free Play - the most important part of Playgroup.
- ❖ Activity - ranging from homely tasks such as baking, polishing, gardening and sanding, to crafts such as painting, felting and candlemaking.
- ❖ Circle - comprising seasonal songs and verses accompanied by gestures, while sitting in mum or dad's lap.
- ❖ Story - reflecting the child's developing consciousness and consisting of repetitive and seasonal puppet stories.
- ❖ Morning Tea - jointly prepared and shared in gratitude by all!

The unique rhythm of the Playgroup in your area is enclosed as a separate insert in this booklet. We also have a leaflet on the importance of rhythm in the child's mental, emotional and physical development; please ask your Playgroup leader for one.

What to bring

This will vary a little from Playgroup to Playgroup; please refer to the separate insert for the particular group in your area. Some standard items are:

- * Change of clothing
- * Hat (Spring/Summer)
- * Warm indoor slippers (Winter & on cold days)
- * A piece of fruit to share for morning tea

Arrivals

We are all parents and understand the challenges of teething and broken nights! However, please try to come on time, as it may be disappointing for your child to miss out on an activity or to feel that everyone has started without them.

Please leave shoes outside the Playgroup room (check this with your leader, as this doesn't apply to all groups) - as well as switched-off mobile phones, so we can enjoy an uninterrupted session.

Toys

We ask that favourite toys and precious possessions are left at home and not brought into Playgroup, as these items could get broken or lost, much to the disappointment of the owner.

Moreover, little children are still learning about 'sharing' and 'taking turns'; instilling these values is easier with toys that belong to Playgroup rather than one child's personal toy.

Birthdays

Birthdays form the highlight of the year for most children and are an important part of the annual rhythm. We celebrate your child's birthday in Playgroup with a special story, a gift and/or a birthday baking.

At some of our Playgroups the parent is asked to bring the cake in; at others the cake is made by everyone on the day - please check this with your Playgroup leader.

Festivals & Celebrations

The year's cycle is marked by the celebration of seasonal festivals; most of these are marked in our school's weekly newsletter, together with upcoming events.

Besides the events listed below, in which you and your family are warmly invited to participate, most of our playgroups also conduct these festivities as a down-scaled version within Playgroup time, so that your children may celebrate in an age-appropriate setting.

- ❖ Term 1: Harvest Market
- ❖ Term 2: Midwinter Festival
- ❖ Term 3: Spring Equinox Festival
- ❖ Term 4: Christmas Celebration

Illness

A simple guide in case you are unsure whether it is OK for your child to attend Playgroup is: if they have a temperature, diarrhoea and/or are vomiting, persistently coughing or is listless, then they are best kept quietly at home for rest and recuperation. Seek medical advice if you are worried about the health of your child.

Toddlers and Media

Whilst not discrediting the advantages of TV, computers, cinema, I-pods and DVDs for adult life, research into the effect of electronic media on children paints an ever-clearer picture of damage.

The young child cannot differentiate between reality and fantasy, as he/she has a different consciousness from adults. Moreover, a child watching TV or playing computer games is not actively playing; creative, active play and movement is the most important activity for a young child, whose limbs, brain and sense of balance are still developing. Even so-called 'good' programmes stop your child from playing.

Everything we do at Steiner schools aims to strengthen the child's imaginative, creative faculties. We therefore recommend that children under 9 years of age do not watch any TV, DVDs or play computer games. Supporting us in this will help enormously with what we aim to achieve at our school.

Questions & Answers

❖ **Why don't you have any plastic toys in your Playgroup?**

Babies and young children are just beginning to learn about the world around them; it's important to provide them with objects that give them a beautiful, true image of the world. Toys made from natural materials have a depth and real weight that synthetic counterparts cannot match. They are warmer, have more texture, and each piece is unique. Children can sense this difference as they touch and play with the toy.

We also aim to foster open-ended, imaginative play, where any item can be used in myriad ways to help develop the child's creativity; offering natural materials and toys that are true representations of the world around them helps this development. We have a list available of recommended gifts to help you (and well-wishing friends or grandparents) choose open-ended toys.

❖ **Why do you say blessings before morning tea? Are you a religious school?**

Steiner schools are non-denominational. However, attention is given to the spiritual dimension; in Playgroup we aim to awaken the child's sense of reverence for nature and humanity, and a sense of gratitude and goodness. Pausing for a moment before we eat also helps to strengthen the cohesion of the group.

