

Park West

Cooperative
Nursery
School

Little Link

Information for families



2335 North Orchard Chicago, IL 60614 (773) 327-1115 www.parkwestcoop.org

4AM-3

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Dear Parents,

We have been enjoying these early days of school and spending time together getting to know each other.

We will continue to keep our classroom routine consistent and keep our classroom set-up fairly simple so that the teachers can focus their attention on being available to help children feel comfortable and secure, our emphasis being on fostering relationships with ourselves and the other children in the room.

As we go through the first round of assisting days, we want to share with you some information that will hopefully give you a more in depth orientation to some of the practices and procedures in our classroom:

Classroom schedule:

Each day, your child will have essentially two periods of what we term free play, or open play—in the classroom and also in the gym. Gym will be first for us this year. We will gather in the classroom for a limited playtime and head to the gym pretty quickly. It will help us if folks can be as punctual as possible to give us our full gym time.

After gym, we will return upstairs for our group time, followed by snack.

Our main play time comes toward the end of our morning together, followed by a story before we dismiss.

During the first few weeks of school, we will spend a lot of time going over the schedule with children, in casual conversation as well as part of our group times. This sequence can be something that will come up for discussion at your house and kids will often enjoy replaying the order of events with you.

Separation

Although children have made the adjustment to being to school without adults, there may still be some reticence upon arrival—especially after the weekend, or illness, or

assisting days. So don't be surprised and do rely upon teachers to help you and your child through those hard mornings. It can really help when parents are clear with their child about their plans. If you are able to come down to the gym on a difficult morning, that may ease the adjustment, but if you can't then be clear with your child about what you can do. For example: "I'll walk you to your cubby and then go" or "We can read a book together before I have to leave". When you leave, remind your child when you will see them again. Children might still cry when you leave, but know that teachers will be there to help your child and we really will call you if he or she cannot settle down.

Another thing to keep in mind is that it can often be the case that your child may experience some set backs at home while they are managing the new experience of school. Skills they may have previously mastered may backslide, even in regard to toileting or even sleeping. You may also notice that your child may be moody or seemingly less able to deal with frustrations that otherwise would not have bothered them in the past. Be assured that this is all part of the normal process of separation, but please keep in touch with us about how it is going for you at home and let us know if there is anything we can do for you to support you.

Assisting

As you come for your first assist day in our classroom, we will spend time with you going over some of the more nitty-gritty stuff (like where to find the bleach bottle), so the following are some more general thoughts about your classroom time with us:

The time you are in the classroom, we think of you as another teacher, and children really look to you on this level too, especially as the year progresses. You are essential to the classroom environment and it is important that you find your level of comfort interacting with the children. Here are some guidelines, expectations, wishes:

- We believe that it is important that children feel ownership in this classroom, so we ask that adults in our environment make every effort to follow the child's lead in their play. This is their space, their time. Please play with the children, do art activities with them, build blocks, cook in the play house, but let them direct the play. Offer them ideas that extend their experiences, but try not to impose your knowledge upon them. As much as possible, let the discoveries be theirs.
- As you play with the children in the classroom, adopt an attitude of exploration: make observations out loud, listen to the observations children make.
- When a child asks you for help, see if you can help them devise their own solution. Ask them questions: What are you trying to do? What is your plan? Did you try doing this? If they ask you to make something for them, encourage them to experiment—you could offer them a starting point, or see if you can help them break down the parts of the process.
- Dress yourself and your child appropriately for play. Plan on spending a lot of time on the floor and wear something you don't mind getting painty. For example, a child reluctant to try a messy art activity might be more willing to experiment if they see an adult participating, rather than standing back afraid of getting messy themselves.

- Don't hesitate to defer to the teachers. It is unfortunately somewhat of a disadvantage to be an occasional participant in the classroom. There are going to be things/rules you just won't be sure about. Simply say, Before you do that, let's check with Anita or Kerstin.

Discipline

As the adults in the classroom, it is our responsibility to supervise behavior to ensure everyone's safety, both physical and emotional. It is our responsibility to help children understand the causes and effects of their actions. It is our responsibility to help them find positive ways of interacting with each other, especially when their ideas and plans are at odds with one another.

Although our classroom has a lot of openness, we do set boundaries and limits. The classroom will hopefully be set up such that many expectations should be already apparent, but there will always be the need to redirect a child to another activity, or simply remind children of our expectations.

For example, remind a child throwing or dumping sand, that the sand must stay in the sandbox. If the child is not able to meet that limit at that time, then let them know you are going to help them find something else to do and then that adult might need to stick with that child and help them follow through and get engaged in another activity.

When interceding in a dispute, try to base your actions upon the assumption that children want to sustain their play with each other. Many disputes erupt because the children have been ineffective in communicating their ideas to one another and we are here to help them improve and practice these skills. You may need to act as interpreter, asking questions to help kids get to the core of what the problem is and what they are trying to express.

Help children identify and label their feelings. Help them find appropriate ways to express their anger such as, I don't like it when you do that, I didn't want you to do that.

Sharing

We don't believe in making kids share, although it is not that this isn't a goal. We believe that, ultimately, children who desire to initiate and sustain social interactions will discover that sharing and cooperating are effective means to that end. We believe that this is one lesson children discover better through adult support instead of adult imposition. When a child is playing with something they should not have to give it up just because someone else wants it. Instead, we can help children learn to ask for turns, tell the other they can have it when they are finished, ask if they can play too, ask how much longer, tell them when they are finished, etc.

This means that there will be times when you will find yourself protecting the child who is using 80% of the blocks available, or all of the cows, or most of the playdough. When you encounter this, see if the child with the materials is amenable to the other child(ren) joining. Think about it from the first child's perspective. They may have invested a large period of time in their plan and may not be ready to share it yet. They are probably worried about how someone else joining will change their idea. If it is apparent the first child needs time to finish what they are doing on their

own, then help the second child find another activity and let them know they will have a turn as soon as the other child is done.

Discretion

As an assistant in the classroom, you are going to see a lot of different behaviors and we do rely upon you to keep us informed about incidents and interactions you observe. Please remember that it is not appropriate to share information that you share with us with other parents. Keep in mind that you are in the classroom on an occasional basis and will not have had the opportunity to develop a full picture of all situations. Remember that children are in process. What they do and who they are today is different from yesterday and what they will be like tomorrow. There will be days when teacher time will be more focused on one particular child or another, but know that this balances out in the end and we make a conscientious effort to develop a close supportive relationship with each child, based upon their individual needs. Please remember also that we are a cooperative and that we are here to honor and support the individual personalities of each child. Everyone has strengths and things they need to work on.

Finally, please remember that we are here for you. Parent-teacher communication is vital to us—we see it as one of the most important things we do as teachers—so, please do not hesitate to contact us with any information, questions or concerns that have an impact on your child's experience in the classroom.

Best wishes,

Kerstin v. Linton