

OPEN ARMS PLAYGARDEN PARENT HANDBOOK

2025-2026

School Year

939 B Street, Petaluma, California

openarmsplaygarden.com

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Requirements for Enrollment

- Application Form
 - Identification and Emergency Information
 - Child's Preadmission Health History
 - Physician's Report
 - Immunization Verification
 - Emergency Medical Consent Form
 - Admission's Agreement
 - Notice of Parent's Rights
 - Notice of Personal Rights
 - Receipt of Parent Handbook Form
 - Walking Permission Slip
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A complete set of paperwork is required to be on file prior to a child's first day of care. You may make copies of any of these forms for your personal records. You are responsible for understanding and agreeing to their content.

The Director or Owner is available to answer any questions you may have.

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OUR PROGRAM

Thank you for choosing to trust us with your children this coming school year. We do our best to provide a safe, healthy and fun learning environment to allow physical, emotional and social development for your children. When caring for your children we will always keep in mind how we would like our own children to be treated and cared for by others. We strive to connect with each child and family and love each one for their unique and special qualities.

-Maayan Schoeman, Owner and Founder of Open Arms Playgarden

“The great rule is: play on the surface and the work takes place beneath. For the child, the time is always now; the place, here; the action, me. (The child) has no capacity to entertain adult notions of fantasy world and real world. (The child) knows only one world, and that is the very real one in which and with which (the child) plays. (The child) is not playing at life. Play is life.”

-Joseph Chilton Pearce, *Magical Child*



WHAT IS A PLAYGARDEN

Our playgardens is a preschool based on the Steiner Waldorf approach to education. Rudolf Steiner founded Waldorf education in the early 1900s and recognized the importance of free play and imagination in the context of the developing child. Open Arms Playgarden focuses on providing an environment in which the whole child can unfold in an age-appropriate way, by creating a setting in which the children can immerse themselves in the real experiences of life (i.e. gardening, baking, digging, building, washing, etc) through free and creative play. The outdoors, as the physical environment for much of the children's play, connects the children to nature, creating a safe and healing space for exploration, discovery, connection, and wonder.

THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES

At Open Arms Playgarden, our mission is to provide a loving, home-away-from-home preschool environment for children ages 2 years to kindergarten. Our teachers have either Waldorf Teacher Training or LifeWays Training, as well as an early childhood education background. Our mixed age program views relationship-based care and continuity of care as essential elements to quality early childhood care. Other essentials include a rhythmic daily schedule of outward expression and inward rest, movement, creative and artistic experiences, meaningful work, outdoor time, and free, imaginative play. Our curriculum is play-based, focusing on the development of the head, heart, and hands of each child in our care. At this young age, we encourage language development and communication (head), social-emotional growth (heart), and use of their bodies in play and work (hands). Cognitive development follows naturally when the child is allowed time for play and self initiated exploration in a nurturing, calm, and predictable environment.

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

We emphasize loving human interaction with warm speech, live singing, nursery rhymes and stories rather than technology. Open Arms Playgarden is a media-free environment, except for administrative and adult educational purposes. It is our hope that screens and media will be limited at home as well, for the children in our care, so that they are free to be as imaginative and creative as their age of development needs. We kindly request no media on school nights, including movies, iPads/tablets, iPhones/smartphones, and video games. This will offer the children the best opportunity for healthy development, as well as compatibility with the values of Open Arms Playgarden.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

According to Steiner, “the need for imagination, the sense of truth, and a feeling of responsibility--these are the three forces which are the very nerve of education.” It is through the attitudes and gestures, both inner and outer, of the teachers that these three forces are brought to life. The teachers at Open Arms Playgarden actively observe the children in our care, and through reflection we consciously and artistically create experiences to serve their development. This is how we meet the needs of the children before us so that their imagination may awaken and deepen, their physical activities provide truth about the world in which they live, and they grow into independence through pride and reverence for their work. It is our honor as your child’s teachers, to care for your children with intention and warmth in our daily care.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPEMENT

Much of the work of early childhood is developing social skills, and growing emotionally. Open Arms Playgarden strives to provide a nurturing environment for emotional growth, to help the children learn the social skills they will need in life. We observe and see the social interaction between the children throughout the year, using the skills they are learning, and support them when needed. We do not expect children to know how to behave; it is up to the adults to teach through modeling the behavior we would like. Young children learn mostly through imitation. Knowing that children will imitate the adults and the world around them, our teachers model the wanted behavior by the way we interact with the children, with fellow staff members, and with the parents.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPEMENT

Children need extended amounts of time to move and play outside freely in order to develop physically, and subsequently prepare the brain for later learning. Self-initiated movement, space to climb, run, jump, pull or push a wagon, and swing all help develop core strength, upper arm and body strength, and balance. All of these contribute to the child's ability to be calm, strong, balanced, and successful later at school.

While it is possible for children to learn academic skills at preschool, Open Arms Playgarden believes that they should spend this precious time in true age-appropriate development. Movement and creative play build brain pathways and strengthen imagination, while providing opportunity for social-emotional development. We have observed that when children are learning academic skills at an early age, they don't move or use their bodies enough and lose the best time for this essential part of their development.

Circle time at Playgarden is a very important part of the physical development of the children. In it we bring developmental movement in song and play and we can observe how and when they reach physical milestones such as skipping, jumping off a high step, or balancing on a beam. Much of the guided movement we do at Playgarden is designed to make sure all the children experience the various movements a baby would naturally do in their first year of life, prior to walking. In our modern world of portable car seats, bouncy seats, activity centers and high chairs, it is common for stages of development to be "missed." Our goal is to gently "remind" the children, in a fun, non-conscious way, of movements that are a healthy and natural part of childhood development.

ARRIVING AND DEPARTING

Drop-Off and Pick-Up Procedures

Open Arms Playgarden is open for children Monday through Friday from 8:15 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. for preschool. Monday through Thursdays, an extended day is available until 3:30pm.

Please have your child at playgarden no later than 8:45 a.m. Children who arrive after this time disrupt the school day that is already in progress and have their daily rhythm disrupted. If you are going to be late, please let us know and plan to arrive at 10:30.

Pick-up time for the preschool day is from 12:45-1:00 p.m.

Pick-up time for the extended day on Tuesday/Thursday is 3:15-3:30 p.m.

If you arrive after the pick-up time, there is a late fee of \$15 for each quarter hour or portion thereof that you are late. Three such late pick-ups could result in dismissal from the program.

It is our sincere hope that this should never happen, however if we cannot reach you after 1:00 p.m. or 3:30 p.m., and all of your contacts listed that are allowed to pick-up your child have been called without response or ability to pick up, it is the discretion of the staff on duty to bring your child with them to their next activity. Notice of your child's whereabouts will be posted on the main door of the playgarden. Late fees will continue to accrue until your child is picked up.



HOW TO DROP OFF WITH LOVE AND INTENTION

We encourage you to follow a consistent rhythm at home, and especially prior to coming to school in the morning. We also ask that you do a quick goodbye in the morning at drop-off. It is helpful to tell your child in the car what to expect and follow through with the plan. For example you could say: “Once we park the car, we will walk to the classroom together and go and say good morning to Ms. Maayan. I’ll say goodbye and then I’ll see you at pick-up.”

We will be there to help you and your child with the transition. Bringing a small transitional object is helpful for the child to bridge the world between home and school. Examples of a transitional object can be a small book, small stuffed animal, anything that can be put in the cubby. You may let your child choose, but please keep to the guidelines. Even better is to prepare in advance and suggest something the night before, or in the morning.

Children will usually transfer their attachment to another adult only once the parent has left. Prolonging the separation will make it harder for the child.

By creating a goodbye ritual the child learns to trust in what is going to happen and know what to expect; this reduces anxiety. Even if they cry, they calm easily, and soon transition well, when the parents lead by being consistent and confident in the ritual. The first few times may be easy and it may only be hard to say goodbye after a few days when the child has a sense of how long they are apart from you. We will call parents if their child is having a hard time and cannot calm.

Keeping the goodbye short helps all the children transition smoothly.

