



## **2023-2024 PARENT HANDBOOK**

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# Welcome to The Playschool at St. Mary's

The Playschool is a nonprofit organization that opens its doors for three to five-year-old children of all denominations, races, and national origins. The number of students on our rosters who have had siblings or parents previously enrolled in our program testifies to the effectiveness and reputation of our Playschool. We are an outreach program of St. Mary's Episcopal Church, however no specific religion is taught in our classrooms. *We have been a play directed school in the Anchorage community since 1966.*

## Our Philosophy

The Playschool provides a preschool environment designed to help children build self-confidence and a positive self-image. We work on developing social skills, fine and gross motor skills, gaining an understanding of the teacher-pupil relationship, and becoming comfortable in a classroom setting away from home. These goals are accomplished by providing programs that are developmentally appropriate, a curriculum that focuses on play, and the opportunity for parents to play a significant role within the classroom and playschool as a whole.

*What is developmentally appropriate practice?* This term means that teachers first think about what children are like and then develop an environment that provides "hands-on" learning opportunities. Our classrooms are designed to encourage children to explore what interests them, touch what intrigues them, talk, listen, run, help out, and play through a combination of self-directed times and more structured activities. Teachers and parents act as guides in this developmental process, but also follow the children's leads.

*What is a play-based curriculum?* As the name "Playschool" implies, we believe children learn best during the preschool years through self-directed play. Through play, children learn concepts behind reading, math, science, music, culture, physical movement and the world around them. Children are encouraged to explore and discover, without the risk associated with having to provide a correct answer. Play provides children with the opportunity to attempt a new skill, fail in the attempt and not view themselves as a failure. Play also provides endless opportunities for children to celebrate successes (emotional development), learn problem solving and concepts such as cause and effect (cognitive development), exercise fine and gross motor skills (physical development), and practice communication skills and interaction (social development).

*Why is parent involvement important?* Volunteering in the classroom as teacher's aides provides parents with opportunities to become familiar with, and help guide, the learning process. Parents are able to see first-hand what interests their children, how they interact with peers and the teacher, and which activities come naturally and which are more challenging. Parents get to know the children and appreciate them as individuals. Parental involvement can also provide reassurance for children who are not used to being away from home and it gives the children an enormous sense of pride. By having parents volunteer in the classrooms, as members of the Advisory Council or other committees, and as volunteers at school-sponsored events, The Playschool hopes to begin a pattern of parental involvement that will last throughout our children's academic careers.

## Daily Schedule Example

9:15-10:15	Free Play
10:15-10:25	Clean-up
10:25-10:35	Circle Time
10:35-10:50	Upstairs Play (Gross Motor games)
10:50-11:05	Snack
11:05-11:15	Outdoor Gear
11:15-11:45	Outside Time

## Curriculum

Each class period includes free play, circle time, project time, cleanup, large muscle movement, snack and outdoor play. A number of themes are covered during The Playschool year, and the whole program is integrated into the topic at hand. For example, the following is a sample of activities from our dinosaur unit, which lasts from one to two weeks:

### Dinosaurs

Prepared by Playschool Staff

Environment: Posters, wall displays, and pictures feature prehistoric creatures; toys in the cornmeal "sand" box are replaced with turkey bones and Popsicle sticks for bone digs; dinosaurs, rocks, dinosaur play-dough toys, and puzzles are out for free play; the water table hosts slime and a volcano; dinosaur books and games are used.

Activities: Make fossils; paint dinosaurs; make dinosaur eggs; find sticks and bones in cornmeal and glue on paper to make a skeleton; paint volcanoes; trace children's feet into a dinosaur footprint; do a skit showing finding bones.

Music and movement: Learn dinosaur songs; dance to the songs; have a dinosaur parade; move like various dinosaurs.

Literature: Books are used to look at individual dinosaurs; a dinosaur story each day; and try to find pictures of favorite dinosaurs in books.

