



# PARENT HANDBOOK

*Children's Own School*

**781-729-2689**

# Welcome

Dear Children's Own School families,

Welcome to those new to our community!

Children's Own School has been a Montessori tradition since 1942. We strive to pursue a Montessori experience as defined by the *Association Montessori Internationale*. We are members of the *Montessori Schools of Massachusetts* and the *Association of Independent Schools of New England*. We are licensed by and operate under the guidance of the *Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care*.

For everyone, welcome to the new school year and the current edition of the Children's Own School *Parent Handbook*. We hope you will find it both useful and accessible. This handbook is comprised of two parts:

## **Part 1 is a guide understanding the Montessori approach**

When parents choose Children's Own School for their child, they are asked to make a commitment and continuing efforts to understand and embrace the Montessori approach and to work in partnership with the school. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same values and expectations.

Families who benefit from the five- and six-year-olds in a classroom community must be committed to share this experience with others and stay enrolled at Children's Own School for a child's kindergarten year.

## **Part 2 contains general information about the policies and procedures of the school.**

We invite you to familiarize yourself with its contents and to use it as a reference tool for day-to-day life at Children's Own School. If you have questions, please ask. If you discover typos, let us know. If you have suggestions, we welcome them.

The Covid-19 pandemic forced Montessori schools around the world to consider different ways to deliver our Montessori-guided developmental programming. In revising the current edition of the Parent Handbook, we felt some of the guidance we wrote for our home-based learning program is important to share. Our plan involved guiding parents to support their child's independence and self-learning at home. Fortunately, we did not have to implement home-based learning, but the content written to support home-based learning during a pandemic shutdown is applicable even when children are attending COS regularly.

Dr. Montessori's time-tested curriculum addresses aspects of social, moral, cognitive, and emotional development:

- It promotes creative-thinking and decision-making skills.
- Children have freedom of choice and movement provided they understand and follow the limits of the classroom, community, and material.
- The multi-age classroom promotes cooperative learning and assists in social development.
- Younger children learn by example from the older classmates. The middle and older children's learning is reinforced by "teaching" the younger children, and the oldest children are presented with opportunities to be leaders.

All of this leads to our shared goal of fostering independence and a life-long love of learning.

Welcome to Children's Own School.

# Parent Handbook

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## Part I: Montessori's Approach to Early Learning

“Education is not what the teacher gives, education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual...by [their] experiences upon the environment.”

- Maria Montessori

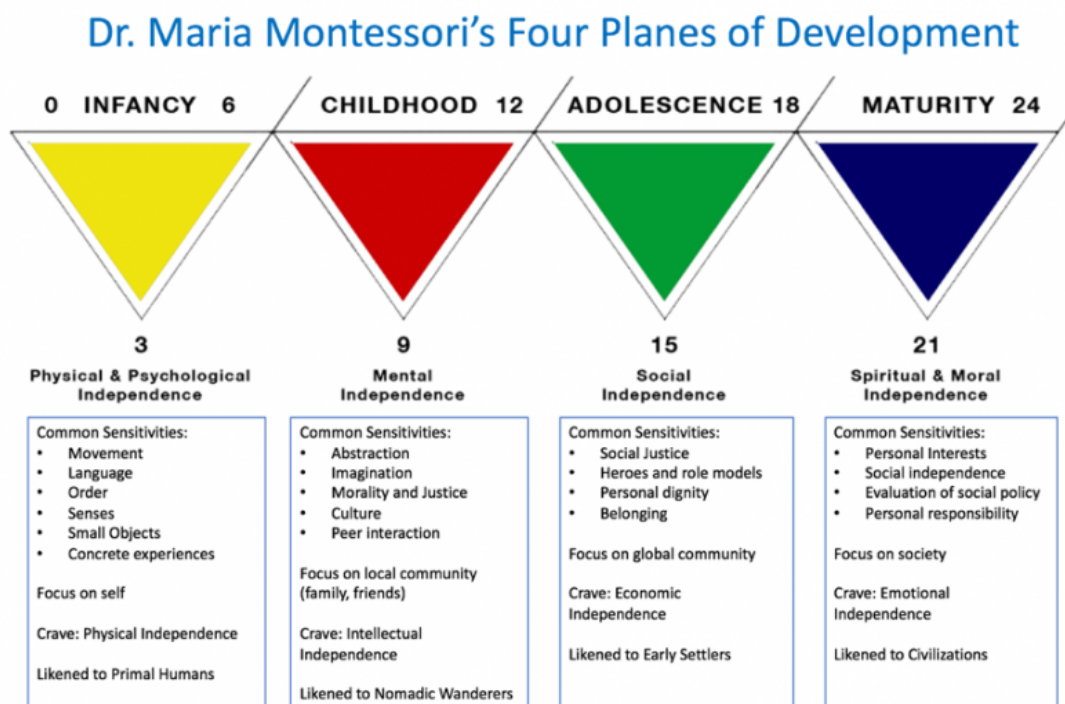
We don't expect families who enroll their children at COS to set up Montessori environments in their homes, and we actively discourage you from buying Montessori classroom materials for your home.

We want to offer simple strategies that parents and caregivers can implement at home to support a child's growing independence and capabilities. Children benefit from consistency; and when expectations, allowances, and limit setting are aligned between home and school, this provides consistency.

Parents have access to many online sources of information on Montessori philosophy. The more ambitious can go directly to the source and read Dr. Montessori's books and other writings. This handbook assumes a certain level of familiarity with the Montessori approach, including an understanding of the basic program structure (i.e. mixed age groups), and a little jargon (i.e. 'work').

We offer tips here to aid you in helping your child grow and be independent at home, and to provide consistency between home and school.

### Montessori's View of Human Development and the Role of Independence



Being a good parent does not mean doing things for your child. It takes a little more effort on our part to create the set-ups that promote a young child's functional independence. It is usually quicker and easier if we, the adults, do it for children. However, developmentally, your young child wants to struggle with tasks like putting on and off underpants until they can do it 'all by themselves'. The big work of a child from birth to age six is biological and physical independence. Your three-year-old should be able to get themselves dressed in simple clothes, and to clean themselves after using the toilet. They may not do it perfectly, but it is important that they have the opportunity and the time to try.

Homes are not generally set up for a child's independence, but making aspects of your home more child-friendly doesn't require a complete renovation of your space. Besides, as your child moves into elementary school age and the second plane of development, their need for independence shifts toward more psychological independence through intense peer relationships, a new capacity for reasoned thinking, and imagination.

Your toddler and preschooler also have a need for psychological independence. At COS, your child is usually in a class with 19 other children. No child has the individual attention of the two adults in the room for the entire work period, as in an 'only-child-in-a-two-parent' family.

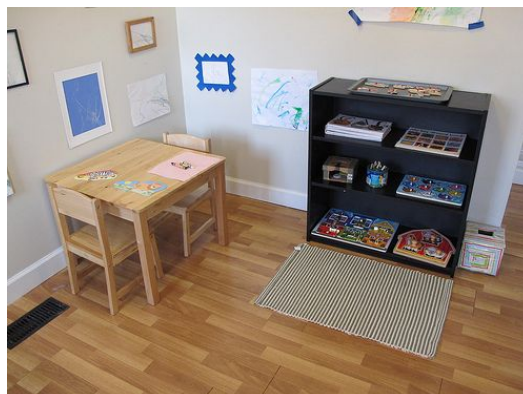
Our classrooms have been prepared to enable children to be independent in their choices and activities. While peer interaction is important in our classrooms, the very youngest typically work alone. A very social child does not need your constant attention. They may want it, but you should be prepared to aid their development by expecting them to wait until you have the time or the schedule allows for intense interpersonal time. Similarly, as adults, we need to respect the concentration of young children and not interrupt them.

In the classroom, we help and answer questions when needed, but we also redirect to a peer for assistance or simply make ourselves unavailable when we know the child expects unlimited adult attention. An older sibling can always help if you know they are capable of tying a bow, reading a word, or reaching something in a cabinet.

If your COS child is an only or oldest, you will have to play that role of older sibling or peer at home. You should help them with a task they can not do by themselves if it enables them to move forward with their independent activity. You don't want to frustrate them. Alternately, you might redirect them to a different activity they can do all by themselves.

In the classroom, we note what choices are made without making demands on expected activities, and we help steer the child to a robust and diverse set of developmental activities. We sit alongside a child when our presence is needed for encouragement to complete a task or to help at the critical time for the child to be successful. We give lessons when a child is ready, and we use observation, as a way to assess readiness.

## Create Physical Structure at Home



School is where children do their work. Office/shop/hospital/etc is where adults do their work. Home is where we all do our combined work.

You do not need to purchase Montessori materials for your home. Mirroring the expectations and freedoms we give children at school is the best way to reinforce what they learn in school.

Please know, just because your child loves a particular Montessori material, it does not mean they want it at home! If you are not sure what activities/games/toys to keep at home for your child, please talk to us! We are happy to help you with resources.

In your child's room, playroom, or family common area, set up a small shelf with activity choices for your child. Keep a small floor mat nearby if they want to do the activity on floor, and have a small table and chair set up for them to use.

This is their space and you should expect them to keep in clean and orderly. We help them to do this by setting up their space with 3 principles in mind: limited, orderly, beautiful.



Limiting activity choices aids decision-making abilities and helps children engage with an activity for longer times and in more creative ways. Rotate what is out from time to time. Expect your child to clean up the activity and return it to its place on the activity shelf.