Every time another parent comes to drop off, it reminds all the children about their experience. Let us make the beginning of the school year successful to all of us, as we build our community.



PARENT TEACHER CONVERSATIONS

As you can see, drop-off is a special time and needs the full attention of the teachers to make sure we all transition smoothly together. If there is something that you need to share with a teacher regarding your child, please either call ahead of time to discuss, or come a little early at pick-up time (12:30-12:45 or 3:00-3:15). This is a good opportunity to linger a little and connect with the teachers, and it's also a good time if you have something to share with a teacher. For in depth conversations, please email or call to schedule a phone call or home visit.

A MINDFUL PICKUP

At pick up time the children get confused as to who is holding the space and keeping the boundaries for them. A long pick up time can be confusing and often can lead to tears and accidents. Please be very watchful over your child(ren) at that time and keep to Playgarden rules. If not sure, ask your child--they know the rules--or ask one of the teachers. As soon as parents arrive and sign the child out the child is the responsibility of the parents. Siblings are not to enter playground or classroom.

SIGN-IN SIGN OUT PROCEDURES

California Child Care Licensing regulations require that all children enrolled in a care center must be signed into and out of the facility daily by the parent/guardian of the child or a designated party listed on the child's emergency form. You must use your full signature when signing in or out. The regulation is for the safety and well-being of your child.

Open Arms Playgarden is not liable for any child who has not been signed in. We do ask unknown persons to present a photo ID prior to removing your child from care, so please prepare anyone unfamiliar to the staff for this possibility. If a person to be picking up your child does not appear on our emergency form, you may make a signed notice for this person to do so and give this to a teacher. You may also do this by phone. We may phone you to get a verbal confirmation of a pick-up. If for some reason an unauthorized person is insistent on taking your child with them, we will do everything in our power to dissuade them as long as it does not put other children or staff at risk. 911 would be called and you would be asked to come to school as soon as possible.

OUR DAY TOGETHER

DAILY RHYTHM

Open Arms Playgarden follows a consistent schedule that allows time to concentrate and work inwardly, and time for free outward play. The schedule of the day is designed to bring the children ready for each activity. The thought behind the construction of the schedule helps bring joy and readiness, and to eliminate most of the conflicts in transitions between activities. We try to have few transitions throughout the day, providing time for the children to dive deeply into what they do. Open Arms Playgardens follows the seasons, and we make changes to songs, movement games, food and crafts accordingly throughout the year.



Morning Playgarden Schedule

Subject to change based on the children's needs and to reflect the changing seasons.

- » 8:15-8:45 Goodbye and Drop-off
- » 8:45--9:35 Indoor free play, baking, crafting
- » 9:40 Bathroom & diaper changes, washing hands
- » 9:50 Circle Time
- » 10:00 Snack
- » 10:30 Outdoor free play, crafting, gardening
- » 11:50 Clean up, bathroom, wash hands, diaper change
- » 12:00 Lunch
- » 12:30 Clean up
- » 12:45-1:00 Pickup Time for children leaving school
- » 1:00 Rest time for children resting at school

Afternoon Rhythm for Extended Care

- » 1:00--1:45 Books and Rest time
- » 1:45--2:30 Play inside & Bake Muffins for Snack
- » 2:30 Clean up, bathroom, wash hands
- » 2:45 Snack
- » 3:00--3:30 Outdoor play and pick up time
- » 3:30 Playgarden Closes

DRESSING FOR PLAYGARDEN

We encourage children to use their own imaginations. Open Arms Playgarden values non-violent and peaceful means to problem solving. With these two things in mind, we strongly discourage any clothing with pre-fabricated TV, movie or commercial imagery. We have found that children are reminded to act like the characters of those images on their clothing, or the clothing of another child. We share with the children that these characters do not get to come to playgarden, as they do not always use their words to solve their problems. We would greatly appreciate your support in keeping the characters from attending playgarden as well. If a child wears clothing with such characters, we will help them to either choose another garment from their cubby or turn the garment inside out so that the children will not be distracted or influenced by it. This policy applies to shoes, hats, backpacks, water bottles and lunch boxes as well.

