



Hilltop Children's Center

Building on the Wonders of Childhood

Family Manual

Updated – July 2011

Hilltop Children's Center

FAMILY MANUAL

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 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 that are required by the State of Washington for childcare agencies, is regularly inspected by the state, and was accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children for over a decade. We are 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 two through ten years. Children, families, and staff of all races, creeds, income levels, sexual orientation, languages, abilities and national origin are most welcomed at Hilltop.

Hilltop is governed by a Board of Directors, which is composed of staff, parents, and volunteers from the greater community. Board meetings are held monthly and interested parents are welcome to attend. Further information about the Board of Directors is included in the manual under "Organizational Structure".

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Table of Contents

Mission Statement	3
Non-Discrimination and Religious Statement	3
Program Goals and Philosophy.....	3
Organizational Structure.....	4
Program Curriculum	6
Culturally Relevant Anti-Bias Education	7
Guidance and Conflict Resolution	8
Family Communication	10
Family Participation.....	11
Family Observations and Visits.....	11
The First Day of School	12
Signing In and Signing Out.....	13
Toys from Home.....	14
Outdoor Play	15
Other Program Information	15
Age Transitions Policy	Holidays
Animal Policy	Meals
Birthdays	Music and Dance
Classrooms	Naps
Costumes	Pesticide Free Policy
Daily Schedule	Toilet Learning
Field Trips	
Transportation Policy	21
Health and Safety	21
Allergies	Injuries
Child Abuse and Neglect Policy	Medications
Illness	Prevention
Immunizations and Health Exams	Sexual Development
When a Child is of Concern.....	25
School Closures	26
Disaster/Crisis Response.....	27

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 members 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.

Hilltop is a non-religious institution. 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.

Program Goals and Philosophy

Our goals at Hilltop are to:

- Provide high quality, affordable childcare that meets or exceeds the accreditation criteria established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
- Provide a well-educated, skillful staff who interact positively with children and foster their self-esteem and help develop their social-emotional development.
- Ensure that the environment and experiences that are provided match each child's developmental level and individual style of learning.
- Support families in achieving their hopes and dreams 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 most markedly, 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, socialization and problem solving.

We implement anti-bias practices and emphasize the value of diversity that 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.

Organizational Structure

Hilltop is fortunate to be comprised of multiple groups who we consider “stakeholders” in our organization, dependent upon each other for our success and accountable to each other in responsibilities, each with significant roles and rights. Those stakeholders are: the Board, the Administration, the Teachers, the Families, the Early Learning Community, the Local Business community, and most of all, the Children. As a non-profit, Hilltop takes a community-based stance in decision-making and fundraising. This section will better explain the capacity of the first three groups.

Hilltop’s Board of Directors is a body of ten individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences who are all committed to the financial stability and programmatic capacity of Hilltop. The Board members are all volunteers who act as a governing body for the organization and is comprised mostly of parents. The largest duty the Board performs is the creation and adoption of an annual budget that both reflects Hilltop’s mission and ensures Hilltop’s financial solvency. New board members are voted on by Board consensus, and serve a minimum of a two-year term.

Hilltop has an administrative and teaching structure that best supports the development of children and the management of stable organization.

Organizational Structure:

Executive Director- Meg McNulty (organizational development and administration, fund development, public relations, budgeting, board relations, licensing and accreditation)

Program Supervisor – Michele McLean (supervision of teaching staff, liaison to parents, recruitment, human resources, schedule, licensing and accreditation)

Operations Coordinator – Brad Belvo (bookkeeping, facilities)

Curriculum Specialist – Sarah Felstiner (professional development, staff curriculum support, specific children of concern, professional tours, liaison to Early Learning community)

HR/Registrar – Kathryn Heller (Office management, children and staff records, reporting and procurement, enrollment, clerical duties)

Kitchen Manager – Jeremy Eacker (meal preparation, menu design)

Classroom Staffing:

Hilltop values shared decision making and egalitarian teams so that all teachers at Hilltop are considered Master Teachers, with no leads or assistants. This team teaching approach translates to a rich learning environment and more personalized/individualized curriculum consisting of three teachers (except in the half-day program which employs two teachers). Teachers receive paid planning time each week out of the classroom, including a weekly team meeting to work on documentation, discuss curriculum as a team, share observations of the children and classroom dynamics, and plan future trips, events, etc... among many other programmatic tasks.

As Hilltop is open for 11 hours and teachers normally work an 8-hour shift, the schedule for teachers can be complex and the staffing pattern for teachers varies from room to room. The typical flow is that one teacher arrives around 7:30 am; the next arrives around 8:30 or 9:00 am and the “closing” teacher shift begins at 10:00 am. There are many times when all three teachers are “on the floor” with the children while other times, one of the three teachers may be out of the room for planning time or for a meeting, usually around midday lunch and nap.