Children develop concentration when the items they need are accessible to them in a specific place, and those places stay the same. Give them the time and space to explore without interruption.

You can separate and group items together as we do in the classroom: all the components of a particular activity are together in a basket or laid out on a tray. We don't mix crayons with pastels for art, nor do we mix blocks with farm animal miniatures. Keeping this entire activity in the same location on a work shelf, helps your child orient to where everything should be returned to after use.



No one chooses ugly things, unless they are being ironic. Young children, though never ironic, are no different. Attractive and well-maintained material/activities call to them for use. They love to be involved in caring for their belongings and keeping their environment clean. Child sized tools to care for their environment are important to allow them to be successful.

*For Small Hands* is a great resource for items to have at home that allow your child to do what they can at Children's Own School: pour themselves a drink, chop a fruit or vegetable for snack or meal prep, sew, sort laundry, rake leaves, hammer nails, etc.

## Create Psychological Structure at Home

A child must experience clear, consistent, and appropriate expectations, guidelines, feedback, and follow-through to feel secure.

Be sure to present your child with advanced warnings regarding changes that may lead to needing acts of parental enforcement.

When not adhering to established limits, a child should be given limited choices regarding how to proceed, and you should take a firm, but kind, stance in the follow-through.

For example, if you are dropping off your four year old at school, be consistent in how you approach the drop off process. You may want to give a warning that you will soon be at school. When you arrive let them know it is time to leave the car and go to class. If they do not comply with the routine, give them a choice – they can get out of the car on their own or with assistance. If you do help, please try to be patient and gentle. After school, talk to your child about the issue and have them think of solutions for the future. Expect your child to test the limits and try not to take it personally.

Redirection can be an appropriate strategy, especially when the home rules and set-up support this.

For example, at COS, if a child is being loud in the classroom, we would first remind them of the rule to use a quiet voice inside. If they can't, we can suggest they might need to take a short trip to the "Movement and Music Room" at COS. If, developmentally, they need to move and make noise, we offer that option, but we prevent that need/behavior from disrupting the whole classroom.

As your child develops, have the rules and limits change to reflect these changes.

## Bringing Other Aspects of Montessori Home

Simple changes to your home can be made to aid your child's growing independence which we are fostering in their Montessori classroom. Order, independence, and self-direction are hallmarks of a Montessori classroom. Having a place for everything on a scale accessible to your child, promotes their independence.

Ways to do this include:

- having low shelves or a low hook/closet rod,
- keeping a step stool handy so your child can reach the toilet or sink or counter,
- helping them find a regular place for their playthings instead of putting everything in a bin,
- making healthy snacks available on a low pantry shelf, and

- pouring drinks into a small manageable pitcher to keep in the refrigerator.

Provide feedback to your child that focuses on the process or the details of the effort, rather than the end product. Or ask them to describe what was done. “What a beautiful picture” is the quick response. Spend a little focused time, but limit it because 1) you may be in the middle of something, and 2) your child might still be in the middle of something.

Focusing on the process or effort involved helps your child stay focused on their work and develop skills instead of just thinking about results. Be cautious about using rewards; for once learning or behavior is externally motivated, a child’s process can lose creativity, focus, and passion. Remember not to interrupt your child when they are focused.

## Creating a Home-Like Environment at School

More than a developmental philosophy and pedagogy, Montessori is a way of life, and according to Dr. Montessori, the most important stage of life is birth to three years. During this time, human beings are creating the basic structure that forms the essence of who they are. Physically, psychically, and emotionally, infancy and early childhood are critical times for human beings. Dr. Montessori identified a period postpartum of “external pregnancy”, lasting approximately nine months, during which the child learns to trust himself and his environment. We are committed to supporting members of our staff during this important time for both mother and child.

Having an infant in the classroom has been successful at Montessori schools, and it has also been found valuable for their students. In each case, after an initial fascination by the children, the baby became an accepted presence in the room and the children’s daily work continued. In a day and age when respect, kindness, and cooperative relationships sometimes take a back seat to other priorities, we feel that our children benefit from witnessing the natural loving care that is shared by a parent and an infant. When children witness this on a daily basis, it strengthens and supports their desire to form close and caring relationships with others.

It is our goal at Children’s Own School to support this important time for the mother and child, while keeping the children and classroom needs as our first consideration. Because the appropriateness of an infant in the classroom must be decided on a case-by-case basis, this cannot be a set policy. However, in every case these important individual criteria must be met: 1) having an infant in the classroom will not interfere with the normalization of the class, and the learning in the class must not be compromised. 2) Determination of the appropriateness for the infant to be in the classroom is based on the temperament of the infant and the dynamics of the classroom.

There will be a two-week trial period, followed by a cycle of inquiry. This will include observation by the Director and, if necessary, other trained Montessori guides. It will also include regular meetings between the Director and the teacher/mother, whom we believe will be the first to recognize whether or not her classroom is compromised. Through these observations and dialogues, the Director will determine if it is appropriate for the infant to be in the classroom.

This cycle of inquiry will reconvene and re-evaluate the situation every two weeks to determine that the needs of the children are being met. Alternative child care arrangement will be in place before the initial trial period begins in case it is determined that the infant should not be in the classroom. The infant can remain in the classroom until he or she begins to roll, crawl, or move about. Once the child is mobile, the teacher/mother will utilize other childcare arrangements.

We encourage parents to approach the classroom teacher and Director with any questions they may have about this issue. It is important that our parents understand our position. We feel this policy about our position allows parents to see the careful and prudent consideration we are giving this situation. This policy is based on our school’s mission and

Montessori philosophy. We will listen and respond to parents' questions and concerns, but the decision is ultimately handled by the school's administration.

## Montessori Lessons

A lesson in the classroom is often called a presentation. The teacher shows the child how to do an activity, often with limited language, and then turns the activity over to the child for their independent practice. When we've timed a lesson correctly, the material calls to the child's developmental needs, and we see repetition of the activity and satisfaction when the work is finished.

We don't see this exact scenario in every child. Sometimes a child's temperament inhibits their ability to work independently or to be comfortable with making errors. Sometimes a child has been conditioned into letting others do everything. These are the children that often need us to sit with them and offer encouragement to try. If your child falls into this category, we are happy to offer ideas to try at home to increase your child's comfort at trying new things and/or doing them alone or with a peer/sibling.

Our lessons at COS are for individual children or sometimes a small group. We don't expect a five-year-old who can read well to have to listen to others sound out 3 letter phonetic words. Similarly a five-year-old who doesn't know enough letter sounds will be frustrated if they are asked to read 3 letter phonetic words.

We don't typically have a daily "circle time" where an adult chosen "learning theme" is shared. At COS, we do this in a more organic way. We sing songs with topics related to the child's world. We put up artwork that reflects the seasons. We discuss foods and events. For instance, every fall we discuss and read books about the season changing to autumn and how this manifests in our natural world. Some classes make apple sauce, some carve pumpkins, some do leaf rubbings, some do all of those things. What we do not do, is plan these discussions and activities across classrooms on a weekly basis.

Occasionally, we do coordinate across the classrooms. For instance, for a number of years, at the start of school, Ms. Val gives classrooms monarch caterpillars she has collected. Children watch them grow, make a chrysalis, and then emerge as Monarch butterflies. Or we learn a lot about geography, but not during the same week in each classroom. Sometimes a classroom experiences a burst of interest in a specific curriculum area, often based on what one child does. Sometimes an area of study happens naturally and we can't recreate it year-to-year. For example, one year a class wrote the lyrics to songs, and we invited our music teacher and musically inclined parents in to compose the music.

## PLAY AS A LEARNING TOOL

Dr. Montessori said, "Play is the work of the child." And in a Montessori classroom our play is reality-based. Children can prepare real food, not cook in a pretend kitchen. Children use brooms to sweep, and there are multiple water-based activities such as window washing. Our language and mathematics activities are presented as games.

In the Montessori world, we call the activities in our classrooms "work" to recognize that the activities children do to aid their development are as important as our adult professions and responsibilities. It reflects the deep respect Dr. Montessori had for children, and we maintain that deep respect at COS.

To facilitate independence, concentration and learning at home, allow your child to have time for open-ended and uninterrupted play. The following themes are research-based reminders of the importance of play adapted from *Young Children in the Digital Age: A Parent's Guide* by Nancy Carlsson-Paige.

**Young children use their whole bodies and all of their senses to learn.**

They don't sit still at COS. Don't expect them to at home. Allow the use of their whole body to lift, move, carry, dance, jump, climb, and walk.

**Young children learn best from direct, first-hand experience.**

Your home is filled with the opportunity for learning by caring for oneself and the environment, either alongside you or by themselves.

**Young children learn by inventing ideas.**

At COS, we allow children to have "ah-ha" moments. Dr. Carlsson-Paige writes, "For genuine learning to happen, kids need to construct ideas for themselves, in their own minds. This is the kind of learning that is real and genuine and stays with us". Think open-ended activities and unstructured time. And don't give your child all the answers.

**Young children make sense of their world through play.**

Play is universal among the young and we do not need to teach our children how to play. When children play, they learn.

**Young children build inner-resilience and coping skills through play.**

Creative play is how children learn problem-solving, cooperation, self-regulation, self-control and how to make meaning of their experiences.

**Young children live and learn in the context of relationships.**

Be more intentional about the way you interact with your child, set expectations and limits. You do not need to be your child's friend. You need to be their parent. Young children feel safety and security when they know the limits.