❖ **Why do you call the children and parents to an activity with a song?**

Little children immerse themselves so completely in their own dream state that it would cut into their natural flow of play to call them away from their activity with verbal instructions. Using the lyre and/or our singing voice, we can lead them into a new activity in a much gentler way, closer to their own dreamlike nature.

Questions & Answers

❖ **Why do you round off the corners of the painting paper?**

Again, this is a question of softness versus hardness; little children are all rounded and soft, and their senses wide-open. We aim to meet them at their own level in everything we do and present to them.

❖ **Why don't the children just come and play?**

At this young age, children are using their life forces to build themselves a body, a holy temple that they will 'reside' in for life. A rhythm in the day allows the child to develop this body in a healthy way by strengthening their life forces. It could be likened to the body having a rhythm of breathing - breathe in and out - both are necessary. When the children come together and sing with movement or do an activity, it is like a breath in. When they engage in free play it is like a breath out. Both parts are necessary. There are bigger rhythms as well, for example in the festivals of the year (see page 4), which when attended regularly also help strengthen the life force of the child.

❖ **What is the difference between a Steiner school and a Waldorf school?**

There is none - the terms are interchangeable. The first school of this type was set up in Stuttgart, Germany in 1919, when Rudolf Steiner was asked to establish and lead a school for the children of employees at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory. The name stuck - hence Waldorf schools and Waldorf education.

Questions & Answers

❖ Who was Rudolf Steiner?

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was an Austrian philosopher, scientist, artist and writer who left a lasting legacy in education, music, drama, architecture, art, eurythmy (visible speech & movement excercises), medicine and agriculture. One of his fundamental beliefs was that humanity needs to work organically in cooperation with nature, not against it. He sounded warning bells about many issues, such as sustainability and depletion of human and natural resources, which are of wide concern today.

❖ What is unique about Steiner education? How is it different from other types of schools?

Waldorf schools are based on a consistent philosophy and understanding of children and how they grow and learn. Rather than follow the public school model of training children for the work force, Waldorf schools focus on encouraging creativity and free thinking. The arts play a big part at all levels, as do movement, music and craft. Self-expression, self-discipline and the wholeness of life are the key elements which teachers weave into every lesson. The whole-child orientation is often described as working with 'Head, Heart and Hands'.

Some distinctive features of Waldorf education include:

- Children learn as much as possible through direct personal experience and interaction with people, materials, subjects and ideas.
- Learning is a non-competitive activity. Testing and grading are not used to motivate study.

Recommended Reading

The books listed below form excellent reading material for newcomers to Steiner education. Some of our groups have a small library from which you may borrow a number of these titles.

The public libraries in Busselton, Dunsborough and Margaret River have a small Steiner selection and can order books in for you. Alternatively, you can purchase all titles from Southern Aurora Books and Gifts in Bibra Lake, Perth.

We can order books in for you to purchase and we carry a small collection of titles in our school shop, Gnome Hollows. Please see your playgroup leader for more information.

You are Your Child's First Teacher.....Rahima Baldwin-Dancy

The Incarnating Child.....Joan Salter

Beyond the Rainbow Bridge.....B.J. Patterson

Natural Childhood..... John B. Thomson

The Plug-in Drug.....Marie Winn

Early Childhood Booklets 1 & 2....Melbourne Rudolf Steiner School

The Children's Year.....Cooper/ Fynes-Clinton/ Rowling

The Yallingup Steiner School is situated in the picturesque Wildwood Valley in the Margaret River wine region. Initially begun as a small Playgroup in 1989, we now offer places at our school to children up to 12 years old, and run a number of associated Playgroups and 3 on-site Kindergartens.

Carbunup Hall, Carbunup Playgroup

Monday & Tuesday

Margaret River, Wishing Star Playgroup

Wednesday & Thursday

YSS, Yallingup Playgroup Friday

All groups lead by Victoria Robertson

For any enquiries please contact:

Yallingup Steiner School
cnr. Caves & Wildwood Rd.
P.O. Box 135
Yallingup WA 6282

Ph. 08-9755 2230
Fax 08-9755 2575
Email info@yss.wa.edu.au
Web www.yss.wa.edu.au



'Our highest endeavour must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives'

Rudolf Steiner