



Hilltop Children's Center

Family Manual

(updated May 2006)

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Introduction

Welcome to Hilltop Children's Center. This family manual describes the Center from its philosophical foundation to its daily operations. We encourage you to read it carefully and save it for future reference. If any of your questions are not addressed in the manual, please contact one of the office staff at (206) 283-3100.

Hilltop Children's Center is a nonprofit corporation licensed by the State of Washington to provide childcare services. Hilltop began serving the Queen Anne Community in 1971. Hilltop meets and exceeds the standards and regulations required by the State of Washington for childcare agencies, and is regularly inspected by the state.¹ We are also accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.² This is a national organization of early childhood educators that has set criteria for quality preschool and school-age programs.

Hilltop Children's Center is open from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday, for children aged three through ten years. Children, families, and staff of all races, creeds, income levels, sexual orientation, languages, abilities and national origin are welcome at Hilltop.

Hilltop is governed by a Board of Directors, which is composed of staff, parents, a Church member and volunteers from the greater community. Board meetings are held monthly and interested parents are welcome to attend.

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¹ <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/esa/dcccl/index.shtml>

² <http://www.naeyc.org/>

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Mission Statement

Hilltop Children's Center is a learning community for children and adults, where:

- Children are valued for their ability to do meaningful work, their wonder and curiosity, their perspectives and ability to play.
- Families are valued for their bonds and traditions, their ability to play, their commitment to work, home, community and their dreams for their children.
- Staff are valued for their vision, their delight in children, their skill, heart, and knowledge, a commitment to families and an ability to play.
- We cherish what we learn from each other.

Non-Discrimination Policy and Religious Statement

Non-Discrimination Policy

Hilltop does not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, marital status, physical abilities, religion, age, sex or sexual orientation. We are an open and affirming program, seeking diversity in children, staff, and families.

Religious Statement

Hilltop is a non-religious institution. While we are housed in Queen Anne Evangelical Lutheran Church, we are not affiliated with the Church. At Hilltop, we strive to affirm and celebrate each child and family in a myriad of ways. We welcome and support families from various religious and non-religious traditions alike. Our curriculum is not religious in nature. On occasion, we may partner with the Church in offering optional activities in which Hilltop families can participate (i.e. food drive for needy families in November).

Program Goals and Philosophy

Our goals at Hilltop are to:

- Provide high quality, affordable childcare that meets the accreditation criteria established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Provide a well-educated, skillful staff who interact positively with children and foster their self-esteem.
- Ensure that the environment and experiences we provide match each child's developmental level and individual style of learning.
- Support families in achieving their hopes for their children.
- Share our vision for early childhood education with other teachers and professionals.

- Operate a center with humane and positive principles and procedures for all involved.
- Create an enriching workplace for our staff.

In all of our programming we use childhood, collaboration and community as a framework for planning and learning. We prepare our children to be “ready for school” by providing them with opportunities for rich learning and relationship building through play and in-depth curriculum investigations. By the time they are school-aged and ready for our “Big Kids” program, children feel like Hilltop is a second home to return to after the structure of elementary school.

We believe that all children are full of remarkable capabilities and have a right to a childhood filled with play, exploration, and excitement about learning. Children's learning is enhanced with respect and support from adults. As you move through our classrooms you may recognize influences from the philosophies of Montessori, High/Scope, and the schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy.

We see children as enormously creative, and capable of complex learning through self-directed play. We build our curriculum around their questions and pursuits and the skills they are trying to master. We pay close attention to cultivating their self-esteem and their dispositions toward learning, risk-taking and problem solving.

We implement anti-bias practices and emphasize the value of diversity which does not stereotype, trivialize, or objectify. We seek a team approach in our care giving and teaching, and strive for collaboration with families and the wider community. Our staff values children as individuals, and as members of families, cultures and communities.

Program Curriculum

The word “educate” means to “draw out.” Teachers at Hilltop spend a great deal of time planning the environment for learning, then observing closely as things unfold. It is not uncommon to see adults writing observation notes, taking photos, or talking with each other about what they are seeing. Our staff members delight in children's play and learning, and we document, analyze and draw inspiration from it. Central to our approach is in-depth curriculum investigation that grows from children's pursuits and reflects their developmental themes.

Adults at Hilltop help children represent their ideas and experiences in multiple media. Typically we think of this as “artwork,” but beyond creative expression, representation is also an expression of symbolic thinking, a developmental process critical to all academic learning. Through representation children make their thinking visible. This process often leads to expanded thinking or a transformation of their ideas. The representation process offers opportunities for children to dialogue with, learn from,

and influence each other. As children represent and re-represent their evolving understandings in a variety of media, they deepen and extend their own thinking.

The role of “the teacher as researcher” is enhanced by the teacher’s ongoing observation and documentation of children’s work and play. Children’s representations provide a window for adults to get to know the thoughts and questions that the children are pursuing. This in turn, enables teachers to plan curriculum that is relevant and developmentally appropriate. Hilltop teachers see themselves as facilitators for children’s social construction of knowledge. They engage actively in learning and adventuring along with the children.

The education of the whole child is achieved through a balance of learning activities that foster language development and emerging literacy, the understanding of number concepts, gross and fine motor skills, self-help skills and social and emotional development. Through a combination of large and small group activity and individual choice making, each child is guided toward a holistic awareness of self and the world. At all times the developmental level, natural affinities and family and home environment of each child are considered.