We wear slippers or indoor shoes inside the Playgarden and will be kept in your child's cubby or basket. Large, oversized slippers often do not stay on feet very long; please choose slippers mindfully and label them with your child's initials.

For the rainy season, please provide a pair of boots with no holes, and a rainsuit, as we play outside in rain or shine. A one-piece rainsuit is most effective and convenient, or a rain jacket and rain pants may also be provided. Warm layers and a comfortable warm hat labeled with their name are essential.

For the sunny season, a labeled sunhat should be provided.

EXTRA CLOTHES

Please provide your child with a complete set of extra clothes, marked clearly with their name, to keep in their cubby or basket at Open Arms Playgarden. Please always make sure that your child has a complete set at all times. In case of an accident, it is reassuring to your child to have something of their own to change into. Periodically changing the clothing for seasonally appropriate items is recommended.

If your child requires diapers, please bring a full bag with your child's first and last initials labeled on it, as well as a container of wipes. We discourage pull-ups during toilet training. If your child is toilet training, please provide at least 3 pairs of underwear, pants and socks to have on hand at all times.

We encourage each family to provide a wet bag for transporting wet/soiled clothing home, as Open Arms Playgarden is mindful and limited in its use of plastic. Please check your child's wet bag each day so items do not linger and pose a health problem. Please return the wet bag and a new change of clothes for your child on their next school day.

For the sunny season, a labeled sunhat should be provided.

SNACK & LUNCH

A small healthy snack is served twice a day; once in the morning preschool program and once in the extended afternoon care program. The snack consists of three food groups.

We provide lunch daily. Parents do not need to pack a lunch for their child. Our menu changes throughout the year and we will share it in the monthly newsletter.



SAMPLE MENU

As Part of our curriculum, we take care in involving the children in food preparation for the group.

Monday

Morning Home baked muffins seasonal fruit nuts or cheese

Lunchtime: Nuts, fruit, vegetables and rice cakes with nut butter

Afternoon Snack: Muffins with fruit and cashews or cheese

Tuesday

Morning Snack: Rice beans carrots yeast and coconut aminos

Lunchtime: Nuts, fruit, vegetables and rice cakes with nut butter

Afternoon Snack: Muffins with fruit and cashews or cheese

Wednesday

Morning Home baked muffins seasonal fruit nuts or cheese

Lunchtime: Nuts, fruit, vegetables and rice cakes with nut butter

Afternoon Snack: Muffins with fruit and cashews or cheese

Thursday

Morning Rice beans carrots yeast and coconut aminos

Lunchtime: Nuts, fruit, vegetables and rice cakes with nut butter

Afternoon Snack: Muffins with fruit and cashews or cheese

Friday

Morning Snack: Fresh baked Challah bread with seasonal fruit and nuts or cheese

Lunchtime: Nuts, fruit, vegetables and rice cakes with nut butter

NAP AND REST TIME

All children enrolled in our extended afternoon care will be taking a nap or rest time. Having a moment of rest, whether sleeping or just quiet and peaceful, is essential to the health and wellbeing of the young child. Our nap/rest time is 45 minutes long, following lunch and pick-up of the morning preschoolers. Nap/Rest time is a sacred time in the Playgarden day, and held with the utmost care and respect. No child will ever be forced to sleep, but rather will be gently and lovingly encouraged to relax and let go of the day. Sometimes resting children do fall asleep. It is our policy to let that child sleep unless you tell us to not let your child do so.

Please bring a smallish towel for your child to rest on, labeled with their name. As the weather cools, a small labeled blanket can be left at Playgarden as well.

All bedding is sent home daily to be washed and returned to Playgarden for the next day.

BIRTHDAYS

A birthday is a special event in a child's life and we have a special way to celebrate at Open Arms Playgarden. On your child's birthday (or close to that date), we devote a special time to celebrate each child, lighting candles and singing a birthday song followed

by gifting a hand made gift the teachers made.

It is our tradition to bake a special birthday cake for the celebration. During our morning,

the children will work to make and bake the cake. Together, after the birthday circle, we share birthday wishes and cake. We invite you to attend this special ceremony!