Concepts: Dinosaurs are extinct; plant eaters and meat eaters; name and identity of various dinosaurs; earth was changing when dinosaurs lived; sizes of dinosaurs, paleontology.

Resource people: Parents with background or experiences to share.

## Guidelines on Religious and Cultural Education

The Playschool honors various holidays by imparting to children the essential or central meaning of the holiday. Specific sectarian doctrine shall not be a part of the curriculum. Stories, songs, dances, special foods, and crafts may be used to explore the celebration of a particular holiday.

### **The Playschool's Operation and Advisory Council**

The Playschool is operated under the direction of the Playschool Director and a Volunteer Advisory Council.

The majority of the Advisory Council members are parent volunteers who have children enrolled in the Playschool. Other Advisory Council members belong to St. Mary's Episcopal Church. The Advisory Council meets every month to decide matters pertaining to Playschool policy and operation. Any questions about Playschool policy and procedure should be directed to an Advisory Council member or the Director.

Playschool parents are welcome to attend Advisory Council meetings. The Advisory Council is open to all suggestions from parents. Job descriptions for Advisory Council positions are available through the Playschool office. We invite and encourage you to join us! Parents interested in serving on the Advisory Council in future years should contact an Advisory Council member or the Director.

### St Mary's Creative Playschool Staff

Director/Teacher	Rachel Elmore
Admin Assistant	Kathryn Wheelles
Teacher	Jessica Mangano
Teacher	Melissa Williams
Teacher	Lindsay Wallace
Teacher	Gail Ash

### Playschool Application and Admission Process

The Playschool conforms to the age standard set by the Anchorage School District. This means that children entering the three-year-old class will turn three years old on or before September 1st. Children entering the four-year-old class will turn four years old on or before September 1st. Children who have not fully learned to independently use the toilet cannot be enrolled. Recurring accidents while at school may result in a Parent Teacher Conference. Extra clothes in backpacks are helpful in the case of accidents.

Application forms and fees can be mailed or delivered to the Playschool office at 2222 E. Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99507. **A non-refundable registration fee of \$125.00 is required with the application to guarantee a spot in the class.** Questions can be directed to the Playschool office by calling the Playschool office at 563-7840. During the summer vacation, voice mail messages are returned on a regular basis.

Each year enrollment applications for the next school year are provided to currently enrolled families on February 1. Applications and registration fees must be received for those children by the end of February. Public Enrollments open on March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Teacher requests can be indicated on the application. We will make every effort to honor teacher requests whenever possible with consideration of class balance in both number and gender. It is our policy that a child's class placement is for the entire year. Special requests for exceptions will be considered by the Director.

When application forms and fees are received, each child will be placed on the class list. Families will be notified as to their child's placement, the dates of registration and orientation day, and upcoming Playschool events.

The Playschool requests notification if a child will not be attending Playschool after an application has been filed and fees have been paid. Students who must withdraw due to family emergency and then desire to return will be given priority on the waitlist after consideration by the Advisory Council. When class openings become available during the school year, the family of the first child on the waitlist will be notified. Once notified, two working days are allowed to complete registration and begin tuition payment, after which time the space will be offered to the next child on the waitlist.

### Registration

Registration packages will be handed to returning students; and mailed to new students several weeks before school begins. **All of the forms must be completed and brought to registration and orientation.** St. Mary's Creative Playschool requires that each child entering the program have documentation of a current physical exam including current vaccination records. Parents whose children are exempt from receiving current vaccinations for medical or religious reasons must file a Physician approved exemption form with the playschool office. **This information must be on file before a child can begin Playschool.** Any student who might be a contagion risk to the rest of the student body will be asked to leave school until they are cleared to return by a medical professional.

If a family is unable to attend registration and orientation at the beginning of the school year, please consider staying with your child on the first day of class in order to become familiar with the program, schedule, and staff.

**Remember: NO SHOTS – NO SCHOOL!**

### Children with Special Needs

Parents wishing to place special needs children in our program should consult the Playschool Director, and children with special needs will be considered on an individual basis.