## Preparing Your Child to Start School

Adjusting to school for the first time does not have to be an uncomfortable experience for either the parent or the child. Young children live in the present and concepts of future time can be confusing to them. Counting down the days until school starts only causes anxiety. Instead, begin to indirectly build the skills and schedules that will make the first day a smooth and easy transition, rather than an interruption of routine.

Now is the time to start to help develop your child's independence, concentration, and ability to choose. Begin teaching the skills, one at a time, that will allow your child to dress independently, help prepare and eat breakfast, and be responsible for getting ready to go. Then simply go on some small outings like running errands, until they are used to the routine of getting up and going.

Adjust your child's sleep schedule a few weeks before the start of school. Decide what time they will need to wake up to allow an unhurried start to the day. This is also a good time to reduce screen time - you won't want school to seem like a punishment the first day when it is turned off or drastically limited. When engaged with screens, children are rewarded for mere passivity. They won't be in the more natural state of mind they'll need to explore, experience, and be actively building their minds at school.



If you wish to discuss school with your child, do it in a low-key way such as noting 'Back to School' preparations in a store you may be visiting. If your child asks what school is and what they may do there, simply answer, "It's a place made especially for children where they can go each day to make friends, do their work, play games, and learn." Try not to prejudice your child or build up false expectations by being too specific about what they will do in school. That way, if they don't happen to paint (or whatever) on the first day, they won't be disappointed in either you or the school.

When their first day finally arrives and they are dressed and ready to go, you can announce that today is the day they get to go to school, to see the teachers, and meet other children. Following these simple suggestions can help make your child's beginning in school as successful and stress-free as possible.

## Curricular Aspects of a Montessori Primary Program

Our primary program focuses on these areas:

**Practical Life :** The foundational curriculum area of a Montessori primary classroom. The activity choices center on caring for oneself and others, caring for the classroom environment, grace and courtesy, and movement activities. These activities strengthen motor skills, foster concentration, and assist in building sequential thinking skills.

**Sensorial:** Hands-on materials such as the Pink Tower help children refine their senses and classify their world. Children learn descriptive language for the sensorial attributes of the exercises (thick and thin, sweet and sour, rough and smooth, loud and soft, cinnamon and cloves). This is an area that promotes exploration, creativity, and design.

**Mathematics:** Concrete materials, such as the Number Rods and the Golden Beads, represent quantity and teach abstract mathematical concepts such as counting, the decimal system, and arithmetic operations. Children work with large numbers into the thousands and even millions.

**Language:** Spoken language is the foundation for success in literacy. Phonemic awareness exercises, conversations, vocabulary enrichment, and sound games begin the first day in the classroom. Simultaneously, the Practical Life, Sensorial, and Metal Insets prepare the young child's hand strength for penmanship. Young children use materials such as the Sandpaper Letters and the Moveable Alphabet to lay the foundation for writing and later reading.

**Cultural Studies and Science:** all presented and used with hands-on activities. We use maps, flags, land and water forms, songs, stories, poems, classroom decorations, and books bring to life the world's geography and peoples. Science looks at the natural world around us, beginning with the categorizations of living and non-living.

**Art, Music and Movement:** Coloring, painting, singing, and dance are incorporated into daily classroom activities.

**Grace and Courtesy:** As noted briefly in the description of Practical Life, respect and empathy are rehearsed and practiced in the Primary classroom daily.

## Part II: General Information, Policies, and Procedures

### Our School

#### Mission

The mission of Children's Own School is to employ the philosophy and methods of Dr. Maria Montessori to:

- educate young people to be successful and valued members of the community,
- enable them to develop within themselves the foundational habits, attitudes, skills, and ideas which are essential for a lifetime of creative thinking and learning, and
- instill in them a deep sense of care of self, care of others, and care of the school environment.

#### Diversity Statement

The goal of Children's Own School is to build and maintain a welcoming and inspiring environment in which children of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and interests can develop and learn. Our firm commitment to racial, cultural, and economic pluralism is essential to our success as a school. Our children, families, faculty, and broader community reflect diversity: we are of assorted races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations. We have a range of family structures, beliefs, and physical abilities as well as learning styles.

#### Governance

Children's Own School is incorporated as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and managed by a Board of Directors. The Board upholds policies that govern the school and engages in strategic planning for the future success of COS. The Board establishes the school's mission, keeps and passes by-laws, determines tuition, and makes major financial and policy decisions. The Board oversees the finances of the Corporation and has all the powers of the Corporation. The Board is responsible for appointing, supporting, and supervising the Director. The Board generally meets monthly when school is in session.

#### Teaching Teams

The classroom teaching teams are comprised of two adults: a master teacher, also called a Montessori guide and a classroom assistant. They are uniquely qualified individuals who are dedicated to the Montessori principles of early childhood development. Our teachers support young children's natural curiosity by preparing indoor and outdoor environments based on Montessori principles that encourage a child's optimal development. All our teachers are certified in Infant, Child, and Adult First Aid and CPR.

Our master teachers are certified Montessori professionals, with graduate-level, specialized education. They respect children as individuals and create a calm and joyful atmosphere. They prepare an environment that allows each child to connect to productive work by giving appropriate presentations with Montessori materials. Once introduced, the children will work with the materials independently. The guides are available to assist children as they progress

towards independence and develop concentration. Our guides also communicate with parents, write reports, and conduct conferences.

Classroom assistants work with the Montessori guide to prepare and maintain an orderly, attractive, and joyful environment. They provide another pair of observant eyes and ears. Classroom assistants are also crucial in modeling courteous and respectful behavior, as well as contributing to the warm, supportive, and calm atmosphere that is the hallmark of Montessori classrooms and our school.

### **Administrative Team**

The Director works with the board, teachers and parents to provide a program that embodies the school's philosophy and mission, promotes the strength of a positive community, and strives to improve the financial and physical conditions of the school. The Director also manages daily administration and supervises the faculty.

The Curriculum Director coordinates implementation of the Montessori program across the classrooms, provides an additional professional opinion regarding the general needs of the classrooms and specific needs of individual children. The Curriculum Director is responsible for running staff meetings and helps to plan and deliver Montessori-inspired events for the school community.

The Office Manager coordinates with the entire school community to help daily operations run smoothly. The Office Manager is responsible for tuition invoicing, payroll and benefits, accounts payable, cash flow, and the school's financial systems. The Office Manager works with the Board Treasurer and Director on the annual budget and to prepare the annual audit.

### **Parent Committee**

The Parent Committee organizes and hosts special events throughout the year. Each classroom has a class parent who supports the work of the Parent Committee by facilitating communication between the classroom and families. They keep parents informed of upcoming events, organize food for events, and coordinate classroom contributions for teacher gifts throughout the year. The class parents are responsible for the weekly rotation of snack and fresh flowers, a role handled mainly by phone and email.

## Our Programs

### Toddler

Imagine your spirited toddler able to concentrate on a task, able to wait patiently for her turn with the puzzle, and walking around her friend's work rather than trampling all over it. Imagine a community of toddlers who truly enjoy each other's company and care about their friends' daily ups and downs.

"Help me to help myself" is the mantra of the growing toddler, and our program aids the child in developing self-care skills such as dressing and toileting. We work on building expressive language and vocabulary enrichment. Our classroom structure promotes concentration, problem solving, visual discrimination, and physical coordination.

The COS toddler classroom serves 9 children ages 15 months to around 36 months and provides a home-like, loving environment where children's abilities and needs are respected and met. Depending on the age when a child begins the toddler program, it may be a one- or two-year experience.

Children may enroll for a half day (8:30 am - 12:00 pm) or a school day and then stay for lunch and nap until 3:00 pm.

### Primary (often called Children's House from the Italian Casa Dei Bambini)

Our primary program is the "original" Montessori program and is designed specifically for children around 3 years-old through 6 years-old. Over the time in our primary program, children are given sequenced lessons designed to increase their skills and independence. Typically a three-year program for children that includes kindergarten, we have the ability to serve, and expect children, who join this program before they are three-years-old to enroll in their fourth, or kindergarten, year.

We offer three enrollment options:

- A half day program from 8:30 am - 12:00 pm.

This choice is ideal for three- and four-year-olds who have a family member or caregiver responsible for their supervision for the rest of the day

- A school day program from 8:30 am - 3:00 pm.

Younger children are welcome for the school day, and **Kindergarteners are expected to stay for the school day.**

Younger children have lunch at school, a rest time, if needed, and/or an afternoon Montessori work period, leaving school at 3:00 pm.

Kindergarteners have lunch with their classmates and participate in afternoon activities including an extended time in our traditional Montessori program along with activities such

as **music instruction** and **special programs such as Young Explorers**, where we bring outside institutions to like the Aquarium or Fine Arts Museum to visit instead of taking field trips. Each year they **perform a play** for classmates and parents at the end of the year.

- A full-day option from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm for families that need additional hours of child care.

**Families must elect this option when they first enroll in our primary program.** Children may not transfer into this option if a family needs additional child care during the school year or from year-to-year.

This program enrolls a maximum of 20 children.

Child care is available from 8:00 am - 8:30 am and again from 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm. During the school day, children enjoy the same Montessori primary program as children enrolled in the half day or school day option.

If a family's needs change, children will remain in this classroom but can decrease to a half or school day schedule.

Children develop close relationships during their time in the primary program. They stay in the same classroom for their entire experience at COS. Children move freely between all areas of the classroom: Practical Life, Sensorial, Mathematics, and Language. Geography and science are presented in a sensorial manner and woven throughout the curriculum areas. Art, music, songs, and storytelling are part of the child's daily experiences. Once children have been introduced to specific activities they are free to choose to use the materials and work with activities that appeal to them.