Towards the end of the school day, typically at 4:30 or 5:00 pm, there may be only one teacher remaining in a particular classroom; at those times, Hilltop employs “floaters” , typically Seattle Pacific University students who have indicated an interest in education. They work with our Hilltop teachers to ensure that the end of the day is calm, enriching, and engaging. While the floaters “keep us in ratio”, they also are known to the children as helpers and teachers. Hilltop strives to keep consistent floaters and substitutes so that children and families can get to know them as well. Substitutes and floaters are asked to introduce themselves to families and they may not always have that capability so please feel free to introduce yourself to them.

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 appreciate 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 intent helps ensure 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 teachers are 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.

Family members are invited to be active participants in the daily life of the Center and contribute to the process of developing curriculum by reading their children's journals and responding to the questions raised in documentation, by participating in collaborative conferences and by sharing their ideas, interests and skills in the classroom and on behalf of the Hilltop community.

Culturally Relevant Anti-Bias Education

The Hilltop staff is committed to peace, acceptance, and justice, and strives 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.

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. 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.

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.

Hilltop teachers devote part of their professional development time to discussing ongoing anti-bias efforts and opportunities in the classroom, and current thinking about the best practices for supporting anti-bias learning. 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 and redirecting 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. All of these efforts take place within a framework of unconditional affection for each child.

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. Children always have the company of a teacher or other staff member while they’re calming down. 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 Program Administrator, Executive 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,
- develop and agree to a mutually satisfying solution, and
- continue to play together, or feel friendly and understanding.

As with all of our practices here, please feel free to ask your child’s teachers about more details on the conflict resolution approach we use or the language we share if you would like to utilize or reinforce these practices at home.

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. Please see below for further details on our forms of communication. 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 irregularly check it, please inform the Operations Director 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. Each child has a hanging file folder called a "stand up" where families can pick up messages and letters 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 within each classroom that gives an overview of current in-depth curriculum investigations and/or of the daily life of the children in the group.

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 Program Administrator and Executive 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 Learning

Staff members are in regular communication with families about their child's pursuits, interests, strengths and struggles. Teachers share anecdotes with families informally on a weekly 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 development through documentation posted on curriculum bulletin boards, in individual children's journals, and in the group's archive of written documentation.

Please feel free to take these journals home and add your own reflections!!

Teachers meet with families in the fall in informal, half-hour 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 come 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

Family members are welcomed and encouraged to form partnerships with staff in supporting their child's growth and development while at the Center. In addition, we welcome each family as part of the classroom and overall center-wide community. There will be many opportunities to participate in potlucks and celebrations and we hope you will join in these community events. In addition, you are welcome to spend time at the center or join your child for lunch when your schedule permits. There are a number of ways that parents can volunteer, most of which fall into one of the following categories: staff support (field trip attendance, washing, sewing and mending, helping maintain the environment 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.). We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from families. PLEASE COMPLETE THE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP FORM IN THE ENROLLMENT PACKET OR ASK KATHRYN FOR A COPY.

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 advanced 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 visitors. Children get excited to see their family members, 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.

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'd like to get a chance to observe what your child's day is like when you are not present you can try finding a place to sit that will help you remain as unobtrusive as possible. 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. Please take your child to his/her room and sign the child in. Upon arrival please encourage your child to wash their hands. 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:

- a small blanket and one soft toy
- lunch (see the "Sack Lunch Guidelines" handout in your enrollment packet)
- a full set of spare clothes (labeled with your child's name)
- an unframed photo of your child
- a framed photo of your family

When you want to leave, let your child know you're leaving. 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, a teacher will sign your child into Hilltop from school in the afternoon, as they get off the school bus. 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 process is a very time consuming 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, their name and information MUST be on file in the administrative office and you must leave teachers a note with the name of the person picking up your child and your full signature. This provision also applies to Hilltop teachers and staff who may be transporting your child home from school. As a safety precaution, staff may ask the pick-up 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. The Big Kids program closes at 6:15 during the school year, and at 6:00 in the summer. Beach program closes at 1:00 p.m. You will be charged a late fee of \$1.00 for every minute after the official closing time.

Toys From Home

Please leave personal toys at home or in the car rather than bringing them into the Center. Our toy policy is 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. Here are some examples of what not to bring: jewelry, games, action figures, collectible cards, 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."

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 outdoor yard, the SPU track and field, and walks along the canal that include mini-parks. In summer months the children are back in the building by 5:30 p.m.; in winter months, the children are back before dark. Each class has a routine place (usually a sign on 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.

