



FAMILY HANDBOOK

2023-2024

Where Tender Hearts and Adventurous Spirits Play to
Learn!

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WELCOME

OUR MISSION

Peaceful Gatherings will meet the need for developmentally appropriate nature-based education. As an early childhood program we will also meet the demand for quality childcare.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to create an educational experience that allows young children to interact with the natural world around them, encouraging their innate desire to explore the world just outside their door.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

At Peaceful Gatherings Nature School we believe that all children are equipped with a natural desire to explore and learn from the world around them. In our outdoor classroom, students are encouraged to trust their innate curiosity. Our child-led, emergent curriculum gives students the opportunity to take control of their learning in a developmentally appropriate way. As learning partners, we guide students by creating lessons that speak to their interests and are driven by the seasonal changes that surround us. Nature based education lets “children develop confidence in their own abilities.”* Children are provided a safe environment that encourages them to take risks and grow in confidence. Our classroom will have students of varying ages; many benefits come from multi-age groupings. In multi-age classrooms, there is a sense of family, students are not labeled according to their ability, younger students can look up to older students, and older students can become mentors for younger students. Along with being multi-aged, our classroom will also be bilingual. Children will be immersed in both English and Spanish in order to promote the natural way language develops. At Peaceful Gatherings Nature School we are excited to be on this journey together. We are looking forward to building a community where tender hearts and adventurous spirits, young and old, play to learn.

**Catherine Koons-Hubbarb*

Life After Nature Preschool:

Exploring the Long Term Effects of Nature-Based Education

STATEMENT OF RESPECT

NONDISCRIMINATORY POLICY

1. Peaceful Gatherings Nature School admits students of any gender, race, national origin, religious beliefs, age, disability, or sexual orientation to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, national origin, religious beliefs, age, disability, or sexual orientation in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, and other school-administered programs.
2. “Standards of ethical behavior in early childhood care and education are based on commitment to the following core values that are deeply rooted in the history of the field of early childhood care and education. We have made a commitment to• Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle • Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn • Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family• Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture,*community, and society • Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague)• Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues• Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect.

*The term culture includes ethnicity, racial identity, economic level, family structure, language, and religious and political beliefs, which profoundly influence each child’s development and relation-ship to the world.”

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EDUCATION TEAM

Sandra Rivas

- Director and Learning Partner
- B.A. Spanish with a minor in Psychology
- 16+ years in Early Childhood and Spanish Education

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ELIGIBILITY AND ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Our program is open to children ages 2.5 years old to 7 years old.

Peaceful Gatherings Nature School requires the following forms and information to be on file for each child enrolled:

1. **Completed Registration and Enrollment Forms**
2. **Completed DSS Form 2909**
3. **Completed SC Certificate of Immunization or Waiver from Pediatrician**
4. **Completed Enrollment Paperwork to include: Child Pick-up Authorization Form, Emergency Contacts, Rough and Water Play Policy, First Aid and Sunscreen/ Insect Repellent Authorization**

REGISTRATION

Registration for current students and their siblings will begin in February. In March, registration will be open to the public. Placement is first come, first served. A completed **Registration Form and the non-refundable registration fee** are required to hold a student's place for the school year. Once accepted you will receive notification of your child's placement via email. After acceptance into the program the **Enrollment Forms, supply fee and first month's tuition** are due by **August 31st**.

Due to our commitment to foster an optimal learning environment we keep student-teacher ratios low, therefore, space in the program is limited. We will do our best to place your child in the session you indicate. If we are unable to do so, we will contact you to offer available openings. If we are unable to enroll your child at the beginning of the year, we will place them on a waitlist and notify you if any openings become available.

TUITION

Programs	Ages	Monthly Tuition
Preschool 3 Days 8:30am-12:00pm	2.5-5 years	\$260*
Elementary 3 Days 8:30am-12:00pm	6-7 Years	\$227*
Elementary and Preschool 5 days 8:30am-12:00pm	2.5-7 Years	\$397*
Elementary and Preschool 2 Days 8:30am-12:00pm	2.5-7 years	\$168*

*2023-2024

All payments are due on the 1st of each month

POLICIES

Hours of Operation

Half-Day classes: Monday through Friday, 8:30am – 12:00pm

Attendance

Peaceful Gatherings will be open for drop off at **8:15am**. Pick up for students will begin at **12pm** and end at **12:15pm**. A late fee of **\$10**, plus a **\$1 per minute** will be charged for late pick up.