One of the primary concerns of the curriculum is that the adults in the program accept children and their parents as they are--culturally, developmentally, and linguistically. Such acceptance means that teachers do not try to maneuver children into preconceived roles ordained by arbitrary methods or objectives, but view them instead as participants: contributing members who help to create the program. We strive to foster an emergent curriculum, one that arises out of the children’s interests and responses to the prepared classroom environment and experiences.

This goal results in a positive and supportive relationship between teachers and children that is, of course, crucial to social and emotional growth. Children in the program have control over what happens to them. The emphasis on investigating, creating, and reflecting together strengthens children’s sense of themselves as capable learners, and grows a deep sense of community.

Because the curriculum is attuned to the cognitive development of each child as well as to the collective understanding of the group, children have ample opportunity to explore and experiment at their own level of knowledge. Their activities are both interesting and satisfying to them because they offer both challenge and accomplishment. Full involvement in and satisfaction from one’s work is of prime importance for social and emotional growth.

Culturally Relevant Anti-Bias Education

The Hilltop staff are committed to peace, tolerance, and justice, and strive to model and teach those attitudes in everything we do. Hilltop is also committed to an anti-bias approach. The four goals of anti-bias education are:

- 1) Nurture the development of a positive identity in each child.
- 2) Promote each child's ability to interact with people who are different from themselves.
- 3) Foster each child's critical thinking about bias.
- 4) Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the face of bias.

We strive to provide toys, pictures, puzzles and books that are non-sexist and show people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in a variety of careers and family groupings. However, the Hilltop classrooms are not purposely stocked and decorated with dolls and posters portraying children from many cultures. Though we do have such materials available, they are not our primary mode for creating a culturally relevant, anti-bias program. We recognize that anti-bias work is about more than skin color, so we talk with children about the range of individuals and families that make up our Hilltop community and the wider world. We take care with the words we use, the beliefs we express and the books and stories we share.

Social problem solving and conflict resolution are an ever-present part of our daily lives together. We challenge children to articulate their wishes, feelings, and ideas and support them in working towards mutually agreeable solutions. By emphasizing negotiation and alternate perspective-taking, we help children advocate for themselves and recognize the needs of others.

We support multilingual children and families, inviting those families to teach words from their home language to teachers and classmates. We try, to the greatest extent we can, to fold words from children's home languages (including sign language) into daily classroom use, and to provide books for children that reflect all of the languages in use in that particular classroom. We also strive, if possible, to place children in rooms where teachers speak the same language as the child. For children who are working to learn English as their second language, we offer support in the context of social play and classroom activities and encourage them to maintain their first language while learning English.

Hilltop teachers devote part of their team meetings each week to discussing current anti-bias efforts and opportunities in the classroom. We purposely introduce meeting topics, thinking games, teacher skits, and other activities to provoke conversations about bias and fairness. In addition, we support in-depth study projects that contain elements of activism for social justice. Though perhaps not immediately visible on our

walls, all of these anti-bias efforts are recorded in our documentation of classroom work.

Our wish is to nurture within each child a disposition to speak and act for peace, tolerance, and justice.

Guidance and Conflict Resolution

All young children are developing the social skills that enable them to play cooperatively with other children and to function as part of a group. Often when children “misbehave,” it is because they haven’t yet learned the skills to negotiate, to ask for what they need, or to join in play with others, without grabbing, pushing, or hitting. Children are still learning cause and effect regarding how their behavior might impact others.

Behavior at Hilltop is managed by providing children with clear expectations about what behavior is acceptable and by encouraging, with positive reinforcement, those behaviors that are valued, while downplaying those that are not. Consistent limits are established and group cooperation is emphasized. Corporal punishment and humiliation are never used. Logical consequences are established for behaviors and positive guidance techniques are employed to reinforce them.

It may sometimes become necessary, as a last resort, to remove a child from his/her peers for a short period of time, if disruptive, aggressive, or unsafe behavior persists. Children are asked to “take a break from other kids” until they are ready to rejoin the group and remember classroom agreements. When they have returned to their peers and are exhibiting cooperative behavior, the teacher will then talk to them about what they could have done differently to solve the problem without acting out inappropriately. In the case of a persistent or repeated problem, we will always inform and consult with a child’s family, and work together on a collaborative plan for helping the child. We might also talk with the Staff Director or the school’s consulting psychologist to get suggestions and develop a strategy for supporting the child and family.

We strive to work out all interpersonal conflicts and issues between children verbally, by identifying the disagreement and then collaboratively generating possible solutions until one can be agreed upon by everyone involved. This form of conflict resolution, sometimes called “social problem solving,” is more respectful of children’s processes than a teacher-dictated solution, and builds social and cognitive skills, as well. Our goals always are to foster in children competence in negotiating and resolving problems they encounter and awareness of themselves as able, caring, resourceful people when faced with a conflict.

We see conflicts as opportunities for supporting children's learning. During conflicts, children practice self-awareness and communication, they master the skills of negotiation and compromise and they deepen friendships. As teachers, we choose from a range of roles when conflict arises. We may choose to act as a coach, helping children find appropriate language for talking about a problem, or we may choose the subtler role of facilitator during a conflict. We may simply listen to children talk about problems, mirroring their understandings and ideas back to them, or we may offer gentle suggestions for approaches to a problem. Our priority is always to nurture children's self-awareness and communication.