### Early Entry

Parents sometimes request that their child be allowed to enroll in the Playschool at an early age. Our policy in this matter is based on that of the Anchorage School District, which states that a child must have their birth date on or before September 1st to enroll.

### Fees and Tuition

Tuition is \$275.00 for three days and \$325.00 for four days. Monthly tuition will be charged even if a child has an extended absence. **The first and last month's tuition payments will be collected at registration. These payments are nonrefundable.** The last month's tuition payment will be applied to May only and early withdrawal will result in forfeiture of May's tuition amount. The Playschool believes early Childhood Education should be available to all families in our community. Our Playschool has

provided for several partial scholarships to be made available throughout the year. Anyone interested in this program should contact the Playschool Office as soon as possible.

A 10% tuition discount is offered for a second and/or third child enrolled in the program at the same time. For example, when a child attends a four-day a week class and has a younger sibling in a three-day a week class, a 10% percent discount will be offered on the two day per week tuition. For those families who are members of St. Mary's Episcopal Church or who are serving in an Advisory Council Position, a 10% tuition discount is offered for each child attending. The discounts cannot be combined. For example, if a family is already receiving the sibling discount, they will not be eligible to receive the church member discount and vice versa.

Tuition payments are due the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. Tuition can be paid Monthly, Annually, or on a Semi- Annual basis. Deliver payment can be either dropped into the tuition box outside of the office or received via mail. We take credit card payment with square or online on our Playschool website. Those payments will include a 3% processing fee. An automatic late fee of \$15.00 will be charged if not received on or before the 10th. This fee will accrue with each late month and all payments will be applied to any outstanding balance.

A three month delinquency will result in a Child's exclusion from the program. Checks returned for insufficient funds are assessed a \$25.00 service fee. Checks will be resubmitted for payment one time only. If there are insufficient funds to cover payment on the check, only cash in the exact amount or money orders will be acceptable for tuition payments thereafter.

Children are admitted for the full academic year, and monthly tuition is not subject to adjustment due to illness, vacation, or other absence. If withdrawal is necessary, full tuition through the last month of attendance is required. The school office staff should receive at least two weeks' notice of withdrawal. Tuition will continue to be charged until notice of withdrawal is received. The office or teacher should also be notified if a child would be absent from school for more than one week. If registration is complete and attendance begins after the fifteenth of the month tuition will be prorated to ½ price for the month. When a child enters the Playschool after March 1st his or her registration fee is waived for the remainder of the school year.

### **Hours and Days of Operation**

The Playschool follows the Anchorage School District Calendar of holidays, snow days, and late start days. News and radio broadcasts report any changes to the public school calendar including school closures or late start days. As a general rule, if public schools are closed, so are we.

<b>AM 3/4 Class- Tue/Wed/Thu</b>	9:00 am - 11:30 am	(\$275.00)
<b>AM 3/4 Class- Tue/Wed/Thu</b>	9:30 am - 12:00 pm	(\$275.00)
<b>AM 3/4 Class- Tue/Wed/Thu/Fri</b>	9:15 am - 11:45 am	(\$325.00)
<b>PM 4's Class- Tue/Wed/Thu</b>	12:30 pm - 3:00 pm	(\$275.00)

### **Volunteer Opportunities**

Parents are invited to volunteer to help organize and run the Playschool's special events; i.e. Halloween Carnival and the Spring Auction.

There are many other ways you can help at the Playschool. We can always use extra hands to assist with maintenance, playground safety and special classroom equipment. Parents who wish to become involved in any of these ways are to contact the Playschool Director.

## Parent Helper Days

**Parents/guardians are required to help in their child's classroom.** Parent helpers are vital to our program to help encourage communication between families and staff. This has developed into an enthusiastically received program allowing parents to observe and interact with their child as well as learn from the teachers and other parents. Children take enormous pride in having their grown-up be the helper and are assigned a special leadership role, "line leader" on those days.