Holiday Closings and Schedule

Our school year will run:

September 5- May 31st

School will be closed for **Fall Break on November 23rd and 24th.**

School will be closed for **Winter Break December 25th-January 5th**

School will be closed for **Spring Break March 25-March 29th**

Unsafe and Inclement Weather

As a nature preschool Peaceful Gatherings will spend the entire day outside regardless of the weather. Students should come prepared for learning outdoors in the sun and rain. The only time that we will not go outside is in unsafe weather.

Unsafe weather is defined as follows:

1. Sustained temperature of 13 degrees for the duration of the school day
2. When there is driving rain, rain that is accompanied by high winds, or rain with temperatures below 40 degrees
3. When there are gusting/gale force winds of 25 mph or higher
4. Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning
5. When the heat index reaches 95 degrees or higher we will take frequent breaks, and as always have water on hand.

Closings and early release due to inclement weather will be determined on a case by case basis. Our goal is to teach children to be resilient no matter the weather, but if there is a possibility of severe weather that will affect road conditions and travel to and from school we will close or release early. You will be contacted by the school as soon as possible when the decision to close or release is made.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of an emergency evacuation, medical emergency or utility interruption parents/guardians will be notified immediately.

Child Pick-up Authorization

Children are only permitted to be picked up by those the enrolling parents/guardians authorize. A written note will be required from you any day someone not listed on the OWNA APP will be picking up your child. We cannot release your child to an unauthorized person. We ask that you keep this list up-to-date. Anyone other than parents/guardians picking up a child should be prepared to show photo identification.

Drop-off and Pick-up

During drop-off and pick-up we ask that you park in the parking lot in front and to the right of the shelter and walk your child up to the shelter. A teacher will check your child in via the OWNA app. Pick-up will be conducted in the same manner. You will walk up to pick up your child and collect their belongings.

When dropping off or picking up your child, **never** leave your child unattended. **Do not** leave children of any age unattended by parked vehicles. All children must be directly supervised (within eyesight) of an adult family member/guardian or one of our staff members.

Student Withdrawal

If any circumstances prevent continued enrollment, written notice via email must be given to the director **30 days prior** to withdrawal. Failure to do so will result in the **next month's tuition being invoiced.**

Guidance Policy

Guidance is an essential teaching part of the classroom and is not viewed as punishment. Guidance is used to help children learn self-control, to help develop their self-esteem and a regard for and acceptance of others in the classroom.

The following techniques, as outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children will be used:

1. Guide children by setting clear, consistent, fair limits for classroom behavior.
2. Value mistakes as learning opportunities.
3. Redirect children to more acceptable behavior or activity.
4. Listen when children talk about their feelings and frustrations.
5. Guide children to resolve conflicts and model skills that help children to solve their own problems.
6. Patiently remind children of the rules and their rationale.

Under no circumstances will any form of corporal punishment be used, which includes biting, jerking, shaking, spanking, slapping, hitting, kicking or any other means of inflicting physical pain.

Peaceful Gatherings will work to provide a safe environment for all children present. It is our policy to work with each child, within the structure of our guidance policy, to manage conflict by developing appropriate skills. If a child's behavior is disrupting the safety and/or educational environment, the parents/guardians will be contacted to assist in developing a plan to acquire the appropriate skills. In some cases, we may refer a child to outside organizations for screening and support. With the parents'/guardians' consent, these agencies will help give techniques/strategies to support the child, or to find a placement for the child which will support development of age appropriate skills.

Mandated Reporting

“Mandated reporters must report abuse or neglect when, in their professional capacity, they receive information giving them reason to believe that a child’s physical or mental health has been, or may be, adversely affected by abuse or neglect. A decision to report must be based upon a reasonable belief that a child has been, or may be, abused or neglected. Thus, mandatory reporters need not have conclusive proof that a child has been abused or neglected prior to reporting abuse or neglect to the proper authorities.