FIELD TRIP & HIKE DAYS

Most field trips are on campus walks with the children.

Other field trips may be arranged during the school year with appropriate notice to parents and with a required permission slip. Parents will be asked to help in providing transportation and supervision. We require car seats for all children under the age of 6 regardless of weight and we must have an adult to child ratio of no less than 1:3. Drivers must present current insurance and a valid driver's license.



OUR POLICIES

CALENDAR

Our calendar is posted on our website, www.openarmsplaygarden.com.

01

The calendar is subject to change and calendar updates will be provided regularly via email. Advance notice on any changes to the calendar will be provided when possible. Should we need to close Open Arms Playgarden due to any health conditions, tuition will still be due, with a 30 day notice.

02

We will offer smoke day make-up should we need to close the Playgarden for more than a total of 5 days due to smoke during the California fire season.

03

August 1st through June 30th tuition is the same every month and includes the days we are closed.

PARENT MEETINGS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

Open Arms Playgarden will hold Parent Meetings periodically through the school year. These meetings will always be educational and a wonderful opportunity to meet other parents and build community. Topics will be announced in advance and determined by the needs of the parent body and the Playgarden.

We host two community events every year: a Lantern Walk, and a Spring Picnic with our End of Year Ceremony. Dates are announced in advance so that all may attend. These events are important opportunities to gather and honor our community and the children as we traverse the year together.

YEAR 2025 - 2026

ON CAMPUS

Please be aware that smoking on campus is not permitted at any time, for the health and safety of the children, and per our lease agreement. This includes the parking lot.

Please limit cell-phone use while on campus as well. If you must take or make a call/text, we kindly ask that you find a space where you can do so out of sight of the children.

HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Unfortunately, it is inevitable that children are going to get sick. The Northern California Academy of Pediatrics states, “the average child has 6-8 colds per year, lasting 7-10 days.” When children are in group care, they will undoubtedly get sick slightly more often. We understand that making the decision that a child is “too sick” to attend school can be a complex one. All of us, parents and staff, have a mutual interest in the children’s health and welfare. A sick child does not belong at playgarden. We cannot give the sick child the one-on-one care that they need, and they do not get the recuperative rest they require.

Clearly, we sympathize with parents whose children are sick and need to stay home from Playgarden. At the same time, we realize that the parents of children who are well do not want their child exposed to infectious diseases when it can be avoided. We do our best to keep germs and viruses away from your children, but we often are not aware of exposure until someone manifests outward symptoms. Nonetheless, we are as vigilant for the signs of illness as we can be, and solicit your support as well. If you suspect your child is sick or becoming ill, please keep them home.

Please keep your child home if they have any of the following symptoms*:

1. A fever of 99.6 or higher, please stay home for 48 hours.
2. A runny nose showing green nasal mucus. Green mucus for multiple days may mean a secondary infection has set in and needs to be checked by a doctor. A clear runny nose from hay fever or other allergies is acceptable when not accompanied by other symptoms such as fever, coughing, vomiting or listlessness.
3. A cough with mucus secretions when associated with other symptoms or when persistent.
4. All rashes except diaper, or heat, or eczema rashes.
5. Vomiting in the last 48 hours.
6. Diarrhea in the last 48 hours.
7. 7. Difficulty breathing or severe asthma.
8. Earache or drainage.
9. Watery, mucousy, or pink eyes.
10. Listlessness to the point of not being able to participate in the program.
Please stay home for 48 hours.
11. Complaints of severe pain.

* Any health assessments deemed necessary by the County, Community Care Licensing, or Open Arms Playgarden (i.e. COVID-19 health screening) will be used in addition to or in place of the above list, and will be provided to parents when necessary.

If your child should become ill during school, you will be notified immediately, and immediate pick-up will need to be arranged for your child. Whenever possible, your child will be allowed to rest away from the other children until you arrive.

Open Arms Playgarden will notify you whenever children have been exposed to a contagious illness. We also need you to notify us within 24 hours of a diagnosis of a serious contagious illness in the family. Even if your child is kept home, or it is a sibling or a parent, please let us know if anyone at school may have been exposed.

