

# **Early Childhood Family Education Handbook 2024-2025**



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# ECFE Parent Handbook

Welcome to Northfield Public Schools and the Early Childhood Family Education program! ECFE is an enjoyable, informal place to learn with other parents and meet new friends. We are delighted to have you join us!

Our mission is to *strengthen families and support all parents in providing the best possible environment for the healthy growth and development of their children.*

## **We Believe:**

- You provide your child's first and most important learning environment.
- Being a parent is one of the most valuable roles you will have.
- At no other time will your child's development be as great as the first five years.
- All families have strengths.

## **The Goals Of ECFE Are To:**

- Give children opportunities to discover and learn.
- Support parents in raising their children.
- Offer information about child development and parenting techniques.
- Help parents and their children communicate with each other.
- Promote positive parental attitudes.
- Provide information on community resources.

## **Learning Through Play**

Our philosophy at ECFE is to weave learning through play. Learning comes best when children are given space, materials, and time to play. We encourage learning through expressive activities, imaginative play, large and small muscle activities, and activities that encourage social and emotional skills. We utilize both our indoor and outdoor classrooms for our programs.

## **WEATHER CANCELLATION POLICY**

ECFE follows the school district schedule. If school is closed all day, all ECFE classes are canceled. If school begins 2 hours late, all morning classes are canceled, but afternoon and evening classes meet. If school is dismissed early, all afternoon and evening ECFE classes are canceled. Cancellations are announced on KYMN 95.1 radio, most TV stations, [www.northfieldschools.org](http://www.northfieldschools.org). You will also receive an email.

## **CLASSROOM INFORMATION**

**ABSENCE:** Please communicate with the teachers if you are unable to attend a class or if your child will not be in sibling care (You will receive instructions on how to contact staff). No refund is given after class sessions begin except under special circumstances. If you have missed 3 classes without communication with ECFE staff, we reserve the right to fill your spot with someone on the waitlist if the class is full.

**ARRIVAL:** Enter Door #1 of the NCEC, come through the office, and hang out in the Parent Lounge until class starts. Follow the ECFE signs to the classrooms. It's important not to miss parent/child interaction time so your child is able to do everything the other children are doing.

**CELL PHONES:** ECFE is a cell phone-free zone. Please turn your phone to silent before class begins. If you wish to take a photo of your child, please be sure no other children are in the photo for privacy reasons.

**CLOTHING:** Please dress your child in comfortable play clothes—they will get dirty! Children must wear shoes in the classroom. We like to spend time in our Outdoor Classroom when the weather permits. Please make sure your children have appropriate outdoor clothing each week. If you forget boots or a coat, we have some extras on hand!

**DISMISSAL:** At the end of class, please return to the early childhood classroom with the rest of the parents before using the restroom or picking other children up from sibling care. Children may become frightened if they don't see their parents when other parents arrive. You may exit the building from door #5 but you will not be able to get back in the same door.

**EMAIL:** ECFE staff will communicate with families via email and Seesaw. Checking your email/Seesaw often will ensure you don't miss important class updates or resources. We use the email address listed in your Eleyo account (where you register for classes) so please be sure that information is up to date.

**HOLIDAY AND BIRTHDAY POLICY:** We do not celebrate religious or ethnic holidays such as Easter, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Ramadan, or Christmas. We will acknowledge birthdays by singing to the child. Per district policy, sugary birthday treats cannot be eaten in class.

## **CLASS STRUCTURE**

**PARENT/CHILD INTERACTION TIME:** This is a valuable time for you to follow, observe, and PLAY with your child. A licensed early childhood teacher prepares the classroom with developmentally appropriate hands-on activities for families to enjoy together. There is so much learning going on during this time! Visit activities that your child is interested in by getting down on his or her level, using simple language to describe what is happening, and ask questions. Waiting for your turn, cooperating with others, and cleaning up after yourself are great skills for adults to model and children to learn.

