

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 that:

- 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.

CLASS INFORMATION

Weather Cancellation Policy: ECFE follows the school district schedule. If school is closed all day, all ECFE classes are cancelled. If school begins 2 hours late, all morning classes are cancelled, but afternoon and evening classes meet. If school is dismissed early, all afternoon and evening ECFE classes are cancelled. Cancellations are announced on KYMN 95.1 radio, most TV stations, www.northfieldschools.org, and the Community Education information line, 507- 664-3649.

Arrival: Enter Door #1 of the NCEC and wait just past the office for ECFE staff to bring you to the classroom. It's important to be on time for parent/child interaction time so your child is able to do everything the other children are doing.

Dismissal: We ask that you exit through the double gray doors of the building promptly after class. If you wish to chat with other families, you may do so in the lobby. Evening classes will exit through Door #5.

Clothing: Please dress your child in comfortable play clothes—they might get dirty! We like to spend time in our Outdoor Classroom when weather permits. Please make sure your children have appropriate outdoor clothing. If you forget boots or a coat, we have some extras on hand!

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. If you need to take an important call, let staff know and step out of the classroom.

Absence: Please send a SeeSaw message to ECFE staff if you will be absent or if your child will not be in sibling care. We do not provide refunds for missed classes. 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.

Communication: ECFE staff mainly communicate with families via SeeSaw once the session begins, and families should use SeeSaw to communicate with staff. Turning notifications on in the app will ensure you don't miss updates or resources. *At times, district-wide communication will come through emails.

Holiday/Birthday Policy: We strive to create a classroom environment where everyone feels welcome, and avoid the stimulation and consumerism that often accompany holidays. We do not

celebrate religious or ethnic holidays. We do, however, enhance curriculum with seasonal changes or themes common to a variety of traditions and acknowledge birthdays by singing to the child. Per [district policy](#), sugary treats cannot be eaten in class.

CLASS STRUCTURE

Parent/Child Interaction Time: A licensed early childhood teacher prepares the classroom with activities for families to enjoy together. Developmentally appropriate hands-on art, science, literacy and music are just some activities to encourage play, learning, and teaching opportunities. Follow your child's lead and visit activities that your child is interested in by getting down on his or her level and using simple language to describe what is happening. Waiting for your turn, cooperating with others, and cleaning up after yourself are great skills for adults to model and children to learn.

Group Time: All parents and children are encouraged to participate in circle time. Circle time consists of welcome greetings, stories, songs, and 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 with Snack (Preschool Classroom): Children get a chance to practice their independence and peer interaction skills while parents separate to another room for discussion led by a parent educator. Children have a simple snack where good manners are modeled. Children are not required to eat snack, but if they choose to eat, they must be sitting down at the table. Parents will sign up to bring a simple, healthy snack, and we provide water. 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 an allergy.

Children's Time (Infant/Toddler Room): In our non-separating classes with younger children in our infant/toddler classroom, children do not have snack, and parents stay in the classroom for parent discussion. We request that you do not bring snacks or beverages for yourself or your child into the infant/toddler classroom.

Classes with Flexible Separation: Our mixed-age classes allow for children to separate as they are comfortable to the adjoining room with early childhood staff in both rooms.

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 discussion, but parents are always encouraged to respectfully share their experiences. A list of group guidelines is posted in the classrooms.

Enrollment Ages: Children may register for an Explorers (preschool) class if they are 2 years and 6 months by the start of class in September, or the start of class in January. If a child turns 2.5 between January and March, they will need to stay in Toddler Time.

Children moving from the infant classes may move up to Toddler Time before turning age 1, depending on mobility.

On My Own: For children to enroll in On My Own, they must also be enrolled in an Explorer or All Ages Class. We may also make exceptions if the parent of that child is attending a class with a parent component with another child.

Enrolling in Multiple Classes: We love that families love coming to class. If you wish to be enrolled in two classes, you may do so only if there is space in the second class to ensure everyone has an opportunity to attend.

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 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.

Sibling Care: Experienced staff offer care for siblings from birth to 5. Availability varies with each class. All siblings should arrive toileted or with dry diapers. Feel free to bring a labeled blanket, pacifier, or any other comfort item your child uses at home. Children will not be allowed to stay in sibling care if they are showing any signs of illness.

Sibling care is not required for newborns or young babies who can be worn during class. Once younger siblings are out of the carseat/carrier or are mobile, they must be enrolled in sibling care. The family can also enroll in an All Ages class.

Discipline Policy: We believe discipline means teaching. We have set up our classroom environments to keep limit-setting to a minimum. 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 toy 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 and is ready to rejoin the group.
- Staff take each child's individual needs and comfort levels into consideration when teaching these skills.

Photo: We enjoy taking photos of you and your children playing together, or of your children practicing independence after separation. These photos go into your child's SeeSaw journal. If you do not want your child's photo taken for any reason, please request a non-consent form from staff

Toys from Home: Bringing toys from home is discouraged as they can be taken by other children or lost.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Illness Policy:

- 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.
- 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.

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 escorts children from the classrooms 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 Lock Down 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. There are changing tables in both the men's and women's bathrooms. There is also a changing table and small toilets down the hall from the classroom; ask staff where they are. If your child needs a diaper change during class, you will be called for a change. Please do not use the staff bathrooms. Please do not toilet your child in the hallway or adjoining classrooms.

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.

OTHER RESOURCES/OPPORTUNITIES

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, but we welcome 4- and 5-year-olds as well. Call 507-645-1200 to make an appointment.

Advisory Council: We could use your talents and experience to support various aspects of our early childhood programs. Whether it be promoting class offerings, sponsoring special events, or increasing awareness of early childhood, we need you! We meet monthly, and regular meeting attendance is not mandatory. Please consider becoming a part of this important council.

Parent Library: Parenting books, as well as picture books about hard things for kids, are 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.

Children's Library: The lobby outside the main office has bookshelves that offer free books to all families. Feel free to borrow a book or keep it. If you would like to donate books, you can "feed the book monster" in the entryway of Door #1.

Conferences: We do not have conferences in ECFE like in preschool, but you are welcome to request a one-on-one conference to discuss your child at any point throughout the year.

Parent Coaching: Parents in the Northfield school district are eligible for extra parenting support at no cost. Call 507-301-7369 or fill out the form at bit.ly/nfldparentsupport.

Special Events: ECFE holds a variety of special events throughout the year. Look for these and other events in the community education brochure.

Volunteers: Early Childhood has many volunteer opportunities. If you have talents you would like to share, please talk with the ECFE staff.