Parent helper days are scheduled on a sign-up, rotating basis to fit families' schedules. When scheduled for a helper/snack day the parent should arrive promptly at the start of class, and **provide enough snacks for the entire class for the day.** This is a very special time of interaction. Please refrain from receiving or making cell phone calls while volunteering. The teacher will offer a brief idea of the day's activities. The parent may be asked to help in a variety of areas, which may include art projects, role-playing, reading, cleanup, and participating in the children's day in any number of ways.

The children, especially three-year-olds, will need assistance with outerwear when it is time to go outside. At the same time, we like to encourage the children's independence in dressing for outdoor play. It is important that **adult helpers are also dressed for the weather.** Once outside, the children require close supervision at all times and Parent helpers are required to stay and help on the playground. Parent helpers may leave at the scheduled class pick-up time.

***If you are unable to come in on your helper day, we ask that you take the initiative to contact another parent from your child's class and work out a trade of parent helper days and notify your child's teacher.***

## Snacks

Parents sign up to provide snacks for the entire class on their Parent Helper Day. Your child's parent helper/ snack days will be listed on the monthly calendars. The snack list suggests nutritious foods such as fruit, vegetables, cheese, beans, and yogurt.

**St. Mary's is a NUT FREE Environment** and we do not allow any home baked goods under any circumstances. For safety reasons, children who suffer *severe* reactions due to cross contamination are asked to bring their own snacks from home on a daily basis. Allergies will be posted in each classroom so all staff will be aware of them.

Please send a water bottle with your child's name on it each day. We ask that water be the beverage during snacktime.



### Early Bird

The Early Bird program is designed to give parents/caregivers some flexibility in the morning hours (especially if they have children in the ASD school). Please contact the office if you are interested in using this program.

Tue/Wed/Thu 8:30-9:00am (\*Only available for the 9am class) \$50.00 per month



### Lunch Bunch

Lunch Bunch is designed to give parents/caregivers some flexibility in their drop off and pick up times. Children have the opportunity to eat lunch and socialize with their school friends. This is a drop-in option as long as there is space available! Daily sign-up sheets will be posted in the hallway with the Lunch Bunch cart.

- ❖ Students bring their own lunches ( The school's no nuts policy applies)
- ❖ No refrigeration is available

Tue/Wed/Thu (depending on class as listed below)

-9:00-11:30am class	11:30-12:15pm
-9:15-11:45am class	11:45-12:30pm
-9:30-12:00pm class	12:00-12:45pm
-12:30-3:00pm class	11:45-12:30pm

### Monthly Calendar

Each teacher will send home a monthly calendar with information about events for the coming month: announcements; vacation days; information for scheduled field trips; and snack and parent helper days. We always welcome suggestions about resource people, audiovisual and printed materials, trips, or class projects we can do in conjunction with any of our themes.

### Birthdays

Teachers will recognize children in a special way on their birthdays. Please **ONLY** hand out party invitations at school if the entire class is invited *and* give them directly to parents. Teachers are not responsible for these invitations.

### Parent-Teacher Meetings

Please feel free to request an appointment with your child's teacher at any time. Parents of four-year-old students are given the opportunity to schedule a pre-kindergarten conference during the second semester.

## Picking up and Delivering Children

It is helpful to both your child and the class when your child arrives promptly at the scheduled beginning of class. **Children are not to arrive any earlier than 5 minutes before the start of school so the teachers can finish their classroom preparation.** If you arrive earlier than your scheduled class time kindly use the playground or wait in the upstairs hall until class begins.

Please park in the upper parking lot and **walk your child into the building through the main entrance of the Church.** Once inside, escort your child downstairs to the classroom. Please do not leave keys, valuables, or siblings in your car. In addition, do not leave your car idling as exhaust fumes go to the playground. Please park in the upper parking lot when picking up your child. Come down the outside stairs to pick up your child at the playground gate. Parents are responsible for signing their child out upon pick up. Photo ID (other than the parents/guardian) must be presented to the gate monitors. Children will not be released to individuals without Photo ID. **Parents are urged to pick up their children promptly following the scheduled end of classes each day. After five (5) minutes following the end of class, you will be considered late and the teachers will bring any children who have not been picked up inside and parents will be charged \$1.00/minute for late pick up fees.** We understand that emergencies happen. If you anticipate being late to pick up your child, please notify the playschool office as soon as possible.