Our goals for children during conflicts are that they:

- calm themselves down enough to negotiate,
- find words for their feelings, needs, and wants,
- listen to others' feelings, needs, and wants,
- agree to a mutually satisfying solution, and
- continue to play together, or feel friendly and understanding.

Family Communication

At Hilltop, we strive for clear and open communication between families, staff, and children. It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to read all written communications from teachers and the Hilltop administration, including posted signs, newsletters, and personal communications, and to respond when necessary. Also, families should notify Hilltop, in writing, of any important changes or information regarding their child's health, attendance, schedule, etc.

Email is used as a regular form of communication between Hilltop and families. Please provide Hilltop with your preferred email address(es), and keep us updated if they change. Each class has an email list from which the teachers and administrative staff can email families. If you do not use email or regularly check it, please inform the office manager to ensure that hard copies of emails are distributed to you.

Each classroom has a system for communications between families and teachers, usually including a bulletin board where important information is posted, and a hanging file folder where families can pick up messages from teachers, the office and other families. There are also systems in place in each classroom for families to leave written messages for teachers.

Other forms of communication are intended to offer families a view into their child's daily life and ongoing work in the classroom. This may include an evolving curriculum board posted outside of each classroom that gives an overview of current themes and activities.

There are many avenues for communication between families and staff. We encourage families to communicate directly with teachers and they are welcome to involve the Staff Director in the communication loop. If a family has a concern and feels that concern has not been adequately addressed by the Hilltop staff, they may then seek the counsel of the Board of Directors.

Documenting Children's Progress

Staff are in regular communication with families about their child's pursuits, interests, and struggles. Teachers share with families informally on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Teachers are available during their planning time to talk with families via phone about their child's development. These phone conversations are an ideal time for families and teachers to follow-up with each other on any issue a child may be having at home or at school. In addition to this, teachers highlight children's learning and progress through documentation posted on curriculum bulletin boards, in individual children's journals, and in the group's archive of written documentation.

Staff also meet with families for conferences. In the fall, teachers meet with each family in informal, hour-long conferences, to learn more about their hopes and wishes for their child.

Throughout the year, families are invited for small group conferences. At these collaborative conferences, teachers and families comes together to study and reflect on children's in-depth investigation work. Together, we read transcriptions of children's conversations, and study photos, video footage, and examples of children's work, looking for the underlying meanings of their work and the questions they're pursuing. Teachers and families think together about how to support and deepen the children's investigation.

Family Participation

Hilltop is a non-profit organization, and we need to make full use of all our resources. Since the quality of your child's program is of primary importance to you, as parents, and to us, as staff, we ask for a minimal monthly commitment of your time. This enriches the program and helps build a working relationship between parents and staff, which ultimately benefits your child.

There are a number of ways that parents can volunteer, most of which fall into one of these categories: staff support (classroom cleaning, field trip attendance, washing and mending, etc.), school maintenance (gardening, painting, carpentry, repairs, etc.), fund-raising (auctions, parties, special events, grant writing, etc.), or oversight committees (Board of Directors, Finance Committee, Fundraising Committee, etc.).

If you have a special skill that you would like to share with the school or classroom, please let your child's teacher know. Maybe you can arrange a field trip to your place of

work for a group of children, or bring in something special that relates to what the children are studying. The possibilities are endless, and your contribution of time and energy helps bring you and your child closer as you become part of their world at school. Please ask your child's teacher if you need ideas for ways to become more involved.

Family Observations and Visits

Families have access to all areas of the center used by the children anytime that their children are in attendance. You are welcome to drop in and observe whenever you like, but advance notice is helpful for both you and the teacher. The class may be out of the building at the time you decide to drop by, or they may be involved in planned activities that could be disrupted by the unexpected appearance of someone in their family. Children get excited to see their family, and this wonderful surprise can disrupt a child's focus or interrupt their social play. By the same token, if you do make a plan with your child and her or his teacher to visit, please try to attend as planned, or inform the teacher if there is a change in your plan.

When observing, please find a place to sit that will help you remain as unobtrusive as possible, so you can see a more natural representation of the classroom in action. Your presence in the classroom is exciting to your child, and she or he will probably try to engage you in play, or act differently than usual because you are in the room. If you remain calm and quiet, your child may get engrossed in social play, and you will get a chance to see what his or her day is like when you are not present. Please do not bring food or treats to school (unless requested by a teacher), or engage in loud or boisterous play. Families are also welcome to come visit to play, work, or have lunch with the children.

The First Day of School

It is important that your child's first few days of school are successful, so allow yourself plenty of time to get ready for school. Make sure that a good breakfast and trip to the bathroom are a part of your child's morning routine so s/he arrives at school well rested, relaxed and in good spirits. Take your child to his/her room and sign the child in. In the classroom, let your child stay with you to allow time for him/her to feel ready to become involved with the group. After looking around with your child, find a comfortable place to stay and remain there. Often children will use you as a "home-base" from which to explore the environment. Make sure that you meet all the teachers in your child's classroom, and pass on any important information to them.