### **Kindergarten at Children's Own School**

Unlike a traditional kindergarten program, the final year of the primary classroom cycle is really a "capstone" experience. Our Montessori curriculum is a spiral curriculum that builds on itself. For example, the language curriculum for three-year-olds starts with spoken language games and moves onto letter sounds. The work of the three- and four-year old is realized in the five-year-old. We do not offer a specific kindergarten curriculum. The kindergarten year allows for a full and complete exploration of the Montessori primary curriculum.

These oldest students are confident in who they are; they are the role models and leaders of the class; they apply the skills and knowledge gleaned in the prior years and extend their work into more advanced mathematics and language activities. All the threads of the Montessori primary program come together for the child in their final year.

Early elementary academic skills, particularly reading, emerge at different times for different children. That said, COS primary graduates typically enter first grade as practiced readers, and mathematical competencies, as well as strong social/emotional skills and generosity.

Kindergarteners participate in weekly music instruction with an early childhood music educator. They attend special programming through our Young Explorers program, where institutions like the Boston Museum of Fine Arts or the New England Aquarium bring their knowledge and programming to school. They rehearse and perform a play at the end of the school year for their parents and classmates.

**French**

According to Montessori theory, children under the age of six have a superpower called the Absorbent Mind, and this is the aspect of development we use to “teach” an additional language. Our language specialist spends a morning in every classroom, conversing with children in French, introducing songs and vocabulary in French in small groups, all within the regular, daily Montessori classroom experience.

**Art and Music**

Art and music are integrated in the classroom. Kindergarteners attend a music instruction program in the afternoon that is taught by an early childhood music instructor.

## Communication

Frequent and open communication between home and school is crucial to the effective functioning of the school and the well-being of each child.

We use a number of methods to make sure we present the information you need in a clear and timely manner. Reading our Parent Handbook is essential for all parents and caregivers. Please refer first to the Parent Handbook during the school year when you have questions.

While frequent communication is important, there are times that are not appropriate to pass along information about your child to staff.

***Drop off and pick up is not the time to ask for or share information.***

***These transition times require us (parents and teachers) to be fully focused on supervising young children.***

**Contacting Your Child's Teacher** - a warm communication with your child's guide is the principle vehicle for questions that may arise concerning your child.

Please do not hesitate to call the office or send a note in to your child's teacher with information concerning your child or for a call back if you have questions.

Please understand that teachers are not usually available to answer or return calls during classroom hours, and that they will be in contact with you as soon as possible.

Classroom email should only be used to: 1) inform, and 2) request a meeting or phone call.

Please inform your child's teacher if there is a change in the home situation: death, divorce, relocation, a new baby, friends or relatives visiting, either parent leaving for a trip, a new babysitter or caregiver, a change in carpool or the child's daily routine or any fears or significant bad dreams.

A change at home probably will be reflected simultaneously or subsequently in behavior at school. **The more information we have, the more helpful and supportive we can be to your child.**

COS teaching staff do not have the luxury of checking and answering email the way other professionals may be expected to do. Expect a reply to email within 24 hours if an answer is needed.

***These are the best lines to follow in communicating with the school about your child's progress and continuity at COS:***

### *Parent/Teacher*

Many times a child's development presents hard issues to consider. Working directly with the teacher in a spirit of collaboration is the most effective way to resolve any issue, and to build a solid partnership

between school and home for future work.

You are, by definition, your child's advocate. At the same time, the school is also an advocate for your child; we each bring our own view of the situation. Our faculty's experience and developmental training help them to evaluate and make sense of their observations of your child. We want to work together with you, on the same side of the table, to develop mutual understanding in the interest of your child.

Your child's teacher is the best person to communicate questions or concerns about your child, but if either you or the teacher feels the need for a fresh perspective, we will happily arrange a meeting to include the parent, teacher, and school director.

#### *Parent/Director*

The Director has an open door policy and you are welcome to stop in with a quick question or information to share. It is always best to schedule a meeting if your concern is serious. Parents are welcome to contact the Director with matters pertaining to observation of the classrooms, referrals for service, special events, and administrative issues.

**Contacting the Office** - Most calls during school hours are answered the same day, but if you get the voicemail system during school hours, please wait a few minutes and try again or leave a message. We are a small administrative staff. We often have responsibilities in classrooms or around other parts of the school and can not always answer every phone call.

The Office Manager is able to answer many of your questions by email or phone, and is able to take a message for your child's teacher if you would like to speak with her. The Office Manager can answer most general questions about daily operations at the school and is the person to answer questions about invoices, statements, or the status of your account.

#### **Contacting the Board**

The Board is available to speak about school governance, finances, and school leadership. The Board can address questions about the mission and vision of the school and long-range strategic planning. They welcome your interest in serving on the Board of Directors, and can inform you about the nomination process and the extent of the commitment of service. The entire Board of Directors can be contacted by email at [board@childrensown.org](mailto:board@childrensown.org).

#### **Contacting the Parent Committee**

The Parent Committee chairpeople are available to speak to parents about volunteering at all-school events. They can address questions about the community, fundraising efforts, and all-school initiatives. They are instrumental in working with the Director to support and sustain the teaching staff. They may be reached by email at [parentscommittee@childrensown.org](mailto:parentscommittee@childrensown.org)



## Special Communication

### *Parent/Teacher Conferences*

Formal conferences are held twice a year. Sign-up is done electronically. Each conference is an in-person meeting, and parents receive written progress reports from the teacher. It is important that both parents attend these conferences. COS is closed for children on the days of parent/teacher conferences.

Additional meetings may be set up with your child's Montessori guide as needed.

### *Communication from School*

We use email and photo links as our primary way to communicate information that all families need to be aware of such as upcoming school events.

*Transparent Classroom* is the system we use for electronic enrollment documents and classroom record keeping.

*School Cues* is used for specific communication such as conference sign-up, newsletters, injury reports, etc.

Families are expected to create accounts with both *Transparent Classroom* and *School Cues*.

### *Notes Home*

Children will occasionally be given notes to take home. These will be placed in the child's lunch box or given to the person who picks up your child. A copy of notes sent home may also be sent via email.

### *Referral for Evaluation or Development Services*

If a staff member is concerned about a child's development, behavior, social/emotional or medical needs, she will document her observations in writing and review her concerns with the director. Additionally, behavioral concerns will be documented with an *incident report* as a means to share information about behavioral concerns with a child's family. The teachers will meet with parents to notify them of their concern and will document this meeting in writing. They will summarize their observations and efforts made to accommodate the child's needs.

COS staff will offer information about referral sources to the parents who will be encouraged to call or request in writing a developmental evaluation. If parents need extra support the school may, with written consent, contact the referral agency for the family. COS will also get written consent for information obtained during the evaluation process to be shared with COS. If a parent makes arrangements directly with a service provider for evaluation or treatment services to occur at COS, parents must provide written consent for these services that the school will maintain in the child's record.

If it is determined that the child is not in need of services from the agency or is ineligible to receive services from the agency, the school will review the child's progress regularly to determine if another referral is necessary and that the child's needs are being met at COS. As needed, staff will meet with the family to discuss how the child is progressing and written documentation will be given to the family via progress report.

### *Suspension and Termination Plan*

Our goal at COS is to partner with parents to provide a safe environment for all. When parents and teachers work together, and early intervention takes place, children who exhibit challenging behaviors can develop appropriate ones. When challenging behavior is observed, staff will determine whether an incident report should be filled out. Like an injury report, this is a way to document the circumstances of the event and how it was dealt with by staff, as well as serving as a mechanism to inform parents.

As much as possible, we try to solve behavioral issues within the classroom community through the use of grace and courtesy lessons and techniques of conflict resolution. When a child's behavior requires direct intervention from a teacher, the following techniques will be used to manage individual instances of misbehavior: redirection to another activity, directing the child to work independently and/or at a suitable distance from the group, and as a final action, gently removing the child from the classroom. When the latter occurs, an adult will always remain with the child.

When faced with on-going challenging behavior from a child at school, the first step will be to arrange a meeting with the family to discuss concerns and determine the best course of action (i.e. monitoring behavior, referral for evaluation or services, strategies to implement in the classroom and at home).

For children receiving services or in the process of evaluation, COS teachers are available to communicate with the provider and to learn about and implement strategies to assist the child in the classroom. Written parental permission to coordinate services and share information is required in these instances.

If the child's behavior continues to disrupt the functioning of the classroom, the parents will be contacted to explain further options, up to removing the child from COS. The Parent Handbook has a policy on termination of a child from our program entitled *Withdrawal* in the section on *Enrollment*.

## Daily Schedule and Logistics

A typical day at Children's Own School:

Child care (primary program specific)	8:00 am - 8:30 am
Arrival	8:30 am - 8:40 am
Morning Work Cycle (lessons and play)	8:30 am - 11:30 pm
Morning dismissal (playground)	11:55 am - 12:00 pm
Lunch/Recess	11:30 am - 1:00 pm
Afternoon Work Cycle (lessons and play)	1:00 pm - 2:45 pm
Afternoon dismissal (playground)	2:45 pm - 3:00 pm
Child Care (primary program specific)	3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

### Attendance: Why it Matters

Consistent attendance is important. The children who benefit most from the prepared environment are those who attend regularly. Young children thrive on routine.