A person who is required to report and fails to do so is guilty of a misdemeanor. Upon conviction, he or she may be fined up to \$500 or imprisoned up to six months, or both.”**

The staff at Peaceful Gatherings must report any suspected child abuse and/or neglect as mandated reporters.

***<https://dss.sc.gov/prevention/mandated-reporters/> SC Department of Social Services*

Immunization Records

All children enrolled in Peaceful Gatherings Nature School are required by the SC Department of Social Services to have a Certificate of Immunization (DHEC form 1148) on record before attending school or to have a medical or religious exemption on file. The certificate/exemption must be on file at the start of the school year. (Section 44-29-180 of South Carolina Code of Laws)

Health Policy

Children should be kept home if they have a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, severe cold or if they display signs of becoming sick (listlessness, productive cough, nasal or eye discharge, sore throat). We ask that you wait **24 hours** after symptoms have stopped before sending your child back to school. Please notify the school if your child has been diagnosed with a communicable disease*so we may alert other parents/guardians. If your child will not be in attendance due to illness please inform the school as soon as possible.

If your child becomes ill during the school day we will make every effort to make them comfortable away from the other children and parents/guardians will be contacted immediately. If we are unable to reach you we will notify the listed emergency contact. Please make sure all contact information is always up to date.

*See the DHEC School and Child Care Exclusion List of Contagious or Communicable Diseases

Administration of Medicine

Parents/Guardians are required to fill out a Medication Permission form in order for staff to administer medication to a child. If it is a prescription medication the prescription directions must be attached to the medication or a form must be filled out by the child’s doctor. The child’s

name must be written on all medication. Medication will be stored in a locked box and must be taken home at the end of each day (with the exception of medication for allergies).

Recording and Reporting Incidents

All injuries that occur while at school will be recorded on the **OWNA app** and will require staff and parent signatures. A copy of the form will be sent to parents/guardians via the app. Any injuries that occur above the neck will be immediately reported to parents via phone or text message.

There will always be at least 1 staff member trained in First Aid and CPR present at all times. In the event of an emergency concerning your child, the school will contact you and then, if necessary, the emergency contacts. If the emergency requires immediate medical care, we will call for an ambulance while we are contacting you. Please notify the school of any phone number changes for you or your emergency contacts (including work and cell phone numbers).

Allergies and Dietary Restrictions

Peaceful Gatherings will work directly with the parents/guardians of children with allergies and dietary restrictions in accommodating their child's specific needs. Please inform the school of all allergies, restrictions, and appropriate interventions on the forms provided. If a child's allergy requires that medication be kept at school, a Medication Permission form must be provided along with each medication to be kept at school.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

At Peaceful Gatherings we spend all of our time outside. In order to best protect your child we ask that you send them to school in sunscreen and insect repellent. If you have forgotten to apply these before class you may apply it before dropping off. We also encourage you to give consent for teachers to apply sunscreen and insect repellent to your child while at school. Labeled bottles of sunscreen and repellent may be sent to school in your child's bag if you prefer certain types or brands.

Safety

At Peaceful Gatherings our staff to child ratio is **1:6 for the preschool class and 1:8 in the elementary class.**

One of the focuses of our program is for children to explore their own limits and capabilities in the outdoors. Giving children autonomy within our guidelines helps them to safely take risks within their own comfort levels. By providing this opportunity for risky play, children will develop confidence in their ability to calculate risk for themselves. Making sure we keep ourselves safe, while making sure those around us are safe is our basic safety guideline.

Photo Release

We will be using photos of our day to track your child's progress and document learning. We will also use photos for our website and social media accounts. In the registration paperwork is a photo release form where you will find several options to choose from to insure your child's security.

Open Door Policy

Peaceful Gatherings Nature School holds an Open Door Policy for parents and guardians. You are welcome to come and visit the school at any time. Please take into account your child's personality and reaction to your presence. If you feel that your visit will interrupt your child's day then consider coming early for pick-up in order to see your child in action. This is in the best interest of your child, so that they can form a healthy routine at school.