On your child's first day at Hilltop, please bring:

- blanket and soft toy
- lunch
- spare clothes

- photo of your child
- framed photo of your family

When you want to leave, let your child know you're leaving – don't just disappear! When you say good-bye, feel confident that the teachers will support your child with his/her feelings, offering comfort, reassurance, and acknowledgment of what she/he is feeling. Our intention is to honor the bonds between you and your child, and to make room for your child's feelings. It may help you to make a specific plan with your child on the way to school about how the drop-off time will look, one example, not necessarily a fit for all families: "let's read two books together, and then you can give me two hugs and three kisses, and push me out the door."

The first few days of school can be stressful and/or fatiguing for children, and this is sometimes expressed by regressive behavior or irritability. Feel free to discuss any concerns you may have with your child's teacher. You may also wish to consider picking your child up a little earlier than usual for the first few days of school. Having quiet routines at home will ease the transition.

Please bring your child to school in clothes designed for active indoor and outdoor play. These should be clothes that you and your child are willing to get dirty, and that your child can get in and out of by herself or himself. We will go outside for play and exercise each day, so please help your child dress comfortably and appropriately, including shoes for running and climbing and a jacket or raincoat for the ever-changing Pacific Northwest weather. On sunny days, please apply sunscreen at home, or when you arrive. We will reapply it as necessary, with your written consent.

Make sure there is a full change of clean clothes in your child's cubby at all times, clearly labeled with your child's name or initials. Please check your child's cubby for soiled clothes at the end of each day and replace any extra clothes that your child has used. Hilltop has a limited supply of spare clothing. If your child is sent home in Hilltop spares, please launder them and return them the next day so that they may be used for another child.

Signing In and Signing Out

Your child must be accompanied to and from school by an adult and signed in and out with the adult's full name in writing. This is a Washington State licensing requirement. Hilltop will not assume responsibility for any child not signed in and out by the parent/guardian or authorized representative. Children will be released only to those adults whose names are provided in the child's initial enrollment papers. Families may include additional names by notifying the office in writing.

If you have a school age child the teacher will sign your child out of Hilltop to school in the morning and into Hilltop from school in the afternoon. This is the only time a

teacher may sign your child in or out. We will call you if your school-age child does not arrive at Hilltop from school when expected. We want to make sure that your child is safe. This is a very time consuming process for staff, so please let us know ahead of time if your child will not be coming to the "Big Kids" program.

When you are picking up your child from the playground or from the park, your child's teacher will have the sign-in sheet there. As well as signing your child out, please verbally notify your child's teacher that you are picking up your child.

If someone other than her or his parents/guardians will pick up your child, you must leave teachers a note with the name of the person picking up your child and your full signature. As a safety precaution, staff may ask this person for identification before allowing them to take your child from the center. Please, when you have someone new pick up your child, remind them to bring a driver's license with them.

Posted near the sign-in sheet, you will also find important information about your child's day, upcoming events, field trip permission forms and other notes that help us keep you informed. Please take time each day as you sign in, and again as you sign out, to read these important messages from teachers and the administration. Also, you should check each day for things your child needs to take home, including artwork, extra clothes, nap bedding, etc.

Hilltop closes promptly at 6:00 p.m., and at 3:00 p.m. on the first Friday of each month for preschool families. You will be charged a late fee of \$1.00 for every minute after the official closing time.

Toys From Home

Our toy policy is important: one soft toy for naptime use only!

When personal items are brought to school, they frequently get lost or broken. They can also cause disagreements and hurt feelings, and distract children from the wealth of materials and experiences available to them at school. We have plenty of toys to play with and projects to work on at Hilltop. Please leave personal toys at home or in the car – placing them in cubbies is not an option. Here are some examples of what not to bring: jewelry, games, action figures, collectible cards, Barbie dolls, videos, video games, violent books, etc.

Here are some suggestions for how to say "no" to your child in a positive way, when your child wants to bring toys to Hilltop:

- "Hilltop has an agreement: only one soft toy at school."
- "Hilltop has lots of school toys. This is a home toy."
- "What's your teacher's agreement about toys from home?"
- "I will keep this toy safe for you, at home or in the car, until you leave Hilltop."

Occasionally, children may want to bring a special book, a photo, a great find from nature, or some other “treasure.” We honor that delight and enthusiasm in children, and it’s fine if your child brings a book or a natural object or some other “big excitement.” Please consider that the classroom is a busy space, with lots of children, so you may want to think twice about delicate items or family heirlooms.

We ask that your child never bring action figures or commercial toys, games, or movies. If a child does bring such items, we will keep it for her or him until pick-up time, with a reminder that “our agreement at Hilltop is that children leave their toys at home. We’ll keep that for you until you go home.”

It is not an option for children to leave toys in their cubbies or mailboxes. Many toys are lost or broken when left in the hallway, and often there are arguments about toys from home sighted in children’s cubbies. Though it’s sometimes hard for a child to part with a cherished toy, our experience is that it’s much easier to do so before leaving home, rather than delaying that negotiation until you reach Hilltop.

Outdoor Play

There are three areas primarily used for outdoor play: the front yard, Coe Park Playground, and Rachel’s Park. In summer months the children are back in the building by 5:30 p.m. and in winter months the children are back before dark. Each class has a routine place (usually the classroom door) that informs you as to where the children are playing.