- A consistent routine provides security for the young child, which in turn enables learning.
- A child's experience in the classroom and with the materials is cumulative; consistent attendance bolsters learning.
- Your own commitment to your child's presence in school affirms the importance of school and learning.
- Intermittent attendance can affect both your child's adaptation to school and their learning.

Please schedule family vacations and trips to coincide with school holidays and schedule appointments with doctors, dentists, and other professionals outside classroom hours whenever possible. If your child has an appointment that will detain them, please inform the office via phone or email ahead of time.

### Getting to School on Time

**School begins at 8:30 am and a prompt arrival allows for the expected three-hour work period of a Montessori classroom. Out of respect for your own child, the classroom community, the other children, and the teachers, please help your child arrive at school on time.**

We expect all children to be at school regularly at 8:30am. When younger children arrive late, it disturbs their sense of order: their sense of what is right and what is expected, of how things are supposed to be. Late arrivals also disrupt the classroom community, the work of the other children, and the teacher.

COS faculty are available to receive children during our drop off window from 8:30 – 8:40 am and escort them to their classrooms. If you arrive after the drop-off period, please ring the front doorbell to be admitted to the office. Children are considered tardy if they arrive after 8:40 am. Persistent tardiness or absenteeism may affect the decision to offer a child re-enrollment for the following school year.

## **Drop-off Expectations**

### **Parents or caregivers are typically not invited into the school at drop-off.**

In our experience, most children recover from separation anxiety or a difficult drop-off quickly once in the classroom. A parent's presence can prolong the big feelings. Call and check in if you are still concerned after a half hour.

If your child does not settle in the classroom (for example, persistent crying for an hour) on any particular day, we will ask that someone come and pick up the child.

If it turns out not to be just-a-brief-transitional adjustment, we will make a plan, COS and the family together, that provides consistency and comfort for the child.

### **Please let your children walk to the school entrance.**

They do not need to be carried, and letting them walk conveys so much - you believe they are ready for school and everything that will happen over their day.

Being a Montessori parent means doing less for your child as they become capable, supporting their natural drive(s) to independence (there are many and at various stages of development), and finally, showing and helping rather than doing things.

### **Please expect your child to hold your hand when you are walking to the school entrance.**

This is about safety. Montessori parents respect independence, and they also set appropriate boundaries.

### **Mobile phone use during drop-off and pick-up is prohibited.**

Phones are a distraction when children need our attention and supervision. Whether you are driving or walking/biking, give your child your full attention during arrival and dismissal. Allowing your child to watch or do anything on phone to and from school will make drop off more challenging, and you will be less likely to hear about your child's day.

### **Please be mindful of our neighbors.**

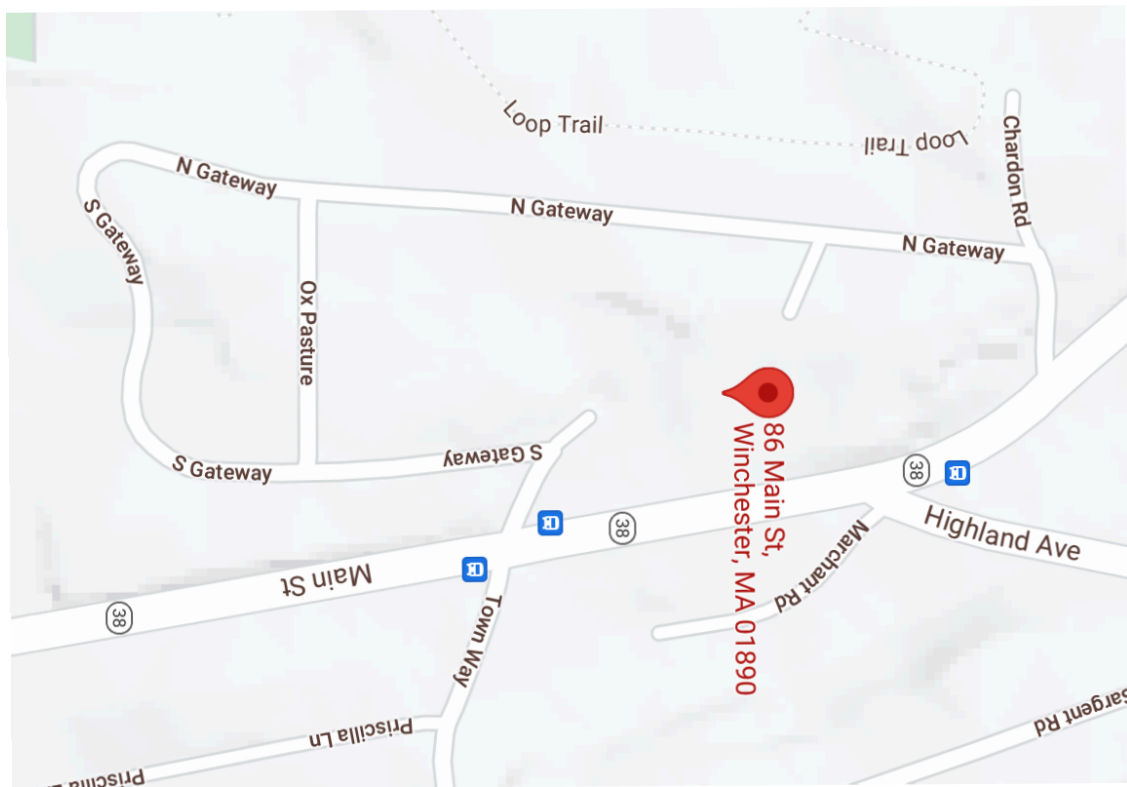
- Park so that you do not make it difficult for them to arrive at or leave their homes.
- Follow traffic laws.
- "Drive like your children live here".
- Do not block the shared driveway!

**Please do not park in the car line.**

The block(s) of Main Street, leading to the COS entry driveway, heading toward Medford, are **NO PARKING** zones.



### Parking Options for Drop Off



Toddler families/caregivers must park and walk to the front door for drop off. Toddler families should park on Main Street.

Primary families/caregivers may park on Main Street past or across from COS. Parking is also available on N. Gateway.

Do not park or drive on Meriden Street.

Do not make a U-Turn on Town Way to reverse direction.

### **Car Line Option for Drop Off**

If you'd rather not get out of your car, you may pull into the COS circular driveway. COS teachers will assist your child in getting out of the car and walking into school. COS teachers will be directing traffic and a small group of children will be taken in together to allow the car line to advance.

## **Do not pull into the driveway if you expect to get out of your car!**

If you do pull into the driveway and your child is not cooperating, COS teachers will ask you to continue driving out the drive, turn right on S. Gateway, and park on N. Gateway and walk your child in that morning.

When you pull out of the COS driveway, you must turn right. Either turn right on S. Gateway to reverse direction back into Winchester or turn left on Town Way and follow streets to get to Highland or the rotary.

### **Picking Up Your Child**

We dismiss from our playgrounds unless the weather prohibits outside dismissal. Come to the playground gate to pick up your child. Once the teacher has released your child, your child is once again under your supervision. ***Children are never allowed inside the building without adult supervision after they have been released to an authorized adult.***

Please be sensitive to your child's pick-up time. Children who have not been picked up on time (12:00pm, 3:00 pm, or 5:00pm, depending on how they are enrolled) will be waiting in the office. After three late pick-ups past 5:00 pm, the child will be required to be picked up at 4:30 pm so as not to inconvenience COS staff at the end of their scheduled day.

Even if you have called the school to say you are going to be a few minutes late, your child will be waiting in the office. The Director or Office Manager will be waiting with your child and will record the date and time of late pick-up. Please come in through the front door where you will be let in.

If you have a scheduling conflict, such as needing to pick up another child at another school, we ask that you arrange to pick up your COS child before going elsewhere. We expect all caregivers to be on time for pick-up. In the event of an unavoidable delay, please call the school at 781-729-2689.

### ***Special Circumstances Pick-Up***

Pick-up by someone other than the parent/guardian or regular caregiver needs to be authorized daily. Please call or email if a friend, neighbor, new caregiver, or family member will be picking up your child.

It is always best if your child's teachers are introduced ahead of time to someone, other than yourself, who will be picking up your child. Before releasing your child, teachers will check identification of people they don't recognize.

### **Snow Days/Inclement Weather**

Children's Own School always closes for snowstorms and other severe weather whenever the Winchester Public Schools close. There are various listings on the Internet, radio, and TV. You can also call the Winchester Public School Link Line at 781-721-7004 or go to their website.

The school may also close even though public schools are open, if the Director determines it is in the best interest of the children or the school to do so. Notification will be sent as early as possible in this event.

If Winchester has a one-hour delay, COS will as well. However, if there is a two-hour delay in Winchester, our morning programs will be cancelled. Our afternoon programs will begin at noon, and children will bring lunch as usual.

Occasionally when severe weather develops during the school day, afternoon classes are cancelled on short notice. An all-school email will be sent out in this event, and parents will be telephoned as needed.

## Everyday Life

Many parents ask questions about what kind of foods to pack for lunch, snacks, appropriate clothing, how children are encouraged to conduct themselves at school, and how to celebrate your child's birthday. Many of your questions will be answered here.

### **Nutrition**

What people eat is, on one hand, highly personal with roots in culture and even religion. At COS we are very aware and respectful of this point in our community. On the other hand, diet is a major factor for children's sound growth and development, and how well they function, attend, and learn on a daily basis. The principles we try to promote for healthy nutrition for children this age include: appropriately sized servings, additive free foods, and the avoidance of processed and pre-packaged food.