Communication

We will make every effort to keep open communication with parents and guardians. We ask that parents/guardians keep open lines of communication with our staff and inform us of any major changes in your child's life. Our primary form of communication will be through email and text messages-these are immediate, easily accessible and paperless. We ask that you regularly check your email and texts for school communications. We will also regularly update our social media accounts with news and announcements.

Teachers will be available for brief conversations during Drop-off and Pick-up to discuss your child's day and answer any questions you may have. If a more in depth discussion is desired you may schedule a meeting with teachers.

OUR DAY

Supplies

We ask that you provide **two changes of seasonally appropriate clothes** (including socks and underwear/diapers) that are **clearly labeled with your child's name** and a **large beach towel**.

Due to the nature of our outdoor space, we ask that you send them daily in your child's bag.

Clothes will more than likely need to be changed regularly even with the appropriate weather gear. We **highly recommend** sending 2 changes of clothes to include underwear and socks. We also ask that you provide an **extra pair of shoes daily**.

Please send a **water bottle** labeled with your child's name daily. We will refill the water bottle as needed throughout the day.

We are an outdoor preschool and this means that we spend all of our time outside. In order for your child to be comfortable and prepared for the outdoors, please have them properly dressed and ready to explore! Here is our recommended gear list for each season and links on how to layer for each season.

Gear list:

Year Round-

- Backpack to be carried to and from school
- Seasonally appropriate changes of clothes
- Water bottle
- Beach towel
- Sunscreen

Fall and Early Spring-

- Layered clothing (as the day warms layers can be removed)
- Waterproof raincoat and pants or one piece suit (these are good for rainy days, but also for mud and water play when the weather is still cool)
- Rain boots or sturdy, closed-toe shoes that can get wet and muddy
- A knit hat that covers the ears (for cooler mornings/days)

Winter-

- Base layers (thermals, wool)
- Mid-layers (fleece)
- Waterproof winter coat or heavy fleece/thin insulated coat rated for cold weather that can be worn under rain gear
- Balaclava or knit hat that covers most of the face
- Wool or fleece socks
- Snow boots or sturdy, warm outdoor boots (preferably waterproof)
- Warm, waterproof gloves or mittens

Spring and Summer-

- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Lightweight clothing
- Swim bottoms and rash guard (if not raining)
- Lightweight, waterproof jacket and pants or quick drying clothing if you do not mind your child staying wet in the rain on warm days
- Rain boots or water shoes
- Sun hat or cap

<https://talesofamountainmama.com/2013/11/layering-kids-cold-weather.html>

<https://talesofamountainmama.com/2013/07/best-clothing-to-keep-kids-cool-giveaway.html>

Snacks and Lunch

In order to provide a safe space for all children and to lessen the risk of exposure to food allergens we ask that all food for your child be brought from home.

Please provide a **morning snack**, as well as lunch.

Please remember that we are eating outside in all kinds of weather and will not be able to heat up lunches.

Curriculum

At Peaceful Gatherings Nature School we believe in nurturing the young child's natural curiosity by following the emergent curriculum approach. This approach was originally developed by Loris Malaguzzi in the schools of Reggio Emilia. Emergent Curriculum is open-ended and self-directed in order to meet the needs of every child. The teacher's guidance and a child's intrinsic motivation are at the root of emergent curriculum. We also pull from the philosophies of Forest Schools, Maria Montessori and Waldorf.

Bilingualism

Day to day your child will be a part of a bilingual environment. We will not be teaching Spanish academically, but instead the child will be introduced to Spanish naturally through books, songs, stories, activities and celebrations. Through this gentle immersion children will gain Spanish comprehension at their own pace just as they learned their native language.

Celebrations

Throughout the school year we will be celebrating Seasonal Holidays and cultural events through songs, books, and food tastings. At Peaceful Gatherings we downplay the commercial aspects of holidays and focus on seasonal and family traditions. Let us know if there is a holiday or tradition that is special to you, so we can celebrate it too!

When it is your child's birthday, you are welcome to send in a special treat for your child to share with the class at snack time. We ask that you please check with us about food allergies in the class before sending anything in.