While at the park your child will be supervised by all Hilltop teachers present. It is important that you make contact with your child’s primary teachers when picking up your child. Your child’s teacher will have the sign out sheet at the playground. For the safety of your child, be sure to sign him/her out as well as verbally notifying the teacher at the playground that you have signed the child out and are taking her/him.

The front yard is also available for children to use. In the summer, children will be able to go wading and play in the sprinklers. A swimsuit, towel, and shoes for water play should be stored in your child’s cubby throughout the summer session.

As children go outside everyday, we’d like to ask you to be mindful of your child’s dress at school. Please make sure they are dressed for the weather, and in clothes that are appropriate for outdoor activity. We do go outside in the rain, so on rainy and potentially rainy days, please send your child with rain gear. Flip flops and sandals, while fun to wear, are not safe for active play. If your child comes to school in such shoes, please provide a pair of sneakers as well.

Other Program Information

Age Transitions Policy

The Rainbow room is generally composed of children who are between 2 ½ and 3 ½ years old. Children in the Sunlight, Mountain, and River rooms are generally 3 ½ to 5 ½ years old. Most enrollment placements are made in the summer and fall. On a rare occasion, a transition from the Rainbow room to the Sunlight, Mountain, or River room may be made during the school year.

With transitions from Rainbow to the other classrooms, we'll examine a number of variables. We'll consider a child's:

- Age
- Social skill development
- Cognitive skill development
- Length of time in the classroom (i.e. if the child has just recently started in a classroom, we'd be reluctant to impose yet another transition on the child)
- Whether or not she has any siblings, and if so, birth order (i.e. if the child is the youngest in the family, possibly being the oldest in the classroom is a great opportunity)
- Which room her closest companions are placed
- Group make-up as a whole (i.e. kids with similar family structures, cultural identities, gender balance)
- Family's placement preference

As with most other decisions at Hilltop, we reference general guidelines, but do not impose them broadly across the board, as no two children are exactly alike. Rather, we take into the account the uniqueness of each child and make a decision accordingly.

Classrooms

The Hilltop classrooms are designed to help children explore and integrate a variety of play experiences. All of the programs offer spaces for sensory play, block building and construction play, dress-up and dramatic play, sorting, counting, and design work, book reading and other literacy work, quiet alone time, and more. In addition, each program has a separate or integrated "studio" space for artistic creation, expression and representation of ideas in multiple media. In addition, all of the programs may use the downstairs Big Kid area during the fall, winter and spring for indoor movement games and active play.

Daily schedule

Each classroom has a daily schedule designed by the teachers to meet the needs of the particular children in that group. These schedules may change from day to day depending on class interests and activities, but everyone has a fixed schedule for breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack and rest time. The rest of the day consists of a

balance of flexible times where children are free to interact with each other and the environment, and teacher-facilitated times with small or large groups. Every day there are at least two active play times scheduled either outdoors or inside. Special events may include walks to local parks, field trips by bus or by foot, cooking projects, visits from community resource people, and other special events to support children's project work.

Toilet Learning

Hilltop's ratios and facility are based on the expectation that children are using the toilet, rather than in diapers. If a child has a special need and is unable to use the toilet, Hilltop staff will devise a plan to support that child. However, most children enrolled at Hilltop are already competent at using the toilet and will not require toileting support.

Teachers provide a few times during the day for routine trips to the bathroom. Before children leave the building for outdoor trips or play, before lunch, before naptime and following wake-up from nap, staff will invite children to try sitting on the toilet. After each time of using, or attempting to use the toilet, teachers will ensure that children thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water. In many classrooms, there is the practice of singing the ABC song to its completion all the while washing one's hands. This ensures that children spend ample time disinfecting their hands. Hilltop does not use antibacterial soap; we have found it to be exceptionally harsh on children's delicate skin and the King County Department of Public Health advises against its use. The single most significant thing parents can do to keep their children healthy is to teach, model, and reinforce proper handwashing.

Children will occasionally have toileting accidents. This is a normal part of childhood. We do not make a big deal out of these accidents. We ask that a complete change of clothes is available in your child's cubby in case it is needed. Please check your child's cubby for soiled clothes at the end of each day and replace any extra clothes that your child has used. Hilltop has a limited supply of spare clothing. If your child is sent home in Hilltop spares, please launder them and return them the next day so that they may be used for another child.

Costumes

Costumes and dress up shoes can inhibit active outdoor and large motor play, all necessary experiences for children's development. If your child comes to school in a costume, please be sure to bring along an extra set of clothes and shoes to change into for outside play. We prefer non-commercial costumes, as they tend to limit the imagination. We have many clothes at school for dress up/dramatic play and find the children to be more creative when the clothes do not present a pre-determined character. We want your children to feel confident, secure, and safe on their feet and in their bodies, so we can provide satisfying outdoor experiences for them.

Pesticide Free Policy

For children's safety, we do not use pesticides at Hilltop. If there is ever an insect problem, we use soap and water to rid the plant of unwanted insects.