In the summer, children will be able to go wading and play in sprinklers and wading pools. 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, sandals, and Crocs, 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 Raindrop Room is for children who are primarily 2 – 2 ½ years old, the Rainbow room is generally composed of children who are between 2 ½ and 3 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 Raindrop to Rainbow or Rainbow to the Sunlight, Mountain, or River room may be made during the school year.

With transitions from Raindrop or 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 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 room has an integrated studio space for artistic creation, expression and representation of ideas in multiple media. Groups also have access to the Big Body Room 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 predictable routine 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 investigations.

Toilet Learning

Hilltop teachers will work in partnership with families to create toileting plans that reflect family culture and values, the child's individual needs and our approach to living and learning at Hilltop. Teachers will make diaper changing a valuable, positive time to interact with children and will track diaper changes and provide this information to parents on a daily basis.

Each classroom is adjoined to a bathroom that meets licensing standards for young children. Children will be able to use the bathroom in an unregimented fashion. In addition, teachers will invite children to use the bathroom before leaving the building for outdoor trips or play, before lunch, before naptime and following wake-up from nap. 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 while washing 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 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. Although we hope never to have the need for pesticides in our center, in the event we needed to use them we would follow the Integrated Pest Management Policy recommended by the Public Health Department of Seattle that includes posting a notice and a myriad of other safety precautions. These policies are also used by the SPU play field maintenance group and in other areas along the canal and are available upon request.

Animal Policy

To insure children's health and safety, we follow state child care licensing guidelines regarding pets. We currently are pet free. If that were to change, pets at Hilltop would be kept in well-managed, clean cages and containers. Fish tanks would be maintained by parent volunteers or teachers and staff would make part of their weekly routine to

ensure that pets were well cared for and that the space was kept clean and free of germs. On the rare occasion that children touch 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 preschool rooms 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 12:30 and 1:30, and get up between 2:30 and 3:00, depending on the age group. Each room has naptime rituals, like reading a book to children, then putting on a special soft light and music. Teachers rub the backs or feet of children that respond to this kind of soothing touch. After a period of relaxation and rest, 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 special requests and changes in nap routine will be discussed between parents and teachers.

Field trips

Field trip notices will be posted above the sign-in sheet at least two days 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 holidays 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 Holiday Policy that we revisit and revise periodically. Please consult the Curriculum Specialist if you have questions about our holiday practices.

Meals

Hilltop provides breakfast, afternoon snack and a light, late afternoon snack and families provide a healthy sack lunch. Hilltop provides milk, soy milk or rice milk. 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.

Eating food with children is as important as any other time of day in a child's life. Children learn life long habits and develop relationships with food and their bodies during meal times. It is our goal that lunch will be a relaxed and conversational time for children and teachers to visit and enjoy their food. We will encourage children to try what's in their lunchbox at least twice but will not insist that children eat everything or even that they save some foods for the end of the meal. Research tells us that children can learn to listen to their bodies if they are given healthy foods from which to choose and are not forced to eat them. This is how children learn to listen to and trust cues from their bodies about hunger and fullness.

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. A simple, late afternoon snack is offered around 5:00 PM. Protein is always available for this along with grains including rice cakes and wholesome crackers. 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 tree nut/ peanut free and shellfish free.** Soy and sunflower seed butter are OK to pack in your child's lunch and will be used in snacks served at the Center.

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, cashew or almond butter? No, Hilltop is peanut/tree nut 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 purchase a lunch for your child. 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 should 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.

Can I send a dessert? You are welcome to pack treats, and know that your child may or may not save that item in their lunch for the end of the meal. We recommend that everything you pack be something you know your child enjoys, and that you're happy to have your child eat. This approach helps children notice what they're hungry for, and eat their lunch in the order they choose. We do notice that if children have lots of sweet treats and salty snacks in their lunch, they may eat less of their other foods. Teachers will help children re-pack uneaten food each day, so that you can gauge which foods your child is eating.

Do children share lunch items with each other? No. Because of allergies, dietary restrictions, and family food preferences, we ask children to "eat the lunch that your family packed for you." However, from time to time you may hear from your child's

teachers about fun events like cooking days and potluck picnics, where you'll be invited to provide a particular item or ingredient for a family-style lunch.

Transportation Policy

Transportation for Field Trips

Hilltop uses the Metro bus system for some 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 and a staff person from Hilltop will be in each car if the driver does not have First Aide CPR training.

Transportation to/from the Public Schools

Hilltop does not provide transportation to any of the local public schools. Hilltop commonly serves children enrolled at Coe, Hay, Laughton, Lowell and Queen Anne Elementary Schools. Transportation is provided to and from Hilltop to these schools through the Seattle Public Schools Transportation Dept. Children are picked up in the AM and dropped off in the PM at the bus stop directly in front of the 4 Nickerson building. Teachers wait with children for the bus before school and wait for the bus after school to ensure the safety of the children. If other plans become necessary to accommodate bus schedules, this will be discussed with families and a plan will be agreed upon.

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 and dentist, 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. A licensed physician may grant medical exemptions to immunizations; 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 school 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 every 6 months. Fill it out completely and return it to your child's teacher. Inform your child's teacher that you have completed this paperwork and she or he will tell you where to store the medication. . 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. You risk a relapse and further delays recovery bringing a child back to school before all symptoms have subsided. (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 have options 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 can 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: or
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. (Doctors recommend that children who have had a fever stay home one **full** day after the fever subsides).

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.

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 Blood Borne Pathogen training yearly and 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. In addition, we prepare children for how to respond during fire and earthquake drills and hold monthly fire drills and quarterly earthquake drills as required by child care licensing regulations

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 and 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 we will call 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.

Sexual Development

Hilltop teachers and staff 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. Our experience is that 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. At the same time, we support children in learning the boundaries that help them respect their own and the bodies of others. During dress up children may undress to their underwear in order to try on drama clothing. While we do not allow nudity (although this is normal for children), there might be other times of day when you see children in their underwear. In addition, we do not allow the 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. Child Protective Services recommends that we don't allow a child to leave with a high or intoxicated person as this can put the child in great danger especially if the person is driving. Should this occur, we will approach the person with kindness and a suggestion that we call a cab, call someone on their emergency list or if possible, one of the staff members can offer to drive them home. If a parent does leave with a child and they are drunk or high it can constitute a CPS referral. To ensure a child's safety, it might be necessary to contact 911 for assistance. This is an uncommon occurrence but the more prepared we are for the possibility, the better.

When A Child Is Of Concern

Occasionally a child may have difficulty adjusting to the program or we may notice that a child may need additional assistance in an area of development or learning. Hilltop teachers and staff will share any of those concerns directly with parents and assist families obtain supplemental services if necessary.

If a child is observed to be dangerous to himself/herself or others or requires specialized attention beyond our ability to provide, Hilltop care may be terminated. Every attempt will be made to partner with families to find programs and resources that are responsive to the child's special needs.

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

- Teacher and the Program Administrator will have frequent, on-going communication with parents.
- Teacher and the Program Administrator will observe and document the child's social/emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioral development.
- The Program Administrator will meet with families to explore their perceptions of the child's needs and current situation.
- Management, staff and parents will meet, discuss, plan and implement positive approaches in response to the child's needs. .
- An outside resource person, usually our Public Health Nurse or consulting child psychologist, will be consulted and asked to observe the child, with parent permission. As a result of this observation further assessment may be recommended.
- The Program Administrator and teachers will follow through to document implementation of suggestions from outside resources using a two-week to one-month time line.

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 typically 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 classroom preparation, and professional/organizational development to allow for a smooth running center, to share best practices and to keep staff updated in advancements in the field. To that end, our closures are usually scheduled in August/September, January, and June. These days will be listed in advance on the annual calendar that is provided for families in September of each year.

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/INCLEMENT WEATHER: We strive to accommodate the needs of our working families while also valuing the safety of the children in our care and the safety of our staff and families. Hilltop reserves the right to close at any time due to severe weather conditions, or for other emergencies or natural disasters. We use Seattle Public School (SPS) as a guide for closures but we do not follow SPS exactly. In the event of a delayed opening or full closure, a message is left on our voice mail, 206.283.3100, by 6:30 AM and we make every effort to email the entire school in the morning of a snow event. Please remember that some of our teachers do not live locally and we must consider coverage and safety issues when making the decision to open or close in major weather events. During times that the public schools are out of session, Hilltop's closure will be at the discretion of the director. No refunds or credits are given for closures due to weather.

Disaster/Crisis Response

Hilltop has a long track record of providing safe and nurturing care for children for 40 years. Hilltop has a comprehensive Crisis and Disaster Plan in place and all staff members receive training in this plan. This includes things like building and site evacuation, earthquake preparedness, emergency lockdown/intruder alert, fire safety, power outage, storms and snow, and any other emergency that could occur. As required by licensing, staff and children practice monthly fire and quarterly earthquake drills so that this becomes a routine, non-threatening occurrence for the children. All of our staff members are trained in CPR/First Aid and Blood Borne Pathogens. We have 72 hours of food and water on site as recommended by disaster specialists and we will invite you to make a comfort kit for your child.

A complete copy of Hilltop's Crisis/Disaster Response Handbook will be provided upon request. Inside you will find the following addressed:

1. Step by step procedures on how to respond to disaster/crisis situations during the first 30 minutes.
2. Prioritization of notification of emergency response personnel including how to limit escalation and injury during the initial impact of the situation