Food is not just the essential fuel for our bodies, it also serves a social function. At COS we promote this aspect of food by conducting snack and lunchtime in a way that provides for this social element and the exercise of the common grace and courtesies related to food.

If your child has any food sensitivities, please make this clear when filling out your paperwork. If special measures must be taken to protect your child, such as providing an *EpiPen*, then please speak directly to your child's teachers and review the requirements in the Health and Safety Section.

### **Snack**



Children's Own School serves a snack each day in every classroom. Snacks vary, depending on class food restrictions, and usually include a carbohydrate along with a fruit, vegetable, or a protein. We serve filtered water each day at snack.

### **Water**

Water is available for children to drink throughout the day and children are encouraged to drink water when they are thirsty at any time during the day.

### **Lunch**





Children staying for afternoons bring their lunches. Foods that children can manage without help are the most popular: small sandwiches, baby carrots, cherry tomatoes, berries, cheese and crackers, raisins, peeled hard boiled eggs, etc. Small individual containers that children can open and close independently are a better option than pre-packed food marketed as an individual serving. Many families have discovered bento lunch boxes as illustrated above.

Teachers encourage children to eat their lunches. Any food not consumed will be sent home each day. Lunch boxes cannot be refrigerated at school. Please use an insulated bag and cold pack if needed.

### **Classroom food preparation**

As part of the practical life, care of self curriculum, classroom have many food preparations on hand throughout the year. There is always some type of food preparation activity available for children who are hungry after snack or lunch.

### **Nut Free Environment**

Children's Own School is a **NUT-FREE** school. Because people who are severely allergic can have an anaphylactic reaction to trace amounts of peanuts or tree nuts, we must request the cooperation of all COS families and staff.

We ask everyone to make a conscious effort to keep peanut butter and any foods consisting of or containing peanuts or tree nuts away from our school and school grounds. Please do not use peanuts, peanut products, nuts, or nut products when preparing food that your child will bring to school.

Please read ingredient labels on packaged foods.

Any food sent into COS to be shared with the class must have been made in a **total nut-free facility**.

Children are not allowed to share food they bring nor trade food with their classmates.

COS cannot guarantee the school to be peanut/nut-free, but with the cooperation of all families and staff members, we will be able to minimize the risk of any allergic reactions.

## ***Clothing***

### **General Guidelines**

**Commercial-character free clothing is preferred.** Please consider what you allow to be advertised on your child's body and why you buy these items for them. If a child comes to school wearing clothes that are distracting to the child or the classroom, we may ask them to change or remove the item.

If dressing is a battle at home, it can be helpful to offer your child a choice of two options of clothing to avoid struggles over what to wear to school. For example, "Would you like to wear this blue shirt or the orange one?" Feel free to remind your child of the school's guidelines and rules to reinforce your direction on what to wear.

Children take pride in being able to dress themselves. When choosing clothes for your child, look for front openings and simple fastenings, such as large, loose buttons and easy zippers. Children frequently have to change clothing at COS. Please let them dress themselves at home and show them how to put an item on and off. We don't really care how nicely they are dressed. We prefer that they can dress independently. Save the tight pants with buttons and zippers, the fancy dresses, the button down shirts, and close fitting sweaters for special occasions. Clothing that is easy to manipulate also helps children prevent bathroom "accidents."

## Outerwear

The children will have outdoor playtime every day, except during truly inclement weather. This should be taken into consideration when dressing your child. In rainy weather, this means raincoats and rain boots. In winter, snow pants and boots are nice for warmth, even if it's not snowy. Don't forget hats and mittens or gloves! Mittens/gloves must be waterproof when there is snow on the ground.

All-in-one snow suits are easier for children to put on by themselves. Consider this option instead of snow pants and a jacket.

Your child should wear their outside gear to school and carry their lunchbox in hand. During the winter, if putting on snow pants to come to school is an additional and unneeded step, they can carry those over their other arm.



## Shoes

Please choose **closed-toe outdoor shoes** that are safe and comfortable for your child to run, climb, and play in outside. If your child has not mastered lacing, please consider buying shoes with Velcro fasteners. Shoes worn to school should enable your child to safely run, climb, play, and work outdoors.

**Sandals, clogs, Crocs, or flip flops are not safe for the level of outdoor activity that children engage in during the day.**



## Classroom Indoor Shoes



At COS, as in many Montessori schools, our students wear indoor shoes. Our New England weather often requires rain or snow boots for outdoor play. Indoor shoes allow your child to wear weather-appropriate gear to school and still be comfortable in the classroom. They also keep the environment as clean as possible.

Indoor shoes are worn all day, and they should be comfortable, safe, and sturdy. We prefer a pair of shoes that are left at school, but if you choose slippers for indoor shoes, please choose ones that support independence, stay on your child's feet, and do not have large, floppy heads or other distracting details. Your child's teacher can provide guidance on the type of indoor shoe they prefer. Children have an indoor shoe drawer in their cubby.

### **Jewelry, Toys, and other Distractions**

Children may not bring certain personal belongings to school including toys, costume jewelry, money, blankets, etc. to school. This creates a distraction from the school day, and there is the possibility that the item may become lost or broken. Please consult with your child's teacher if you have questions or concerns.

### **Labeling**

Please label all clothing with name tags or with a permanent marker. Mittens, hats, boots and yellow raincoats are especially easy to mix up.

We ask for your help with this because many children will not claim their own clothing.

We will use a permanent marker to discretely put your child's name on their clothing if we notice it is not labeled.

### **Cubbies/Storage of child's belongings**

Each child has a cubby labeled with his or her name and/or picture. This is a place where the child's personal belongings can be kept safely at school. There is ample room for coats and sweaters, a change of clothes, and a lunch box.

Our cubbies are not large enough for backpacks and children in preschool do not need backpacks. School backpacks are for carrying textbooks and homework between the home and school. We have neither at COS. Please save your child's backpack for carrying items they will use to entertain themselves while traveling or for overnight trips.

Teachers check your child's cubby daily for lunch boxes, wet clothes, and other things that need to go home. Occasionally a teacher may leave a note in your child's lunchbox with a request for additional clothing.

Please send a PUL wet bag to school so we may send wet or soiled clothing home and minimize the use of plastic bags.

### **Lost And Found**

Labeling your child's possessions will minimize the risk of any of them ending up in the Lost and Found, which is located in the foyer by the side double glass doors. If your child is missing any belongings, check the Lost and

Found bin because unclaimed clothes, shoes, toys, and other personal articles are periodically donated to charity.

## Toileting

Some children who have already mastered using the toilet have trouble adjusting at school and have wetting episodes. This is normal, but feel free to ask your child's teacher or the director for information or advice if you have concerns. This is one reason we ask families to provide an extra change of clothes to have available in your child's cubby. Feel free to contact the director if you have any questions about our toileting process, toilet learning, or other areas of development.

Unless there is a medical or health condition that contraindicates a child using the toilet, we expect that all children enrolling in the primary program at COS are working on mastering toilet learning. Independence is promoted by our Montessori philosophy, lessons, and activities. We specifically teach children activities to care for themselves, others, and the classroom environment. Learning to use the toilet is an important step toward independence that should happen while a child is a toddler, though we understand the process is different for every family.

COS staff are always available to help a child who needs assistance in the toileting process or to clean up and change when a child has had a toileting accident. In keeping with Montessori philosophy, children who have had a toileting accident will be cleaned and changed while standing up.

Children who enroll in our primary program and are not yet independent in their toileting are asked to wear underwear. Children are frequently asked to use the toilet by classroom staff, and we have found, that for most children in this category, if they arrive at school not yet potty trained, they quickly learn (within a matter of weeks) this important self care activity. It is important that families continue with the practice at home. For children in the process of toilet learning, regular communication between school and home will take place to help the child successfully master the process.

Children who enroll in our toddler program will be actively working on toilet learning throughout their day as developmentally appropriate. We hope that the majority of the children in this program will be wearing underwear while at school, though they may arrive and leave in diapers. Again, regular communication between school and home is important in this process. If a child needs to be wearing diapers, the family is responsible for providing a supply to the school.

## Separation Anxiety

Even children who have previously been in school may have difficulty making new transitions. Do not be alarmed if you see regressions to stages (crying, baby talk, loud vocalizations, etc.) you thought your child had finished. Teachers use a variety of strategies to comfort a child with separation anxiety, and children often calm down and move on with their day long before the adult who experienced the child's distraught behavior. You are welcome to call the school to see how your child has settled in on days where separating has been a struggle. Any concerns you have about separation anxiety your child may be experiencing can be discussed with the Director and your child's teacher.

## Grace and Courtesy

When parents choose to enroll their child in Children's Own School, they are choosing a special community. COS strives to provide opportunities for each child, teacher, parent, and staff member to be a successful and valued member of the community. We understand that a community functions most successfully with shared norms of behavior and expectations.

We encourage everyone at COS to take care of themselves, take care of others, and take care of our school environment. When all adult members of our school follow these principles of respect, we provide countless examples for our children to emulate. When we are consistent in these standards, we are raising children to become productive and successful members of the greater world community. We expect all adults to support the Montessori lessons of grace and courtesy by their own example.

- Treat all people with courtesy and respect;
- Address conflicts in a calm and private manner, taking care not to use raised voices or name calling;
- Respect the privacy of adults and children;
- Refrain from passing along information that might be hurtful to someone or is not intended as public knowledge;
- Refrain from complaining to someone other than the person(s) with whom you have an issue. Address the issue directly.