Animal Policy

To insure children's health and safety, we follow licensing guidelines regarding pets. We keep the pets at Hilltop in well-managed, clean cages and containers. There are a few fish tanks at Hilltop, which are typically well maintained by parent volunteers. There is also a cage of two guinea pigs in one of the preschool classrooms. Staff in this classroom make it a part of their weekly routine to ensure that these pets are well cared for and that the space is kept clean and free of germs. On the rare occasion that children touch the animals, they are asked to wash their hands with soap and water immediately afterwards. We understand the desire to bring family pets into the classroom, however prior approval from the office must be obtained before doing so. Please leash your family pet safely away from where children play.

Naps

Children in the upstairs preschool programs rest in their rooms on soft mats for at least one hour each day. This is a state licensing requirement. Each child has his/her own cotton flannel sheet and pillowcase, provided by Hilltop, and usually brings a favorite blanket and soft toy from home. Parents are expected to take bedding home at the end of each week and wash it. Make sure to bring it back to school on your child's next school day. Children generally start their rest time between 12:45 and 1:30, and get up between 2:30 and 3:00, depending on the age group. Quiet activities (books, stories read aloud, quiet toys) may be provided for those children who do not need to sleep. We do not have a separate space for non-nappers. Any variation in nap routine should be negotiated between parents and teachers.

Music and Dance

Weekly music and dance enrichment classes are held for children in the Preschool program. These classes are taught by professionals from outside the center. There is a small additional charge for these classes, payable monthly or quarterly to the instructors. You will receive information about these classes (including billing information) directly from the instructors.

Field trips

Field trip notices will be posted above the sign-in sheet at least one day before the trip. We ask that you sign a permission form for each field trip. These will be posted next to the sign-in sheet. When children go on walks to neighborhood parks a note will be posted on the door telling you where they are. No special permissions are necessary for these walks.

Birthdays

If you would like to celebrate your child's birthday in the classroom, please let the teacher know in advance. You may bring treats to share with the class (muffins, cupcakes, or a favorite food of your child's) and we encourage you to bring things low in sugar content. Please check with your child's teacher regarding any food allergies or dietary restrictions in your child's group. No nuts, nut oils, or shellfish will be allowed.

Holidays

There are many different kinds of holiday celebrated and they are all special and wonderful to the families who celebrate them. It is our goal at Hilltop to craft an approach to holidays that reflects the children and families in our program and that acknowledges the wider world in which we live. Holidays are an opportunity to live our commitment to anti-bias practices at Hilltop. Hilltop has a complete Holiday Policy Manual. Please stop by the office to get a copy if you are interested.

Meals

Hilltop provides a breakfast snack and afternoon snack and families provide a healthy sack lunch. Hilltop provides milk, soy milk or rice milk for lunch. A "food intolerance form" must be completed for us to serve your child soy or rice milk. We encourage the use of whole foods and fresh, seasonal produce. We limit foods that are over processed or high in refined sugars and encourage families to do the same.

Our breakfast is made up of cereal, juice, and milk. Afternoon snack consists of a variety of wholesome foods, sometimes fruits or vegetables, sometimes home baked items. Menus are posted each week. Families who bring children to school after meal service has ended should provide a meal for their children prior to arriving at Hilltop.

Hilltop makes an effort to accommodate each child's food allergies and dietary choices and restrictions, including vegetarian, vegan, and dairy-free options. Hilltop is nut/peanut free and shellfish free.

Hilltop is a participant of the USDA food program and follows criteria established by the United States Department of Agriculture. Each family is asked to complete a USDA eligibility form each fall, whether or not the family's income meets the program criteria. The benefit of Hilltop's food program is available to all children regardless of race, color, handicap, sex, or national origin.

Here are some guidelines we think you will find helpful as you plan sack lunches for your child.

Should I label my child's lunchbox? Yes, please label your child's special lunch box or bag with his/her first and last name.

What about refrigeration? Please pack blue ice in your child's lunch box to keep items cold. Upon arrival, please place lunches in your child's cubby or in a bin in the classroom

Is there a way to heat foods? Unfortunately we are unable to heat meals for children. You may wish to try a good quality thermos or other insulated container to keep leftovers or soup warm.

Do I need to send a drink? No. Hilltop will provide milk or a non-dairy alternative per your request. Please do not send additional beverages with your child's lunch.

Can I bring peanut butter? No, Hilltop is peanut free. This is because peanut allergies are potentially fatal, and as much as we love the convenience and taste of peanut butter, we cannot justify the risk.

Can I include shrimp or other shellfish in my child's lunch? No Hilltop is shellfish free. This is because shellfish allergies are potentially fatal.

What if I forget my child's lunch? If we happen to notice at drop off time that you've forgotten your child's lunch, we will ask you to make a quick trip to Ken's Market to purchase a lunch for your child. Ken's has a huge selection of fresh sandwiches, fruit, and other lunch items from which to choose. If we notice after your departure that your child doesn't have a lunch, we will call you to ask if you can bring a lunch or if you would like us to purchase lunch for your child. If we purchase food for your child, we will ask you to reimburse Hilltop for the costs.

Are there any guidelines about what should be included in sack lunches? Yes, the Washington Administrative Code that pertains to childcare programs lists certain regulations about what must be included in sack lunches in order to meet daily nutritional requirements. Each child's sack lunch must include a dairy product (such as cheese, yogurt or cottage cheese), a meat or meat alternative (such as beef, fish, poultry, legumes, tofu, or beans), a grain product (such as bread, cereal, bagel, or rice cake), and fruits or vegetables (two fruits or two vegetables or one fruit and one vegetable to equal the total portion size required). Keep in mind that we do offer milk (or a non-dairy alternative) with lunch, which meets the daily requirement.