**AGE FOR ENROLLMENT:** The age range for our Busy Body (toddler) class is 12 months to age 3 because children may or may not be ready to move up to the preschool classroom at 2 years, and 6 months. In order for children to enroll in the preschool (Explorers) class, the child MUST be exactly 2 years, and 6 months (or older) by Sept 1 for fall sessions, or January 1 for winter and spring sessions.

**CIRCLE TIME:** All parents and children are encouraged to participate in circle time. Circle time consists of welcome greetings, stories, songs, or other skill-building activities. You are asked to model desired behavior by staying in the circle. If your child doesn't want to participate or leaves circle time, a staff member will step in and try to redirect your child.

**CHILDREN'S TIME IN SEPARATING CLASSES (Preschool Classroom):** Children stay in the classroom with a licensed early childhood teacher. Children get a chance to practice their independence and peer interaction skills while parents separate to another room with a parent educator. Children have a simple snack where good manners are modeled. Children have their snacks while seated at the table but are not required to eat a snack. Parents will sign up to bring a simple, store-bought healthy snack; we will provide water to drink. Due to the seriousness of peanut allergies, please do not bring snacks with peanuts in them. Please let the teachers know if your child has any type of allergy.

**CHILDREN'S TIME IN NON-SEPARATING CLASSES (Infant/Toddler Room):** A licensed early childhood teacher creates a developmentally appropriate environment with art, sensory, and manipulative activities for you and your child to experience and enjoy together. This is a valuable time for you to follow, observe, and interact with your child. You can label things, describe what your child is doing, and ask questions. There is a short circle time where we ask parents to model how to sit and participate. The children are encouraged to join, but may not be ready to sit the full time. The children do not have snacks and parents/caregivers stay in the classroom for parent discussion. During the parent discussion time, staff will engage in play with children so caregivers may focus on the topics being discussed. **Snacks or beverages are not allowed in the infant/toddler classroom.**

**PARENT EDUCATION TIME:** This time is planned to be relevant and tailored to participant needs, and children's ages. A licensed parent educator brings knowledge and information based on current research and past experience with families. The parent educator facilitates the discussion, but parents are always encouraged to respectfully share their experiences. A list of group guidelines is posted in each classroom.

**CURRICULUM:** Our Parent Education curriculum is based on the *Parent Education Core Curriculum Framework* and adapted to meet the needs of parents within each classroom. Our Early Childhood curriculum is based on the *Indicators of Progress (birth – 3 and 3 – 5)* and integrated with the parent education curriculum.

**SEPARATION:** Separation can be challenging. Please say goodbye to your child before leaving. We will do everything possible to make the separation go smoothly. If a child remains distressed after separation, the parent will be called from parent time to the children's classroom or sibling care. Please return to the children's classroom at the same time as all the other adults, and then pick up siblings in sibling care (if applicable).

**SIBLING CARE:** Experienced staff offer care for siblings from birth to 5. Two children must be registered for sibling care to run, so sibling care is not always guaranteed. All siblings should arrive toileted or with dry diapers. Please bring a labeled blanket, pacifier, or any other comfort item your child uses at home. Please pick up the child(ren) in sibcare promptly. The sibling care room will not be staffed until 5 minutes before the start of class; please be respectful of staff prep time. Children will not be allowed to stay if they are showing any signs of illness. (Sibling care is always offered for Newborn Baby Talk, must register 24 hours ahead and includes school-age children only during the summer.) **Babies who have moved out of their car seats/front carriers must be registered for sibling care.**

**DISCIPLINE POLICY:** We believe discipline is teaching and is a natural part of the growth and development of children. We have set up our classroom environments to keep limit-setting to a minimum. We work to have developmentally appropriate expectations/guidelines, and then If children struggle to follow classroom guidelines, staff will try one of the following teaching methods:

- Use a calm voice to distract or redirect the child to another activity.
- Remove the toys or materials that are being used improperly.
- If two children are having difficulty, coach them to make amends.
- If a child is very overwhelmed, staff may ask her to take a break until she has calmed down and is ready to rejoin the group.
- The staff takes each child's individual needs and comfort levels into consideration when teaching these skills.