For safety's sake, we remind you that vehicle safety restraints must be used when your child is delivered and picked up. State law requires that all children be secured by safety restraints or age and weight appropriate car seats or booster seats when riding in a motor vehicle.

At registration, each child's parent or guardian will be asked to complete a list of the names of individuals who are authorized to pick up their child. This list can be amended at any time. **Individuals not previously placed on a pick up list, must present written authorization from parents/guardians before children will be released.** The Playschool is required by the MOA to release a child only to either legal parent or other legal guardian previously identified in writing to the staff.

## Clothing

Clothing worn to school should be suitable for playing and working. There will be paint, etc. that will spill, splatter, and spot! Please check that all snaps and buttons open easily. No belts, please. We recommend elastic waist pants.

Please label your child's outdoor clothing with his or her name. Make sure your child is prepared for outdoor play every day, as he or she will spend at least some time outside. When the temperature drops we prefer mittens. Dressing independently and "doing it myself" promotes self-esteem and is a concept we foster. Let this be a consideration in all clothing choices. Putting on outdoor clothes in a group situation is a real plus for both the child and the staff.

Each child must have a bag (tote bag/reusable bag/ pack bag) with his or her first and last names printed legibly on its front. Label Ziploc bag for extra clothes (shirt, socks, undies, pants). Everything that belongs to your child must be labeled with his/her name.

## **Outdoor Play**

The Playschool encourages outdoor play. The last half-hour of each day will be set aside for outdoor activities. No supervision is available indoors during this time. Please provide appropriate outdoor clothing for your child every day. Occasionally the staff and teachers determine that it is not appropriate to take the children out to play. We follow ASD guidelines for outdoor play temperatures. **If you have concerns about your child playing outside due to low temperatures or other adverse weather conditions, please arrange to pick your child up early.**

## **Personal Belongings**

With the exception of outdoor clothing, children are restricted from bringing personal belongings to Playschool. On share days, a child may bring an item to class to the show. Toys or other items of an aggressive nature (guns, swords, etc.) are not allowed.

## **Television and Media**

Television and media viewing are not a part of the regular curriculum. Such resources are used only occasionally by guest speakers and resource people.

## **Health Concerns**

Each child must have a completed emergency record form and consent for emergency medical or surgical care form in his or her file. These forms are in the registration packet. If you keep your child at home due to illness, please notify the Playschool staff.

If your child is recovering from an illness or has a cold that prevents him or her from playing outside, please pick him/her up early. No medication will be administered at school with exception of inhalers and allergy medicine. Medication is not to be kept in a child's backpack at any time. Medication will be kept in a locked drawer in the Playschool office. Please be sure to retrieve all unused medication at the end of the school year.

If a child becomes ill or is hurt at school, we will call you or the person you have designated on your consent form immediately. You will also receive an incident report if necessary. If we feel the illness or injury is of a serious nature, we will call emergency services immediately and then contact you. Our staff is certified in CPR and Emergency First Aid and attends refresher courses.

Please use your best discretion when deciding to send your student to school. If they are showing any signs of illness then it might be best to keep them home because oftentimes they will only get worse as the day progresses.

Our sick policy is as follows: If your child has a fever of 100.4F they should not be sent to school. **Your child should be kept home until they are fever free, without the use of fever reducing medications, for 24 hours.**

Please keep your child home if your child has vomited within 24 hours of the school start time. **They may return to school once that are symptom free for 24 hours (no fever or vomiting for 24 hours without medication).**

### **Field Trips**

The Playschool schedules two (2) field trips per year for the 4 year old classes only (this is subject to change, but historically two (2) field trips are planned each year). It is the responsibility of each child's parent to either drive their child to and from the field trip location, or make arrangements for another adult to do so. Should you be unable to drive your child to and from the field trip location, or make arrangements for another person to do so, that child will be unable to attend. On the days field trips are scheduled, class will be held at the field trip location. Parents are asked to stay with their child during the field trip.