Transportation Policy

Transportation for Field Trips

Hilltop uses the Metro bus system for some of our field trips. We also take many walking fieldtrips. We occasionally use private cars. Families or staff who are driving for field trips must provide proof of insurance.

Transportation to/from the Public Schools

Hilltop does not provide transportation to any of the local public schools, with the exception of Coe Elementary School. Hilltop staff will walk school children to and from Coe School. Hilltop tries to serve children from any elementary school which provides transportation to and from the center. We commonly have children enrolled at Hilltop from Coe, Hay, and Lowell Elementary Schools.

Health and Safety

Immunizations and Health Exams

State law requires a "health history" and record of immunizations for each child prior to admission. We must also have the date of your child's last physical exam, which must have been completed within one year prior to admission. We also ask for the name of the family physician, who to contact in case of an emergency, and any conditions of the child which may require specific attention.

Children must have all immunizations that are recommended for their age by the State of Washington. Medical exemptions to immunizations may be granted by a licensed physician; personal or religious exemptions can be claimed by parents/guardians. In the event that your child is not immunized against a particular disease and an outbreak of that disease occurs, your child may be excluded from care.

Yearly we must file an immunization report with the state. At the end of each calendar year we will send out a form asking for updates of your child's immunizations records. Your cooperation in doing this is greatly appreciated and will be facilitated if you keep a record of immunizations in a safe place. King County Department of Health provides free immunizations for children.

Medications

In order for staff to administer ANY medication to a child, we must have written authorization from the parent/guardian. Check with your child's teacher or the office to locate the "Parent Permission for Medications" form. This form must be filled out for prescription and non-prescription medications. Fill it out completely and return it to your child's teacher. Place medications in the office refrigerator lock box or the first aid cabinet lock box and inform your child's teacher that you have done so. Parents should also leave a note for teachers EACH DAY that the medication is to be administered.

When the medication is administered the teacher will sign the date, time and amount given on the reverse side of that form.

The following types of non-prescription medications may be administered by Hilltop staff with written parent permission: antihistamines, non-aspirin analgesics, non-narcotic cough suppressants, anti-itch ointments or lotions, chap stick, diaper ointment, sunscreen. Medications must be provided by the parent and be in the original container labeled with child's FULL name. We can only administer medications according to the dosage and age recommendations on the packaging. Any exceptions must be accompanied by a signed note from your child's physician.

All prescription drugs must be in the original container with the original prescription label on the container, including the child's first and last names, date prescription was filled, medication's expiration date and legible instructions for use. Hilltop cannot administer sample medications, medications prescribed for a sibling, or medications packaged in any container other than the original. *Hint: Ask your pharmacist for 2 labeled bottles so that you can keep one at home and one at Hilltop.*

Illness

A day at Hilltop is easy and fun for a child in good health, but exceedingly demanding for one who is not feeling well. Sick children need the one-on-one care and unlimited rest and fluids that they can get at home. Bringing a sick child to school exposes him/her to other secondary illnesses and exposes the staff and other children to illness. Bringing a child back to school before all symptoms have subsided risks a relapse and further delays recovery. (Doctors recommend that children who have had a fever stay home one full day after the fever subsides).

Families whose work schedules do not allow them to stay at home with a sick child need to plan ahead for the inevitable day when their child will be excluded from care. If you do not have a friend or relative who can care for your child in the event of illness, you should pre-register for one of the services that can care for sick children. The office can give you more information on these services.

Seattle-King County Department of Public Health issues the following guidelines on keeping children home, which Hilltop adheres to. Children who show signs of illness as follows should not be brought to the center. We do not have sufficient staff to keep a child indoors. If a child is well enough to come to the Center, they should be well enough to play outside.

Keep me home if:

1. *I'm vomiting*, two or more times in 24 hours.
2. *I have a rash, lice, or nits.*

3. *I have diarrhea*, three or more watery stools in 24 hours.
4. *I have an eye infection*, thick mucus or pus draining from the eye.
5. *I have a sore throat*, with fever or swollen glands.
6. *I'm just not feeling very good*, unusually tired, pale, lack of appetite, confused, or cranky.
7. *I have a fever*, of 100° (F) or more (taken under the arm) and sore throat, rash, vomiting, diarrhea, earache, or just not feeling good.

If your child should display signs of illness while at Hilltop, you will be notified to come and pick up the child as soon as possible. The child will be isolated in the office until you arrive, to prevent the communication of the illness. Please notify us if our child is diagnosed as having a communicable disease such as chicken pox, measles, scarlet fever, hepatitis, herpes, infectious diarrhea, or any other disease or parasite, so that we may notify other families.

Children with communicable diseases such as impetigo will not be admitted until we have received a statement or phone call from the doctor indicating that the child has been treated for at least 24 hours. Children with head lice will not be readmitted until the child has been treated with an approved medication and is free of all nits.