**PHOTO CONSENT:** If you do not want pictures of you or your child taken or used, please request a non-consent form from staff.

**SUPERVISION:** This building is large and has many places to run and hide. Please have your eyes on your child at all times.

**TOYS FROM HOME:** Bringing toys from home is discouraged, except for special comfort items or special theme days.

## **HEALTH & SAFETY**

### **ILLNESS POLICY:**

ECFE follows the Northfield School District illness policies.

- Keep children/siblings home if they have a temperature, red or sore throat, unknown rash, vomiting, diarrhea, or severe congestion in the last 24 hours.
- They should have no fever with no medication in 24 hours.
- Watch colds with care since any communicable disease may begin with a cough or cold symptoms. Children should not attend classes or sibling care during acute stages of a common cold, sore throat, tonsillitis, or conjunctivitis.
- If your child develops symptoms after attending a class and may have exposed other children to a communicable disease, inform the center as soon as possible so staff can contact other parents if necessary.

**IMMUNIZATION RECORDS:** Minnesota law requires that families provide an immunization record or notarized conscientious exemption for every child enrolled in ECFE, including children enrolled in sibling care. These forms must be updated yearly.

**MANDATED REPORTING:** State law requires all public school staff to report suspected physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect of children to Rice County Child Protection Services. It is always our intent to support and provide resources to families in our program.

**SAFETY DRILLS:** Procedures for exiting for fire and tornado drills are posted on the door of each room. In the event of a fire, staff escort children from the Early Childhood classrooms and Sibling Care room following the building fire exit plan. Parents in the Parent Ed room follow the same route and are asked to help staff escort children from the building. Tornado and Lockdown safety drills are conducted indoors periodically throughout the year.

**TOILETING:** Please visit the family bathroom at the main entrance before class time and change diapers if necessary. If your child needs a diaper change during class, you will be called and asked to change it. There are changing tables in both the men's and women's bathrooms outside the gray double doors near the office as well as in the parent ed room and the sibling care room. The small bathrooms with yellow doors are for building staff only.

## **OTHER RESOURCES/OPPORTUNITIES**

**CHILDREN'S LIBRARY:** The bookshelf outside the main office offers free books to all families. Feel free to borrow a book, or keep it! If you would like to donate books please let the ECFE staff know.

**COMMUNITY EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL:** We could use your talents and experience to support various aspects of our early childhood programs. We meet monthly except for July and December and provide childcare. Please consider becoming a part of this important council.

**CONFERENCES:** Although we do not have conferences in ECFE, you are welcome to request a one-on-one

conference to discuss your child at any point throughout the year. Please contact your child's teacher at any point if you would like to set something up.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD SCREENING:** This is a free check of a child's height, weight, immunizations, health, vision, and development and helps to identify any health or developmental concerns before a child enters school. State law requires that children are screened before they enter kindergarten. It is best to screen at age 3 ½, but we welcome 4 and 5-year-olds as well. Call 507-645-1200, email [screening@northfieldschools.org](mailto:screening@northfieldschools.org), or visit the district website to make an appointment.

**PARENT LIBRARY:** A parent book library is located in the Parent Education room. Books can be checked out for two weeks at a time. Fill out the "old school" style library card and drop it into the box on the bookshelf.

**PARENT COACHING:** Under certain circumstances, a licensed teacher is available to make home visits. If a family is unable to attend site-based or outreach classes or is looking for extra support, a teacher may bring children's activities and parenting ideas for parents and children at home.

**SPECIAL EVENTS:** ECFE holds a variety of special events throughout the year. Look for these and other events in the parent education room, on the parent lounge bulletin board and in the brochure.