### **Smoking**

There is no smoking in the classroom building or on the playground during school hours.

### **Concerning Discipline**

It is St. Mary's philosophy that positive reinforcement, redirection, and setting clear and consistent limits are the appropriate methods of managing preschoolers' behavior. Corporal punishment is not used and is not acceptable on St. Mary's property or in connection with any St. Mary's sponsored activity by child caregivers, parents, or guardians. Harmful behavior may result in the child's removal from the classroom, and the parent/guardian may be called to pick him or her up from school. Playschool staff will have a follow up plan with the parent if necessary. Safety of all children is the ultimate goal and if this is compromised, the family may be asked to come up with a plan in collaboration with the teacher and/or Director.

### **Evacuation Plan**

Designated evacuation routes are posted in each classroom and we have monthly fire drills. Parents are expected to familiarize themselves with these routes and assist teachers in evacuations. Should an actual emergency occur and we need to evacuate the building, parents will be notified as soon as possible. If for any reason it is unsafe for us to return to the building, we will evacuate to the F.I.S.H. pantry across from the west end of the playground. If we need to evacuate the area, we will walk the three blocks to the YMCA at 5353 Lake Otis Parkway. Staff will make every effort to ensure the safety of children.

### **Insurance**

SMCP has liability insurance through St. Mary's Episcopal Church.

## **Reporting of Child Abuse**

The Municipality of Anchorage requires that we publish this regulation in our handbook:

*“A caregiver who, in the performance of his or her duties, has cause to believe that a child has suffered harm as a result of abuse or neglect shall immediately report the harm to the nearest office of the Division of Family and Youth Services. If the caregiver or the facility administrator cannot reasonably contact the nearest office of the division, and immediate action is necessary for the well-being of the child, the caregiver or administrator shall make the report to a peace officer.” 7AAC50.171 (c)*

*“The following persons who, in the performance of their occupational duties, have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has suffered harm as a result of child abuse or neglect shall immediately report the harm to the nearest office of the department: ...school teachers and school administrative staff members of public and private schools...” AS47.17.020 (a)*

Complaints of child abuse and neglect should be made to the Office of Children’s Services (OCS). Their contact information can be found at <http://hss.state.ak.us/ocs/Offices/default.htm>. The local number is 269-4000.

## **Confidentiality of Children’s Records**

The persons permitted to see your child’s record (name, address, phone number, health information, and emergency information) will be the parent or legal guardian, Playschool staff, the MUNI certification examiner, child protection personnel, or emergency personnel.

Information will not be divulged to others without written consent of the parent or legal guardian. We will not verify your child’s enrollment or presence to anyone via the telephone without your consent.

## **Security Cameras at School**

I understand there are closed-circuit security cameras in the school building, including the entrances, hallways, and classrooms of The Playschool at St. Mary’s. These cameras are in place to monitor the security of the building and the school. Footage from these cameras may be requested at the discretion of the Director of The Playschool or the Rector of St. Mary’s Episcopal Church

## **Anti-Discrimination Policy**

It is the policy of St. Mary’s Creative Playschool to provide equal opportunity to all, and to prohibit discrimination because of race, sex, national origin, color, religion, age, physical handicap, marital status, or pregnancy or parenthood except where required by law, provided it is not in conflict with the practices of the Episcopal Church.

Members of St. Mary's Creative Playschool Advisory Council and Staff will be happy to discuss any concerns about the Playschool. Please feel free to contact the Administrator, at the Church Office, or telephone 563-3341.

We will let parents know in writing if there are policy changes that happen during the year.