Our Office Manager manages our email lists and may send essential and time-sensitive messages via e-mail. Parent contact information is provided in the Class Lists and in the Family Directory. This personal contact information is solely for the use of COS families. It is not to be distributed or used by other individuals or organizations. Please send any email you would like to send to the school community to the Director or Office Manager for review and approval.

The use of broadcast emails, blogs, or public websites to contact fellow parents about sensitive issues involving COS policy, teachers, staff, or students is inappropriate.

COS Board members are not charged with oversight of day-to-day school management. Please address these concerns with the Director.

## Child Guidance Policy

The goal of our child guidance policy is to maximize the growth and development of children and to protect the group and the individuals within it. Child guidance is used in a consistent, reasonable, and appropriate way based on an understanding of the individual needs and development of a child. Child guidance is based on setting clear, age-appropriate, experience-appropriate limits, offering alternative behaviors, and giving choices. Child guidance policies apply to all school events on all school property.

## Traditions

### *School-based Traditions*

#### **Flower Arranging**

As part of the Montessori curriculum, children are given lessons in flower arranging. They fill vases with flowers and greenery, which beautify the classroom and school environment. The classroom parents organize a weekly schedule for parents to provide fresh flowers. Most flowers are welcome; please avoid flowers with thorns or strong aromas. As a general guideline, parents typically bring one dozen of two different but complimentary flowers and assorted greenery. The teachers will place the flowers in large water basins until the children are ready to arrange!

#### **Kindergarten Play**

Each spring the children of kindergarten age from all four primary classrooms come together for several weeks in the afternoon to learn and rehearse a play that is performed for their schoolmates and again for families.

#### **Birthdays**

Each classroom has a slightly different procedure for celebrating birthdays. Your room parent will let you know how and when your child's birthday will be celebrated. If your child's birthday is in the summer, please consult with the teacher if it is appropriate to celebrate your child's birthday at another time during the school year. In the classroom, we prepare a nut-free, dairy-free, egg-free cake (and gluten free when necessary) the birthday child may share with the community.

### *Orientation And Educational Events*

#### **Orientation for All COS Parents**

Parent Orientation is held in the evening before school begins in September. This is an important evening where we welcome our new and continuing parents for the new school year. The Director, teachers, and assistants will introduce themselves. The Board president and Parent Committee chair will formally welcome you and present opportunities for community participation.

#### **New Student Orientation**

New student orientation takes place before school starts. Children new to our school are welcomed into the classroom for fifteen minutes with their parents/caregiver. They will meet their teachers and familiarize themselves with the school environment.

#### **Montessori Education and Information**

Throughout the year, parents are invited to different events organized by the staff. These events are designed to help parents with practical information about child development and specific information about Montessori philosophy. Parents are encouraged to bring questions about the classroom, curriculum, and stages of development. Dates and times for these events will be announced in the newsletter.

## *School Support Events*

### **Board of Directors Meetings**

Board meetings are open to all members of our community. The elected members of the Board vote on important leadership and financial decisions throughout the year. A teacher representative, a parent representative, and the Director attend Board meetings as non-voting members.

### **Open House**

Each fall we hold an open house when parents are invited to visit our school on a Saturday morning when children are not present. We encourage you to invite friends who may be interested in enrolling their children at COS to this event.

### **COS Annual Auction**

This is our biggest fundraiser of the year and we encourage you to contribute, attend, and invite friends! The money raised annually is dedicated to classroom materials and supplies.

### **Parent Volunteers**

Anyone who will regularly volunteer at COS while school is operating, will be oriented to their role, supervision and expectations along with receiving any training that is necessary for their position. All volunteers must be under the visual supervision of an EEC qualified staff member. The time spent by volunteers will be documented on a time sheet and maintained by the office manager. Regular volunteers will be required to complete a Background Record Check through the state of Massachusetts, Department of Early Education and Care.

Occasional parent volunteers do not need a BRC run, but they are not allowed unsupervised access to children. Any parent who volunteers for an event at school will defer to COS staff when a child needs assistance, excepting their own child. For example, taking a child to the bathroom or accompanying them to another area of the school without a staff member present.

## Enrollment

### **Classroom Assignments**

Our primary classrooms are made up of children 2.9 to 6 years of age. The children stay in the same primary classroom to develop a close knit family community. Parent input, in writing, is welcome prior to decisions about classroom assignments. You are invited to provide information about your child's friendships, temperament, and/or learning style that you feel might help the school determine the best class placement. Please remember that the Director, teachers and staff are looking only for helpful descriptions of your child; please do not make specific teacher or classroom requests. We work hard to balance our communities by a number of factors and cannot promise any specific assignment. Siblings may be in the same room, but placement with a sibling is not guaranteed.

### **Re-Enrollment**

Re-enrollment contracts are distributed to all current families in February. To re-enroll your child for the following school year, please submit your contract and deposit before the deadline indicated at the bottom of the contract. You will have only two weeks to submit your contract and deposit, so please plan ahead. The deposit for our programs is a month's tuition, applied to the first payment. Deposits are non-refundable.

### **Sibling Admissions**

We give preference in admission to siblings of current students and alumni when those older siblings have enrolled for the full developmental cycle of our primary program (meaning they leave COS to enter first grade). Otherwise, siblings are considered as any other new applicant. Sibling applications are due by December 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **Withdrawal**

The school reserves the right to dismiss any student whose behavior or lack of cooperation is deemed unacceptable, or whose parents no longer have a cooperative relationship with the school. Uncooperative behavior at Children's Own School includes but is not limited to a sustained disregard for school policy, non-payment of tuition, disparagement of the school's faculty, administration, board, or families, or behavior that creates an unsafe or uncooperative environment for children, parents, or teachers.

### **Scholarships**

Scholarships are available to continuing and incoming COS families, and awards are based on financial need. If a family needs a scholarship, it is the responsibility of the parent(s) to obtain, complete, and submit the application. Whether or not your child is currently enrolled, in order to qualify for a scholarship for September, you must submit your completed application along with copies of your tax returns no later than February 15th. If your family is receiving a scholarship for the current school year there is no guarantee that your family will receive a scholarship for the next school year. Families currently on scholarship who seek financial assistance for next year must follow the same procedure and meet the same deadlines as prospective/incoming families.

Applications will not be considered if they are late or incomplete or do not include copies of tax returns. Any family with an unpaid balance after February 28th is ineligible for a scholarship. Endowment funds for scholarships are limited currently, and we must require that families receiving scholarships pay a minimum of \$2,000 per child per school year.

## ***Payment and Fees***

### **Tuition Payments**

There are two options for tuition payment plans for our Montessori programs. You choose the plan when you sign your contract. After your deposit is subtracted, the balance can be invoiced in two installments (half due August 1<sup>st</sup> and



half due March 1<sup>st</sup>) or nine installments (one-ninth due the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, August through April).

Prompt payment is essential to the financial well being of the school. Late payments are subject to interest, which will be added to your balance. Payments overdue by more than 30 days will trigger the acceleration of the payment date for the remaining tuition balance for the school year, which will become immediately due and payable.

## Fundraising/Development

Children's Own School is a non-profit preschool, so fundraising is essential. We do all we can to keep our tuition from being excessive, but at the same time we need to attract and hold onto highly qualified teachers and staff, and maintain our beloved building. Our board, staff and parents devote time and effort to the following development initiatives:

- Annual Fund
- Annual Auction

If your company matches charitable contributions or if you know of a potential source of grants or funding, we would very much appreciate you giving our Director or Office Manager the contact information.

### **Volunteer And Donation Opportunities**

At the beginning of the school year, COS will provide each family with a list of volunteer opportunities. Parents who would like to volunteer to help the school throughout the year are encouraged to talk to the Parent Committee Chair, a class parent, or send an email to the office.

### **COS Tax I.D. Number**

Children's Own School's tax I.D. number is 04-600-6613. This is the number that you will need for tax returns to deduct tuition and charitable contributions. If you have a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) for dependent care through your employer, you will need this number for reimbursement.

## Health and Safety

Our health policy has been designed with both adults and children in mind. One of our biggest dilemmas is caring for a child who becomes sick while at school. While there is no entirely satisfactory solution, in most cases it is not in the best interest of the individual or the group for an ill child to finish out the day at COS. We understand that it is difficult for parents to miss work or other commitments, but we need to ask you to take your child home if she/he has a contagious illness, or requires prolonged individual staff attention that interferes with the safety and normal functioning of the group.

COS will not discriminate against children, parents, teachers, or staff because of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) status. Any HIV positive member of the community will be encouraged to remain at the school for as long as is appropriate to their state of health and to the well-being of the school community. Any questions or concerns should be addressed in confidence with the Director.

***All parents are expected to observe the school's health policies for the safety of their own children, other children and their families, teachers, and staff.***

### ***Monitor for symptoms and stay home when sick***

This applies to Covid, as well as any other time your child seems to be under the weather or is complaining of not feeling well.

Stay home if exposed to a Covid-19 positive individual, or anyone awaiting test results.

Sick individuals will be isolated from their classroom until they can be picked up.

### ***Call If Late or Absent***

Please be sure to telephone the school at 781-729-2689 if your child will be absent or more than 30 minutes late. This is important so we know that your child is safe.

If we do not hear from you, we will check-in via email.

If your child is ill, please give us any symptom information we should report to the teachers so they are aware of contagions.

