

# Welcome



Welcome to **4 The Love of Learning**! I am honored that you are considering having your child(ren) join our community of learners. This handbook is an introduction to the philosophies, policies and procedures of **4 The Love of Learning**.

## Hours of Operation

**4 The Love of Learning** is a full day home-based program that is open Monday through Friday from 7:30am-4:30pm. We serve children ages 2-5.

## Why Preschool Only?

While I am licensed to take children of all ages, I have decided to gear my home for preschoolers. You will hear me refer to my home as a school often throughout this handbook. I love that I can offer a school program in a home environment. It gives children the best of both worlds. I have been working with a group of 20 preschoolers for the last 15 years. I am excited about what I can offer to a smaller group of learners. With a smaller group of children, each child will get the love, individual attention, and education that they can strongly benefit from. I have spent many years visiting different kindergarten classrooms so I can help support my preschoolers with the transition from preschool to kindergarten. I will work with your children to help them get ready for the next step.

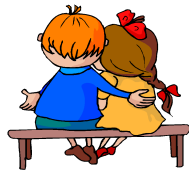
## About our Family

I am Beth Sidel. I have been teaching young children since 1992. As a teenager, I was already starting to set the path for my future career. I did many years of babysitting and truly enjoyed forming strong relationships with the families.

To be further prepared, I took the babysitter course at the local community center. It was a natural transition into Early Childhood Education at UMASS Amherst. During college, I taught toddlers and preschoolers each summer and during breaks. I received my BA in ECE in 1994 and was certified to teach Pre-k through 3rd grade. I chose to continue with my education and received my Masters degree in Education from Smith College in 1995. At the time, jobs were more plentiful within the preschool field and I started teaching preschool at a center in Northampton. Less than a year later in September of '96, I continued teaching preschool at Small World Preschool in South Deerfield. I became Program Director in 2002. My love of curriculum led to a rare opportunity to become a published author. McGraw-Hill published **Preschool Projects: Construction, The Solar System, and The Five Senses** in 2001. I remained at Small World until the Fall of 2009 when I was given an opportunity to work in a public preschool for one year until I opened **4 The Love of Learning** in the summer of 2010. Over the years, I have developed a number of close relationships with the families of the children I care for. Please don't hesitate to ask me to provide you with a list of personal references at any time.

My partner, Nicholas Orsini, works at Community Action as a Property and Maintenance Specialist. Nick will be the Facilities and Technology Manager of **4 The Love of Learning**. Nick is also the substitute teacher for occasional appointments or sick days Beth or her assistant may have. He has previous experience babysitting as a teenager during his summers off from school. His neighbors looked to him to watch their children. Even though he doesn't have formal training, he is a natural with children! When he is around young children, the smile never leaves his face. He thoroughly enjoys being around children of all ages and can play hard with the best of them in addition to being firm and gentle when needed. I am very fortunate to have his support in and out of the classroom. Nick also has personal references available upon request.

Also in residence is our cat Autumn. She is very friendly and loves to nuzzle legs. She is up to date on all of her shots and visits the vet yearly to make sure she is healthy. Animals can offer a variety of learning experiences for children and provide wonderful companionship, especially at tearful transitions. She is an indoor only cat, so please watch out for her when entering and exiting.



## **Educational Philosophy**

“Unfolding from the first word,  
The story of a child is read on the horizon of possibility.  
Like a sunrise colored by many dreams  
We welcome this beginning for our children...”  
-Mary Wynne

Each child’s story is unique and full of possibilities. As an educator, I believe all children should be supported so they can reach their full potential. The most important element in my classroom is the sense of community, family and respect that I foster. Throughout the year, I encourage the children to work together and help each other. Through these interactions, children are constantly learning to socialize, verbalize, and problem solve in positive ways. In order for children to shine and become engaged learners, they need an environment that is stimulating, loving, safe, and inviting. When children feel supported, they are more likely to feel comfortable to try new things and stretch their wings.

In order for me to teach the most effectively, I need to get to know my students. I serve them best when I take the time to really understand who they are and where they are coming from. This helps with planning developmentally appropriate curriculum for the children as a group and each child as an individual. Curriculum is at the heart of my teaching. I truly enjoy challenging children to stretch their minds in new directions. I have found that by using a building block approach that incorporates figuring out what children know, what they want to know, and what they have learned so far, they gain more knowledge on a specific topic.

“Beauty in its truest form, is seeing the world through my child’s eyes; seeing the excitement, the wonder, and the innocence. When I allow myself to do that, I am my happiest.”  
-Laurie Numedahl-Meuwissen



## Curriculum

Children are constantly learning through everything they do throughout the day. They learn through play, from each other and other various experiences and adventures they have each and every day. My goal is to help foster a love of learning that will stay with them throughout their whole life. I want to help guide them with their daily experiences so they are comfortable reaching for new heights every day in preparation of becoming lifelong learners.

**4 *The Love of Learning*** strives to create a balance of activities each day. There will be child-directed time, teacher-directed time, outside time, rest time, and meal time where children will be practicing manners and be involved in stimulating discussions.

I enjoy creating curriculum that shares things I am passionate about with children and I also enjoy encouraging children to share their passions with me. Each month when I sit down to prepare curriculum I think about what the children have been excited about. I also often ask the children what they would like to learn about. I then think about what concepts I want to get across and choose activities to support it. Throughout the year, I make sure there is also a balance within the units. Some tend to be more science, math, literacy, dramatic play, etc. Many of them have a combination of all the different areas. Each month I will send home a calendar with a list of activities that support the learning unit. More complete descriptions of what we did will be posted each day on a dry erase board in the cubby area.

An example of one of my favorite units is "Community." This unit is one I usually do near the beginning of each year. I don't like to repeat units too often because the needs and personalities of each group are so different, but there are a few learning units I do each year to help build a strong foundation. During the community unit, I encourage the children to work together and help each other. We focus on what it means to come together and become a school community. We do activities that help children learn to talk to each other and share.

For example, while the children are working with play dough, instead of working independently making multiple things, the children need to work together and figure out what one thing to make with the play dough. They may choose to make a snow person with each child taking turns making a ball and stacking it, they may choose to make a caterpillar where one child works on the body and the other works on legs and antennae. The projects throughout the month help children work with one partner and many partners. It is amazing to watch the learning that is happening during this month. The concept of helping each other and working together stays with them all year.



## Environment

**4 The Love of Learning** is a home-based program with a school atmosphere. The space is set up to encourage learning with areas such as dramatic play, table manipulatives or math, book reading, block building, science, etc. This organization of toys within a classroom helps children to work on specific skills in each area and helps them to be more organized in their play. It also encourages small group play and allows the teacher to work with a small group of children or one on one. Our days follow a predictable routine, but times are flexible, allowing for involvement in play or projects, weather conditions, etc. Following is an example of how a typical day may look.

### OUTDOOR PLAY

**4 The Love of Learning** has always valued outdoor play, but since Covid, we have moved even more of the program outdoors. The outdoor classroom space has grown exponentially thanks to Nick, who has built us a new mud table to use with our 12x12 foot sandbox, a giant open playhouse complete with a stovetop, oven and grill towards the back of the playground, and a shelter for teachers that also has a great space for floor activities. We also have an artificial green grass space with a table that is perfect for tabletop toys and loose parts. And we can't forget about our easels for painting and our hexagon table that is great for eating meals and doing art activities! We even have a space to do outdoor circle!

# **Daily Schedule**

(subject to change)

7:30-8:30: Arrival

7:30-9:00: Choice Time

9:00-9:15: Clean-up

9:15-9:45 Family style breakfast time

9:45-10:15: Circle time

10:15-10:45: Curriculum time

10:45-11:45: Outdoor play

11:45-12:15: Family style lunch time

12:15-12:30: Bathroom and book time

12:30-3:00: Rest time

3:00-3:15: Wake up and snuggle & Bathroom

3:15-3:30: Family style snack time

3:30-4:30: Social play in or outdoors

## Morning Drop Off



Morning drop off can be a hard time of the day for parents and children. In an effort to make this transition as smooth as possible, I offer the following ideas:

\*Spend time at home eating breakfast together to help get the day off to a good start. If there isn't time, or your child isn't ready to have breakfast, feel free to send in a healthy breakfast to school where your child can sit with friends and teachers (and you for a few minutes if there is time). In an effort to help develop a strong school community, I will have coffee and tea available each morning if you do have time to stay. Feel free to observe children's play or sit and chat with me or other parents before your day starts!

\*Before leaving for school, take a peek at the calendar to see what activity will be happening that day. This can help your child get excited about the day to come.

\*While in the car, discuss the plan for the day. When children feel part of what is going on, they often feel more empowered.

\*Create a goodbye ritual with your child. For example, give them two hugs and a kiss and lead them to the "waving window"; sit with them at the art table for a few minutes and then give a hug and a kiss...etc. The specifics are up to you, but it can be helpful if you stick to the same routine each day.

Since Covid, drop off and pick up have moved outside which has helped with transitions! If you do find yourself having to enter the house, please remove your shoes. Since the children will often be playing on the floor, it will help keep the floors cleaner for their play.

## Afternoon/Evening Pick Up

Just as children sometimes don't want to stay in the morning, they don't want to leave at the end of the day. It can be confusing to children when switching the authority from teacher to parent. In an effort to be consistent, I will expect the children to follow the same rules when you are here as the rest of the day. I will only step in to give gentle reminders if needed. Also, please remember that other cars may be coming and going so I ask that you stay with your child at all times and not allow them to be in the driveway unattended.

As in the beginning of the day, you are more than welcome to stay and chat at the end of the day (provided it is before closing time). Building a solid community through communication is important to me. I truly value the relationships I create with families over the years.

## **Diapering/Toileting**

**4 The Love of Learning** encourages independence with toileting. Children should wear clothing that they can be successful with on their own, such as easy to pull down pants and leggings. Please do not send children to school with overalls, suspenders, or any other clothing or fasteners that does not promote success and independence. Children should be in diapers or underwear. I have found the use of pull-ups to be confusing. Part of diapering at school is helping to get your child comfortable with the process of what it feels like to sit on the potty. When they are ready, they will be encouraged to sit on the regular potty as part of the diapering process. Then, when your child is ready to actually train, they will already have experience and familiarity sitting on the toilet. We do not use potty chairs at school as they are unsanitary and the preschool bathroom lacks space. In my vast experience training many children to use the potty over the years, it has been most successful to use the regular toilet with a step stool. This method also helps support your child to be successful anywhere they may be out and about at a store, restaurant, or friends house where there is a regular size toilet. I have found inserts tend to hinder rather than help children at school, but am open to trying one if the need arises. In regards to wiping, trained children should be taught to wipe their own bottoms as part of their training experience (with the exception of a child who physically cannot reach). Newly training children will be taught a you try first, I finish method until they are able to wipe on their own. There are always flushable wipes available as well to help this process. Every effort is made to make training a positive experience for both parents and children. Parents are responsible for providing diapers and **4 The Love of Learning** will provide wipes. Please don't hesitate to ask any questions.

## **What to Bring**

Each child will have a space to keep their belongings. Please label all clothing and items. Children should have:

\*A full change of clothes, including shirt, pants, underwear, and socks (more changes if they are still learning to use the toilet).

\*Nap items; a small blanket and pillow and a comfort item such as a stuffy if they would like.



\*Appropriate shoes: Sneakers and hiking sandals are perfect for running, climbing and playing. Flip flops and Crocs are not safe for playing so please leave them at home. Please choose shoes that promote independence and are child-friendly. **Children should be able to put on and take off shoes by themselves with minimal to no assistance.** Suggestions for winter include bogs/oakiwear that have handholds and are easy to slide on and are warm. Sneakers and hiking sandals should have velcro and firm backs vs canvas that is too floppy and hard to put on.

\*Appropriate clothing depending on the weather.



**Rainy days:** Raincoat and rain boots

**Snowy or cold days:** Snow pants, winter coat, boots, hat, mittens

**Spring/Autumn and in between days:** Light jacket

**Summer days:** Bathing suit and towel, water shoes if desired

We will be going outside in all types of weather, so please dress your child accordingly. Try to check the weather each morning, but remember that the warmest part of the day is in the afternoon and we will be out in the morning as well. It is helpful to dress children in layers as the temperature changes so drastically during the day at different times of the year.

\*Children are always welcome to bring books to school, but please refrain from sending books that make noise.

\*Nature discoveries are also welcome for sharing (bird nests, snakeskin, etc)

## What Not to Bring

\*Toys: **4 The Love of Learning** is well stocked with a variety of toys. Toys from home are hard to share and can get lost or broken. Please refrain from sending toys into school unless it is a scheduled share day.

\*Snacks or food other than breakfast as mentioned above. **4 The Love of Learning** provides your child with a healthy lunch and two snacks a day.



## Meals and Snacks

**4 The Love of Learning** provides a balanced, organic-based breakfast, lunch, and snack every day. Also, the school participates in an organic local farm share for a good part of the year. Children will be encouraged to try new things every day, but will never be forced to eat something. A sample menu for the day might look like this:

**Breakfast:** Cereal, fresh fruit, milk, and water

**Lunch:** Baked chicken, mashed potatoes, broccoli, cranberry sauce, and milk

**P.M. Snack:** Blueberry muffins, bananas, and water

**4 the Love of Learning** chooses food carefully. I try my best to purchase food with low sugar and salt, and I also make sure I serve a variety of different kinds of food. In keeping with this philosophy, I serve water with snack instead of juice. Children often get enough juice at home and I prefer to encourage drinking water at school. I serve milk with breakfast and lunch.



## Holidays and Birthdays

There is a wide range of cultural and religious beliefs within families. My philosophy as an educator is to welcome customs and traditions into the classroom when possible. Learning about each other is very valuable and I strongly believe children should be exposed to different cultures as one way towards learning about tolerance. I prefer to focus on the traditions, celebrations and customs of a culture and leave religious teaching to families.

On to birthdays... **4 The Love of Learning** recognizes that parents are busy and in turn offers to prepare a special birthday snack for each child. Children will get to choose what they would like for snack on their special day and often will be able to help prepare it. Friends will sign a card with good wishes and sing Happy Birthday. Please let me know if any form of celebration goes against your family's beliefs so I can make adjustments.

## A Word About Television...

**4 The Love of Learning** will not be using a television during the school day. In fact, there is not even a television located in school space. Occasionally, there may be a learning unit where viewing a DVD would enhance curriculum (for example seeing a real shuttle takeoff when learning about the solar system). Also, I may use a Yoga DVD to help us learn some yoga in the winter months when we are occasionally stuck inside. The only other exception will be during pajama days that happen once or twice a year. Then children will be able to choose from a few age appropriate videos and have a movie day. I also have valuable resources and ideas about what children can do at home instead of watching television in the evening. