



Letting the Children Be Children Waldorf Early Childhood Education

by Ronald E. Koetzsch, PhD and Anne Riegel



A typical Waldorf kindergarten room



Fairies of unspun wool hover in front of a kindergarten room window.



Starting the day with circle time

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A Glimpse into a Waldorf Kindergarten

The typical Waldorf kindergarten is a beautiful and inviting place. Its wooden floor is polished and shining, covered here and there with thick wool carpeting. The walls are a light-filled peach color that embraces and comforts. On the window sills are pinecones, colored stones, crystals, seashells, and plants. In one corner, a nature table draped with a colorful silk cloth displays the special gifts of nature for the time of year—flowers, autumn leaves, a ripe apple perhaps. Angels and fairies made from unspun wool float magically in the air, suspended from the ceiling by slender threads. Simple cloth puppets of fairy-tale characters also grace the room, sitting on a table against the wall or gathered in a wicker basket.

On one wall is usually a framed print of Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*, a Christian but also universal, archetypal image of selfless, embracing maternal love for the child. Images from other religious and cultural traditions expressing parental protection and devotion may also be displayed.

The room is illuminated primarily by natural light coming in through windows and skylights. There is probably an alcove or two, equipped with mattresses and blankets for the children's nap time. The kindergarten-sized chairs and tables are made of polished wood. At snack time, the tables are covered with clean tablecloths, colored cloth napkins, and loaves of freshly baked bread. More than one parent has lost his or her heart to Waldorf Education just by walking into a Waldorf kindergarten.

Daily Rhythm in the Waldorf Kindergarten

Imaginative play, practical domestic activities, and movement characterize daily life in the kindergarten. Every day, under the direction of the teacher, the children play circle games that involve skipping, clapping, hopping, and jumping, as well as singing songs with seasonal themes.

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Each day, the children spend much time involved in creative, dramatic play. Around the room are large baskets filled with wooden blocks, cut logs, pieces of cloth of various sizes and colors, plain wooden toys, and child-sized pots, pans, and dishes. The children use these simple props to create their own stories, dramas, adventures, and games.

There is also a daily story time when the children sit in a circle, and, in the oral tradition, the teacher tells from memory—rather than reads—a fairy tale or folktale. On special days, there may be a puppet or marionette show, again depicting a traditional story, presented by the teacher.

Every day, the children have a period of free play in the schoolyard or on the playground. In most Waldorf schools, this outdoor playtime takes place regardless of the weather, so it often involves the putting on and taking off of sweaters, raincoats, hats, and boots. The children, directed by their teacher, also work in the school garden and, if the school has a working farm, visit and help care for the cows, chickens, and other animals. Walks in nature, in a nearby park or forest perhaps, are also part of the daily schedule.

On most days, the children also do an artistic activity. They draw with thick crayons, do simple color exercises with watercolor paints, or model a small figure out of colored beeswax.

At various times in the course of the day, typically when the children are engaged in free play, the teacher does simple housekeeping and cooking tasks. She chops vegetables and cooks a soup for the morning snack, kneads dough and bakes bread, waters the plants in the room, makes a decorative display of flowers, or sews a button on a shirt. The children are free to simply watch the teacher, continue with their own play, or work with her, imitating her actions. When she is making bread, for example, some of the children will take a turn mixing and kneading the dough.

At the end of the day is a general cleanup in which all the children participate. With the teacher guiding, the children sweep and mop the floor with their little brooms and mops, dust the windowsills, wash and dry the dishes, and put everything in its proper place so that the room is ready for another day. Often the teacher and children sing a song or recite a favorite verse as they work.

Circle time, free play, snack, story time, nap, and outside play take place in the same sequence and more or less at the same time every



*Listening to and acting out a story—
about gnomes?*



*A fairy tale is brought to life
with marionettes.*



*The children take part in keeping the
room clean and tidy.*



Every week there is a special day for baking.



Kindergartners take part in the school May Day festival.



The training for Waldorf teachers involves much artistic work.

day. While spontaneity is valued and the teacher is free to create her own schedule, the governing principles are regularity, rhythm, and repetition.

There are also weekly, monthly, and annual rhythms of events in the life of the Waldorf kindergarten. Each Tuesday may be “Bread Baking Day” and each Thursday “Walk in the Forest Day.” In the autumn, there is a harvest festival for the children. The coming of spring is marked by a planting festival or a celebration of May Day, complete with a Maypole and Maypole dancing and singing.

Also, the birthday of each child in the class is celebrated as a very important occasion. The birthday boy or girl is crowned as the “prince” or “princess” of the day and lights his or her birthday candle. Usually, the child’s parents visit the class for the celebration, and there is a special food treat as well. Children with summer birthdays also get their special day.

The Waldorf kindergarten is unusual as much for what it does not have as for what it does have. All the accoutrements of early academic learning, almost universal in early childhood education today, are missing. There are no computers, televisions, flash cards, homework assignments, or reading and writing aids.

The Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher

The teacher who presides over this little paradise ideally has had a two-year, full-time Waldorf teacher training (or the equivalent, part-time over several years). The training includes extensive practice in the arts, including singing, music, artistic speech and recitation, painting, drawing, clay modeling, drama, and puppetry. It includes handcrafts as well—such as sewing, knitting, doll- and puppet-making, woodworking, and metalworking. These activities are seen as a means of personal development and transformation, as well as a practical preparation for teaching. The trainees also study child development and educational theory, particularly as Rudolf Steiner understood these, and they typically spend time practice teaching under the supervision of a master Waldorf kindergarten teacher.

One of the key ideas in Waldorf early childhood education is that children learn by imitation. Hence, the Waldorf kindergarten teacher strives, in all her actions, words, and thoughts, to be

worthy of emulation by the children. She dresses simply and modestly and wears an apron during housekeeping activities. Her posture is upright, and her movements are deliberate and graceful. She speaks clearly and slowly, with good diction, cultivating her voice both in speech and song. Often the teacher will signal a change in activities by singing to the children.

The Waldorf kindergarten teacher strives to maintain a calm and cheerful demeanor at all times. She reminds herself daily that each child is a unique, divinely created individual with an eternal spirit and an important destiny. She keeps in mind that her task as teacher is to foster the healthy development—physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual—of each child entrusted to her care and guidance. She strives to be a good example for the children and to manifest unconditional maternal love, protection, support, and goodwill. While the great majority of Waldorf kindergarten and early childhood teachers are women, there are also a significant number of men in the profession.

The Origin of the Waldorf Kindergarten

The Waldorf kindergarten must be understood within the context of Waldorf Education. Waldorf Education was developed by Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). Born in Croatia—then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire—to Austrian parents, Steiner was known early in his life as a philosopher and scientist concerned with epistemological and scientific questions. His profound personal spiritual experiences led Steiner to reject the increasingly dominant materialistic worldview of his day. From the age of forty, Steiner spoke publicly as a spiritual teacher, examining such basic questions as the origin, nature, and destiny of the human being, the evolution of human consciousness through history, and the meaning of the various religions of the world. He soon attracted a following, which over the years grew into a large international movement. Steiner called his worldview Anthroposophy, “the true wisdom of the human being,” and in 1912 founded the Anthroposophical Society. The society grew, attracting many members of the artistic, intellectual, and social elite of Middle Europe and beyond.

Several years later, Steiner began emphasizing the importance of the arts as a factor in human development. He created an art of movement called eurythmy, developed new techniques and styles in drawing, painting, and sculpture, pioneered new concepts in



A quiet moment in the morning circle . . .



. . . and a more active one!



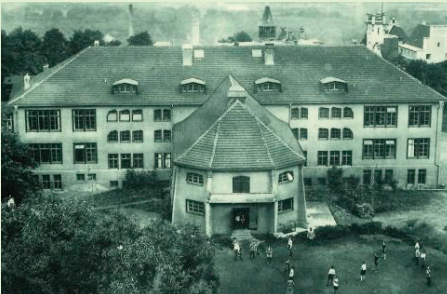
*Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925),
founder of Waldorf Education*



The Second Goetheanum, Dornach, Switzerland, designed by Rudolf Steiner



A stage performance of eurhythmy



The first Waldorf school, Stuttgart, Germany, founded in 1919

architecture, and fostered artistic and dramatic speech. Steiner also gave insights and indications to musicians and musical instrument makers about tone, the musical intervals, and the music of the future. For Steiner, art can be a means for the human being to experience the invisible, spiritual world and also a way to develop capacities for spiritual vision.

In the last years of his life, Rudolf Steiner applied his insights into human nature to various practical fields, including medicine, agriculture, economics, social organization, care of persons with developmental problems, and care of the elderly and dying. His underlying theme was that the practices and institutions of modern society, based on a materialistic view of the human being, need to be transformed on the basis of a spiritual understanding of the world and of humanity. The human being is not merely a biological machine that has evolved from simpler forms of life through an impersonal, random process of evolution. Each person is a unique creation of the divine spiritual world and has a spiritual essence that precedes and transcends the physical, that is eternal, and that is engaged in a process of personal evolution and transformation.

Waldorf Education is a product of the last period of Rudolf Steiner's life. In April 1919, just months after the end of World War I, Steiner lectured in Stuttgart, Germany. There, a prosperous businessman, Emil Molt, asked Steiner two remarkable questions: Is there a way to educate children so that they will develop into human beings who are capable of bringing peace to the world? And, if there is, will you help me start such a school?

Steiner answered in the affirmative to both questions. Within a few months, he had selected teachers for the school and had introduced them to the curriculum and pedagogy that was to be the basis for this new type of education. The first Waldorf school opened in Stuttgart in September 1919, with 175 children and class teachers for grades one through eight. Most of the students were children of workers in the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, of which Molt was the director.

The first school was called *Die Freie Waldorfschule* (meaning the Free Waldorf School)—free in that it was independent of all state or other outside control. The school was unique for many reasons. It welcomed all children, boys and girls, those who were destined for university, as well as those headed to factory and shop, and educated them together and in the same way. The school

sought to nurture all capacities of the child—physical, emotional, intellectual, artistic, moral, and spiritual. Each day included in an integrated way activities for the intellect, for aesthetic and emotional development, and for the physical being of the child. Art, music, handcrafts, and drama were as important as reading, writing, arithmetic, and history. It was an education “to school the head, hands, and heart.” The teachers were given the task of helping the children become creative, independent, and moral individuals, capable of imparting meaning to their lives. They, and the thousands of Waldorf teachers since then, took as their motto:

Accept the children with reverence; educate them with love; send them forth in freedom.

There was no kindergarten in the Stuttgart school in its first year. The school went from first grade to eighth and was based on Steiner’s understanding of the special nature of the developing child between the ages of seven and fourteen.

Soon, however, a kindergarten was established within the school, founded on what Steiner saw as the particular nature and needs of the younger child. The Waldorf kindergarten became an intrinsic part of Waldorf Education, and as Waldorf schools were founded in Germany, the Netherlands, England, the United States, and other countries, the kindergarten was often the seed from which the schools grew.

Today there are 1100 Waldorf schools in 64 countries. Each school has a kindergarten. In addition, there are many Waldorf kindergartens that are not connected to a larger Waldorf school. Hence, there are over 1800 Waldorf kindergartens in the world, including in Japan, Korea, China, Thailand, India, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Egypt, Israel, Kenya, Namibia, Argentina, Uruguay, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, and Haiti. The International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) oversees this international movement.

All of the roughly 160 independent Waldorf schools in North America have kindergartens (many have two or three), and most of these also have preschools. There are, in addition, more than 60 freestanding Waldorf kindergartens and preschools. The Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN) is a membership organization for these kindergartens and supports the movement in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.



A Waldorf kindergarten in Scotland



A Waldorf kindergarten in Kenya



A Waldorf kindergarten in China, one of more than 300 in the country

Understanding Waldorf Early Childhood/ Kindergarten Education

In today's educational environment, the typical mainstream kindergarten has become a place of academic learning. Five- and six-year-olds sit at desks, learn to read and write, take home worksheets, and often learn basic keyboarding and computer skills.

In this context, the Waldorf kindergarten day seems an anachronistic mystery. It is characterized by a long morning spent in free, creative, dramatic play, listening to stories, watching puppet shows, playing circle games, running and skipping in the school playground, pulling weeds in the school garden, watching and perhaps helping the teacher bake or sweep the floor, punctuated, of course, by a nap time. Today, when the emphasis in education is on early academics, preparation for standardized tests, and readying children to become fierce and successful competitors in the global economy, what is going on here?

The key to understanding this mystery is Rudolf Steiner's view of the true nature and needs of the young child. Steiner was by inclination and training a scientist, a keen observer of the phenomena of the natural and human worlds. As a young man, he spent several years as a household tutor, and his view of the young child is based in large measure on direct observation. The several elements of this view explain the distinctive aspects of the Waldorf kindergarten.

Steiner observed that the young child is open, in a total and unguarded way, to the sensory (sights, sounds, textures) and other stimuli that come from the outside world. The young child is in effect a single sense organ, experiencing and being affected by the immediate environment much more deeply than the typical adult. Steiner held that these external sensory stimuli play an important role in the physical and emotional development of the child. For this reason, great care is taken in the Waldorf kindergarten to create an aesthetically rich and harmonious environment, alive with delicate yet vibrant color, and filled with beautiful, natural, and human-made objects.

Steiner also observed that the young child is by nature a being of will and of movement. (No parent will contest that!) The child needs physical activity for healthy development. And so the Waldorf kindergarten child spends most of the day physically moving—in games, indoor and outdoor play, outings, and chores.

For Steiner, the young child is also a being of imitation. The child imitates the gestures, bearing, behavior, speech, and even the



Creating a world with two wooden stands and a piece of silk



The nature table brings the outdoors inside.



Out into the world and exploring nature on the daily walk

emotions, moods, and thoughts of others, particularly the adults in her immediate environment. Therefore, the Waldorf kindergarten teacher, as already noted, takes great care to be a model for the children, in every respect.

The Importance of Play

Another key element in Steiner's view of early childhood is that play is the "true work" of the young child. The young child is a being with an active, creative imagination who needs to and loves to engage in unstructured play as a way of experiencing and understanding the world. Make-believe is the child's natural activity. This play is not only an end in itself. It is the necessary precursor to the later development of intellectual and other capacities. Through play, the healthy integration of the senses takes place, and the child is prepared for acquiring academic skills such as reading and writing. Steiner observed that the young child is capable of intellectual work and can learn to read and write before the age of seven. He added, however, that the later intellectual development of the precocious student may be adversely affected if he is overstimulated by too-early academic learning. This, of course, explains the central role of play and the absence of academics in the Waldorf kindergarten. Steiner often spoke of the importance of allowing children to remain in "the kingdom of childhood" until they are truly ready to leave it.

Finally, Steiner held that the healthy development of the child requires a predictable, regular daily rhythm. A schedule in which playtime, mealtime, and nap time occur at the same time each day gives the child strength. Hence, each day in the Waldorf kindergarten follows more or less the same pattern, except when there is a birthday or special festival.

Steiner first expressed these ideas about child development almost a century ago. Then, as now, they were not in accord with the mainstream view of child development and education. In recent years, however, Steiner's understanding of the young child and of human development has been corroborated by scientific research and noted educational and scientific authorities.

In 1990 Dr. Jane Healy, a professor of child development and a close observer of research into brain development, published a book called *Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think—and What We Can Do About It*. It was a groundbreaking, revolutionary book.



Waiting to catch "the big one" during the time for free play



Making cookie batter attracts many helping hands.



Each morning at the same time, children and teachers gather around the table for a simple and wholesome snack, freshly prepared.



Exploring the world of color with watercolor paints and . . .



. . . drawing with beeswax block crayons both “light up” the entire brain.



Discovering the sound of the ocean hidden in a seashell

In it, Dr. Healy strongly opposes mainstream emphasis on early academics. She points out that although the young child can learn to read, write, and do math, the child’s brain at that time is not well suited for these activities. When, a few years later, the brain has developed and the child is ready to learn these skills in an optimal way, problems may occur for the child who has been pushed ahead academically. Healy suggests that learning disabilities, including ADHD, and student burnout may be linked to premature emphasis on academics.

Since then, much research has corroborated Healy’s conclusions, and many other educational experts have expressed the same concerns. For example, recent research indicates that free, imaginative play stimulates the development of the prefrontal lobes of the brain and contributes to the development of “executive function.” Executive function includes the ability to create a plan and to carry it out, to think abstractly and flexibly, to develop internal guidelines for behavior, and to inhibit inappropriate behavior. Artistic activities such as music, drawing, painting, and dance have a similar effect. According to a 2008 study by the Dana Foundation, only free play and artistic activities engage (“light up”) the entire brain of children between the ages of four and seven. In doing so, they contribute to the healthy development of the entire nervous system.

These and similar studies have led the American Society of Pediatricians (ASP) to assert that free play, physical exercise, and artistic activities are essential for the healthy development of the young child. Accordingly, the ASP has decried the loss of time allowed for unstructured play and art in many schools today.

Laying the Groundwork

In an article titled “Laying the Groundwork for Learning Reading and Writing” (published in the Fall/Winter 2015 issue of *Renewal: A Journal for Waldorf Education*), veteran Waldorf early childhood educator Christi Pierce Nordoff (shown in photo at left) explains that although children in a Waldorf preschool or kindergarten are not taught academic skills, they are acquiring the skills that will enable them later to learn to read and write at the appropriate time. They develop listening skills (by listening to stories, rhymes, poems, and songs), language skills (by reciting poems and verses and singing songs), and visual skills (by observing flowers, animals, and other natural phenomena, and by watching the teacher do practical tasks).

In the same issue of *Renewal*, Nazneen Kane, PhD, an assistant professor of sociology and director of the Center for Early Childhood Wellbeing at Mount Saint Joseph University in Cincinnati, published an article titled “The Myth of the Play/Learning Dualism.” Dr. Kane is one of those mothers who was deeply moved by her first experience of a Waldorf early childhood classroom. She writes:

I felt an immense sense of comfort and relief after my initial observation of her warm and nourishing classroom—which, in addition to everything else, was filled with the aroma of freshly baked bread. Above all, I appreciated the way in which work, learning, and play seamlessly intertwined throughout the half-day rhythm.

Later in the article, Dr. Kane cites studies in Europe and in the United States that indicate that children who attend play-based preschools and kindergartens develop higher literacy, mathematical, and other academic skills than children who are exposed to early intensive academics.

In her 2003 book, *The Emotional Development of Young Children*, Marilou Hyson maintains that children imitate and internalize the emotional patterns of the adults around them. She holds that a wholesome emotional environment is necessary for school readiness and for later healthy emotional and intellectual development. Hyson, whose work is endorsed by former Yale professor of psychology Edward Zigler, urges parents, teachers, and caregivers of young children to create an atmosphere of emotional equanimity, security, warmth, and love.

Before Kindergarten

For many years, Waldorf early childhood educators focused on children ages five and six, i.e., the children in kindergarten. Recently, two factors have caused this focus to expand to younger children. One is the social and economic reality that many parents of young children have a career and cannot stay at home with them. These parents want Waldorf-based care for their children at a much earlier age. The other factor is that Waldorf educators have realized that the prekindergarten years are as important as kindergarten itself. What happens to children from birth until age five plays a key role in their development and will determine their ability to benefit from their later education.



Washing dishes after snack mixes work, play, and learning.



Digging for buried treasure in the sand pit



Toddlers and caregiver at a Waldorf day care center



Mothers and toddlers in a Waldorf parent-tot class

The result is that Waldorf Education now extends to the four-year-old, the toddler, and even to the infant. Many Waldorf schools now take four-year-olds into kindergarten, and a child may have three years there before entering first grade. Some schools and many independent kindergartens have day care programs for toddlers. Many schools have parent-infant or parent-tot programs, in which families bring their very young children to school once a week for several hours. The children engage in play or directed activities while the parents learn about child development, receive support for their parenting journey, and learn skills that they might employ at home, such as making a cloth doll or playing simple games with their children.

In addition, some Waldorf schools have an early childhood program based on the “LifeWays” model of home-style childcare. These programs include the typical Waldorf features of free play, storytelling, singing, outdoor activities, gardening, and so on. The distinctive features of the LifeWays model include small group size (usually not more than six children), mixed ages (from infancy through age six), the “family suite” (a group of children who stay with each other and a care provider for several years), and a homelike, rather than classroom, environment. There are many independent LifeWays programs all over the United States and Canada.

The Waldorf Outdoor Kindergarten

In the 1950s, in response to increasing urbanization and the indoor-ization of modern life, the idea of the “forest kindergarten” was born and then realized in northern Europe. The first nursery/ kindergartens in which the children spent the entire day outdoors in nature, regardless of the weather, were established in Denmark and Sweden. The movement soon became popular in Germany and eventually was recognized as a legitimate form of childcare to be supported by the government. Today, Germany has about 1000 forest kindergartens, and many of these are associated with one of the roughly 230 Waldorf schools in that country.

In 2007 the first all-outdoor Waldorf kindergarten program in the United States, Mother Earth School, was started by Shining Star Waldorf School in Portland, Oregon. Today, Waldorf schools in Seattle, Cincinnati, Saratoga Springs (New York), Kimberton (Pennsylvania), and elsewhere have outdoor kindergartens, and



A LifeWays “family suite” of mixed-age children during story time



Snack time in an outdoor kindergarten

the movement is growing very rapidly. There are also a number of independent, Waldorf-inspired outdoor initiatives.

These programs have all the typical activities of the Waldorf nursery/kindergarten, but everything takes place outdoors. In the event of rain, there is typically a covered but wall-less open area to shelter the children and caregivers. The children have unlimited opportunities to explore, interact with, and observe nature, build forts and fairy houses, make mudpies, climb trees, and (if the program is associated with a garden or farm, as is often the case) engage in gardening activities and animal care. Research has shown that children who have experienced an outdoor preschool and kindergarten later develop high-level academic and social skills.

After Kindergarten

When a child enters a Waldorf kindergarten or preschool, he or she enters a world where the sanctity of childhood is respected and where the gradual unfolding of human capacities is nurtured. One central aim of the Waldorf kindergarten is to imbue the children with a sense of wonder, gratitude, and love toward the world and all that is in it. Another is to prepare the child for the next stage of development and education, the years between ages seven and fourteen.

In most Waldorf schools, the start of first grade is marked by the “Rose Ceremony.” Each new first grader is presented a red rose by a rising eighth-grade student and is welcomed into the community of the school. In the ensuing years, the child will learn to read, write, and do math; study the history of humankind from ancient times until the present; explore the natural world through the study of botany, zoology, chemistry, and physics; learn to knit, sew, work with wood, paint, draw, sing, play a musical instrument, and act in a play; and much more.

In the eight years of Waldorf elementary school, the child will experience an education that aims to develop the “head, heart, and hands”—to nurture the balanced unfolding of the capacities of thinking, feeling, and willing. This, it is hoped, will provide the foundation for future healthy physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. If all goes well, the child will become a healthy, well-rounded adult—a creative, independent thinker who discovers his or her destined path in life, is prepared to meet the challenges of the future, and can make a contribution to the well-being of humanity and the world.



In an outdoor kindergarten, there are always opportunities for joyful play and healthful exercise.



Experiencing the beauty and mystery of one of nature's gifts



In the “Rose Ceremony,” the previous year's kindergarten children are recognized as new first-grade students.

Bringing Waldorf into the Home

Parents can do much to foster the healthy development of their young children by providing a wholesome environment and lifestyle at home. According to Waldorf early childhood theory and practice, young children will greatly benefit from the following:

A healthful, natural diet

Whole grains, fresh vegetables and fruits, nuts and seeds, whole milk and whole milk products, honey, eggs, fish, and poultry, all preferably organic in quality, are generally considered to be essential in a healthful diet for children, as well as adults. Nutritionists typically advise against white sugar, soft drinks, fast food and junk food, canned food, processed food, and GMO food products. Consult www.nongmoproject.org for detailed information.

Protection from extremes of heat and cold

Regulating one's body temperature requires energy, and young children need their energy for growth and development. Thus, outdoors in cold weather, babies, toddlers, and young children can wear warm clothing, preferably of wool, including a woolen knit hat to keep them warm. In sunny and hot weather, a wide-brimmed sun hat is helpful to prevent sunburn and overheating of the head and face.

Time in nature

Opportunities for outdoor play, a daily walk in the forest or along a beach or in a park, and a visit to a beautiful wilderness area all nourish the growing child.

A daily, predictable pattern of activities

A clear and faithfully observed schedule of mealtimes, nap time, outside play, and bedtime can help the young child feel secure and protected. An irregular eating schedule and late or erratic bedtimes can undermine a child's healthy development.

An afternoon nap

Research indicates that young children greatly benefit from a daily afternoon nap. In Waldorf kindergartens that have an afternoon program, the children typically take a thirty- to forty-five-minute nap immediately after lunch.

A bedtime ritual

A nightly ritual that might include lighting a candle, telling a story, and saying a verse or prayer together can prepare the child for a restful sleep.

Involvement in the practical life of the home

Having tasks and responsibilities that contribute to home life, such as sweeping the porch, feeding a pet, or cleaning up after a meal, help the young child develop valuable lifelong skills and habits.

An aesthetically pleasing environment

Young children are nourished and deeply affected by what they see and touch. Beautiful, natural objects such as quartz crystals and other semiprecious stones, seashells, plants and flowers, walls painted in soft colors, tasteful furniture made of wood, particularly in the child's sleeping room, are positive influences. Toys and dolls can be simple and made of natural materials such as wood, wool, and cotton fabric. Such playthings give the child an experience of something that is authentic, natural, and of lasting value. They

nurture an internal standard of quality, which the child will carry through life. Plastic playthings convey a much different aesthetic and also are potentially toxic.

Minimal exposure to electronic entertainment

Recently the American Pediatric Association counseled parents that children younger than two should not watch television. Waldorf educators would go beyond and advise that television, videos, computer games, and cell phones not be part of the child's experience until much later. Instead, parents and children can read a storybook, do a jigsaw puzzle, play a game, sing a song, or do handcrafts.

A non-WiFi environment

Recent research has raised the concern that the pulsed radio frequency radiation (PRFR) from WiFi transmitters may have a deleterious effect on human health. There is particular concern about the vulnerability of young children, whose organs and nervous system are developing very rapidly. The World Health Organization has warned against exposure to PRFR, and many schools in Europe, Canada, and elsewhere have chosen not to install WiFi systems. If there is WiFi in the home, one might choose to turn it off while the family is sleeping and when it is not in use.

Insulation from the daily (bad) news

Studies show that young children can be deeply affected by reports about and images of natural disasters and human tragedies. Even though they may not fully understand what they see and hear, children can be as traumatized as the persons who actually experienced the event. Parents can exercise discretion when watching or listening to the news of the day.

Loving guidance

Rudolf Steiner held that the young child needs and wants loving adults who provide protection and guidance and make decisions for him or her. Thus, decisions such as what clothes to wear, what to eat, and what to do after school, especially for young children, can mostly be the responsibility of parents.

A healthy emotional environment

Like the Waldorf kindergarten teacher, parents can strive to focus on positive thoughts and emotions and to model in all their behaviors what they would like to see replicated in their children. Our children can be revealing mirrors for us.

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Waldorf Early Childhood Resources

The following organizations and websites provide information about Waldorf early childhood centers and kindergartens, teacher trainings, and events, as well as related articles and other publications:

- Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America (WECAN) www.waldorfearychildhood.org
- International Association of Steiner/Waldorf Early Childhood Education (IASWECE) www.iaswece.org
- Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) www.whywaldorfworks.org
- LifeWays North America www.lifewaysnorthamerica.org
- Waldorf School Association of Ontario (WSAO) www.waldorf.ca

Ordering Copies of This Booklet

This booklet is available for purchase from the authors. Prices for orders from within the United States are as follows:

10 copies, \$25; 35 copies, \$45; 75 copies, \$90; 150 copies, \$165; 300 copies, \$300

All prices include shipping and handling. Prices are subject to change. International orders incur an added shipping charge. To place an order, write rkoetzsch@awsna.org or call 916-965-1341.

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Eric Limon Photography