Medications at Playgarden

If your child is to receive medication of any kind at school, a parent must:

1. Complete and sign a release of liability to Open Arms Playgarden
2. Medication must be in the original bottle/box with:
 - A. The child's name
 - B. Dosage
 - C. Application times
 - D. Doctor's name on the label from the pharmacy

No over-the-counter medications will be dispensed at school. We will make every effort to administer the medications on the form, but we cannot guarantee the application.

If a child has been prescribed an antibiotic, they must be on the medication for 24 hours before returning to school.

Please inform a teacher if your child has been given medication of any kind before entering school that day. Over-the-counter cough, cold, and decongestant medication can strongly affect a child's behavior. As a staff, we need to be alerted to the possibility of any adverse reactions.

Discipline

At Open Arms Playgarden, we believe that children find security and direction where there is consistency in adult guidance and structure, including our daily rhythm. Children explore, observe, feel, interact and learn through the process of being involved with people and things in their world. Teachers, their role of caring for children, model and demonstrate appropriate behavior. Children need to know what is acceptable and appropriate and what is not. Our teachers use positive, constructive, and preventative methods of discipline to maintain an atmosphere of love, acceptance and order. This atmosphere is one in which children respect themselves, their peers, their teachers, and the things in their environment.

Positive guidance and redirection are the methods used to promote self-regulation and acceptable behavior. Our teachers are compassionate, loving, and firm in maintaining the safety of the children and our program. When off-track behavior has occurred and a child is upset, the teacher stays with the child and helps to soothe and calm the child so that the child can then have closure with the incident. In situations that require intervention to prevent harm to self, others, animals, or property, a child may be required to sit with the teacher in order to have a safe space to re-gather themselves. During this time of sitting together, the teacher and the child will make an agreement regarding their behavior before rejoining the group or activity. If after that time, the child is still not ready to rejoin the group, an alternative activity will be set up for the child where they can work independently until ready to rejoin the group.

The preferred method of dealing with disruptive behavior is to allow logical consequences to set in. When behavior is potentially dangerous to the child or other children, intervention by the teacher is necessary.

Children are encouraged to express their feelings verbally. When children are experiencing difficulties among themselves they are encouraged, and aided, in negotiating solutions. A teacher is always available to help a child discover the words to express how they feel. Whenever possible, children should participate in determining those steps necessary to correct an inappropriate, harmful, or disrespectful behavior. Children need to know that it is okay to feel angry, sad, hurt, and every other emotion, and that there are healthy and appropriate ways to express feelings.

If it is determined that the behavior of a child continues to place other children, animals, property or teachers at risk, teachers will notify the Director. The Director will meet with the parents to discuss the situation and determine a time frame for correction of the behavior or dismissal from the program as set forth in the Admissions Agreement.

Open Arms Playgarden staff will not allow any type of corporal punishment or forms of discipline that violates the child's personal rights.

Emergency & Natural Disaster Information

In the event of a natural disaster, unless otherwise directed by officials, or if the safety of the children is not apparent, we will remain at Open Arms Playgarden.

If we must evacuate, the nearest evacuation site is:

Petaluma High School Football Field
201 Fair Street
Petaluma, CA 94952

In the case of an emergency, your child will be transported in the safest manner possible to the designated safe area.

Each family will supply an emergency kit for their child; a checklist will be distributed in the fall.

Medical emergency for a child

Should a child have a medical or dental emergency, staff will provide first aid when needed, contact parents and call 911 if necessary. One staff member will accompany the child to the hospital or dentist should parents not be available to do so or were not reached in time. The staff member will stay with the child until parents or other authorized person, such as on the emergency contact form, arrive.

Transportation

Open Arms Playgarden does not provide any transportation for enrolled children.

Optional additional services:

There are no additional optional services offered at Open Arms Playgarden other than what is in the contract and parent handbook.

Enrollment Criteria

New families will visit the school and meet with the Owner and or Director.

The prospective student will be invited to play while parents and staff discuss policies and enrollment allowing staff to observe and interact with the child.

All paperwork and deposit must be completed to allow enrollment at the school prior to start date.