Injuries

If your child is injured while in our care, an accident form will be filled out, noting the time of the injury, what happened, how the injury was treated and by whom. We are limited to standard first aid procedures; we will not apply anything other than soap and water to a cut and ice to a bump or bruise.

If you do not find an explanation for an injury, do not hesitate to ask the staff. If an injury requires treatment beyond what can be provided at the Center, you will be contacted. In the event that a parent or approved guardian cannot be contacted, we will call the person that you have listed as an alternate in case of emergency, and if we are unable to reach this person, your physician. If medical attention by a physician is required and we have been unable to contact any of the people you have listed, we will call 911.

Prevention

We work to prevent the spread of communicable diseases by practicing careful sanitation. Children and staff wash hands before and after toileting and before meals, toys are washed regularly, and bedding is laundered once a week. We also ask that when your child arrives at Hilltop each day, you take him or her to the bathroom to

wash hands, as a means to prevent the spread of infections. Each child uses only his or her own mat and bedding. Staff take First Aid and CPR training every two years, and stay aware of possible safety hazards in the environment. We routinely cover sanitary hygiene practices and safety rules as part of our curriculum. Fire drills and earthquake drills are held each month as required.

Sexual development

We at Hilltop believe that sexual development occurs in the context of overall growth and development, along with physical, social/emotional and cognitive development. Like all areas of childhood growth, sexual development is highly individualized. An environment which fosters this growth in a positive light is essential. We recognize that families at our center have differing values around sexual development and expression. It is our hope that parents will feel free to communicate with staff about their own individual family's beliefs and values.

We believe that a positive environment allows children to learn about and feel good about their bodies, develop a vocabulary which allows them to understand and talk about all of their body parts and functions and allows them freedom of self-expression in a wide variety of non-stereotypic roles during dramatic play. During dress up children may undress to their underwear in order to try on other drama clothing. We do not allow nudity (although this is normal for children), use of profanity, teasing and intimidation and sexual exploration that involves touching each other's private parts. Our ultimate goal is to foster in children a high sense of self-esteem as their bodies grow and change.

Allergies

If a child has an allergy when enrolled or develops one at a later date, the center must be provided with a statement from the doctor indicating the type of allergy, symptoms, and foods to be avoided and anything else that the child should not be exposed to. In the case of food allergies, the director and families will decide whether or not the parent should bring supplemental food. For severe, life threatening allergies, an "emergency action plan" will be drafted and posted. For other food issues, there is a Child Care Nutritionist available through the Seattle/King County Health Department when needed.

Child abuse and neglect policy

Hilltop is required by law to report suspected physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, or exploitation to Child Protective Services immediately. We are not required to notify parents.

When A Child Is Of Concern

Occasionally a child may have difficulty adjusting to the program. If a child is creating a hazard to him or herself or to others, or when teachers must devote an inordinate amount of attention to that one child over a period of time, Hilltop care may be terminated. Any persistent behaviors that interfere with the function of the program and the safety needs of children and staff will be considered grounds for termination.

The following steps will be observed prior to termination of enrollment:

- Teacher and the Staff Director will have frequent, on-going communication with parents.
- Teacher and the Staff Director will observe and document child's behavior.
- The Staff Director will investigate with parents/guardians possible medical/physical reasons.
- The Staff Director and staff will discuss and implement positive approaches to dealing with the behavior.
- An outside resource person, usually our Public Health Nurse or consulting psychiatrist, will be consulted and asked to observe the child, with parent permission.
- Director and teachers will follow through to document implementation of suggestions from outside resources using a two-week to one-month time line.
- If deemed necessary the Staff Director will inform CPS.
- If there has been no change in the disruptive behavior within the agreed upon time limits, the child's enrollment at Hilltop may be terminated.
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School Closures

A calendar of closures will be distributed to families each fall, covering the period of September through August. Signs will be posted reminding families of closures.

HOLIDAYS: Hilltop is closed New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the Friday following, Christmas Day, and all days between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. If a holiday falls on a Saturday or Sunday, Hilltop will close on the nearest working day prior to or following the holiday. These closures will be noted in the school calendar.

ADVOCACY: Hilltop closes for one day each spring, usually around May 1st, to participate in meetings, workshops, or activities related to advocacy for the field of Early Childhood Education. This closure day will be listed in advance on the annual calendar.

IN-SERVICE: Hilltop closes four days each year for teachers to clean the classrooms and meet together or attend training workshops. These in-service days will usually be scheduled in August/September, January, and June, as follows: the Thursday and

Friday before Labor Day weekend, a Friday or Monday in mid-January, and the Friday after public schools close for summer recess. These closure days will be listed in advance on the annual calendar.

STAFF MEETINGS: Hilltop preschool classes close at 3:00 p.m. on the first Friday of each month, so that the whole staff can meet together for discussions of all-school business and state-mandated training. Hilltop's late pick-up charges will apply after 3:00 p.m. on those days. The Big Kids classroom remains open on staff meeting days and is staffed by substitute teachers.

SNOW/WEATHER: Hilltop reserves the right to close at any time due to severe weather conditions, or for other emergencies or natural disasters. In general, Hilltop will close for severe weather whenever the Seattle Public Schools close. During times that the public schools are out of session (winter break, late afternoon, etc.) Hilltop's closure will be at the discretion of the Business or Staff Director. No refunds or credits are given for closures due to severe weather.