### ***Hold Children's Hands in the Driveway***

Always hold your child's hand when walking through the parking lot; it is the best way to avoid injury. If you need assistance with this, please ask a teacher or staff member.

**No Idling**

Do not idle your car engine in the driveway or on Main Street. Please remember to turn off your car engine when dropping off or picking up your child. Better for little lungs and our environment.

**Wash Hands**

Hand washing helps prevent the spread of illness.

We ask children to frequently wash their hands throughout the day, including after toileting, before food preparation or eating, when arriving and returning to the classroom from outdoors.

Wash hands after breakfast if handling and/or consuming foods containing peanuts or tree nuts. This will prevent possible life-threatening reactions from our children with nut allergies.

**No Smoking, Etc.**

Smoking in or near the building or anywhere on school grounds is prohibited. The school will not release any child to any adult, including a parent, who is intoxicated.

**Picking up a Sick Child**

Any child experiencing **ANY** of the following must be sent home:

- Fever of 101° or higher
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Suspected communicable illness or infection
- Illness that prevents child from participating

Children may return to school only if they meet **ALL** of these criteria:

- Fever-free without fever-reducing medication for 24 hours
- Diarrhea-free for 24 hours
- Vomit-free for 24 hours
- If taking medication for a communicable illness, on it for at least 24 hours

Please do not send your child to school if you do not want them to go outside. We all go outside every day, with rare exceptions for extreme weather.

If your child is staying home ill, please be sure to phone the school at 781-729-2689. If you get voicemail,

please leave a message. We need to know that your child's absence from school is no cause for alarm, and notification of communicable illness is very important for us and other families in the school. When we know of a communicable illness in a classroom, we will notify the appropriate members of the school community.

## Hygiene

Children and staff members are required to wash hands with soap and water at these times:

- Before eating or handling food
- After going to the bathroom or assisting in toileting
- After contact with bodily fluids or excretions
- After cleaning areas contaminated with bodily fluids or excretions
- After handling classroom pets or their equipment

Commonly used areas are frequently sanitized with bleach solution (of one tablespoon to one quart of water, fresh daily) or another sanitizer approved by the Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC). Special attention will be given to the proper treatment of injuries and conditions that result in the presence of blood or other bodily fluids that transmit disease. Every member of the staff is familiar with the proper response to such situations. Soiled clothing will be sealed and sent home for laundering.

## Injury Reports

If a child is injured during school hours, the child's teacher will tell the parent/caregiver about the injury at pick-up or immediately by telephone, depending on the extent of the injury. The child's teacher will complete an injury report and have the parent/caregiver sign it. The signed injury report goes into the central log, with photocopies going to the family and into the child's file.

## Forms

*MASSACHUSETTS STATE LAW REQUIRES THAT ALL CHILDREN'S FILES BE IN ORDER BEFORE THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR.*

Please submit your child's Enrollment Form, Health Form, and Family and Child History Form before the start of the first day of school. All of this information should be submitted electronically via your Transparent Classroom account.

## Health Record

Your child's health record must show all required immunizations, a lead test screening, and a recent physical exam.

Required Immunizations:

- 4 doses of vaccine for DTaP/DTP
- 3 doses of vaccine for polio
- 1 dose of vaccine for MMR
- 3 doses of vaccine for Hib
- 3 doses of vaccine for Hepatitis B
- 1 dose of vaccine for varicella or record of chickenpox

There are combination shots available. For example, one shot of Pediarix covers one DTaP, one polio, and one Hep B.

If you are unable to get the missing doses in time for a complete health record to be submitted to the school by Labor Day, please make an appointment for early in the school year and provide the school with a note from the health care provider stating the date(s) and the name(s) of the vaccine(s) scheduled.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health also recommends the following immunizations: 4 doses of PCV, 2 doses of Hep A, 3 doses of rotavirus, and an annual flu vaccine.

If any immunizations cannot be given, we will need a written exemption from your child's health care provider or religious advisor. The Department of Early Education and Care requires lead screening to be noted on your child's record.

Your child's health record can be either a printout from the physician's office or the completed health record that is included in the fall enrollment forms booklet. Either way, the physician needs to sign and legibly date the record. *Please do not remove the page from the booklet; take the whole booklet to the doctor's office. Please keep the booklet intact.*

The health record must show the date of a recent physical exam and is valid for one calendar year from that date. Please be sure to give us an updated health record if it expires before the end of the school year.

*After each annual physical your child receives, please be sure to make and keep at least two or three photocopies of your child's health record, and give one to COS.*

### **Medication Consent**

If you need a teacher to administer any medication to your child, you must obtain a Medication Consent Form from the office. Please complete the form and give it to your child's teacher, along with the medication. Additionally, we must have a doctor's authorization – either a prescription label or a doctor's signature – for any internal use medication (e.g. liquid, pill, ear/eye/nose drops). Doctor authorization is not required for topical medication (e.g. cream, ointment).

### **Emergency Evacuation Plan**

In the event of an emergency, the director, or designee if the director is not on-site, will determine whether the emergency warrants an evacuation or shelter in place. The director and the school are set-up to receive emergency alert notifications from the town of Winchester via text and email.

In the event of evacuation, we will follow the plan for exiting the building used for drills. Under this plan, the master teacher for each classroom is responsible for taking the daily attendance information and emergency binder with them on their way out of the building. The assistant teacher is responsible for checking the bathrooms and cubby areas for children not in the classroom. Attendance will be taken prior to departing the COS campus to assure that no children are left behind. The director or designee will call the appropriate town authority to inform them of the school's evacuation.

The Winchester Recreation Building located at 263 Main Street will be the gathering place for all classrooms. The classroom teachers will guide the children safely along the sidewalk from COS to 263 Main Street using crosswalks when required to cross the street. One adult will lead each classroom group while the other follows at the end of the line keeping a visual check that the group stays together. Upon arrival, attendance will be checked again and all parents will be contacted by phone via the list in the emergency binders.

If the determination is made to shelter in place, all classrooms will gather upstairs in the Green Room. This classroom space is equipped with a fire door and is located where the interior of the room can not be seen from outside on the school grounds.

In the event of prolonged loss of power, heat, or hot water, the classroom staff will prepare children for dismissal while the office staff notify parents to pick up their children. In the event children need to leave COS due to light, temperature, or other danger, the plan for evacuation to the Winchester Recreation Building will be followed.

**Monthly Evacuation Drills**

Each classroom follows a set procedure for exiting the building and gathering on one of the playgrounds away from the building. The procedures are posted at each classroom exit and drills are conducted monthly, during different days and times of day.

## Parental Rights

Chapter 28A, Section 10 of the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts mandates to the Office for Children the legal responsibility of promulgating rules and regulations governing the operation of day care centers (including preschools).

In accordance with this law, the Office for Children published the requirements now in effect on May 1, 1997. The licensee must comply with these regulations in order to ensure a minimum level of care for the children serviced by the day care center and/or nursery school.

The licensee (day care center owner) is required to inform all parents of 'the rights of parents' as stated in the regulations at the time of admission of their child to the center. These rights are as follows:

7.05(12) *Parent Visits.* The licensee shall permit and encourage parents to visit the center and their child's room while their child is present.

7.05(13) *Parent Input.* The licensee shall have a procedure for allowing parental input in the development of center policy and programs. The licensee shall provide an explanation to the parent(s) when a parent makes suggestions as to the program or policy of a center and the suggestions are not adopted by the licensee. If the parent requests a written response, the licensee shall respond in writing to the parent.

7.05(14) *Reports to Parents.* The licensee shall periodically but at least every six (6) months prepare a written progress report of the participation of each child in the center's records. The licensee shall provide a copy of each report to the parent(s) or meet with them at least every six (6) months to discuss their child's activities and participation in the center. In addition:

- (a) for infants under fifteen months of age, the licensee shall complete a written progress report of the child's development every three (3) months, and provide it to the parent(s);
- (b) the licensee shall bring special problems or significant development concerns, particularly as they regard infants, to the parent's attention as soon as they arise.

7.05(15) *Parent Conferences.* The licensee shall make the staff available for individual conferences with parents at parental request.

7.05(19) *Confidentiality and Distribution of Records.* Information contained in a child's record shall be privileged and confidential. The licensee shall not distribute or release information in a child's record to anyone not directly related to implementing the program plan for the child without written consent of the child's parent(s). The licensee shall notify the parent(s) if a child's record is subpoenaed. The child's parent(s) shall, upon request, have access to his child's record at reasonable times. In no event shall such access be delayed more than two (2) business days after the initial request without the consent of the child's parent(s). Upon such request for access the child's entire record, regardless of the physical location of its parts, shall be made available. The licensee shall establish procedures governing access to, duplication of, and dissemination of such information; and shall maintain a permanent, written log in each child's record indicating any persons to whom information contained in a child's record has been released. Each person disseminating or releasing information contained in a child's record, in whole or in part, shall upon each instance of dissemination or release, enter into the log the following: his name, signature, position, the date, the portions of the record which were disseminated or released, the purpose of the record which was disseminated or released, the purpose of such dissemination or release, and the signature of the person to whom the information is disseminated or released. Such log shall be available only to the child's parent(s) and center personnel responsible for record maintenance.

7.05(20) *Charge for Copies.* The licensee shall not charge an unreasonable fee for copies of any information contained in the child's record.

7.05(21) *Amending the Child's Record.* A child's parent(s) shall have the right to add information, comments, data, or any other relevant materials to the child's records; and procedures for providing emergency health care.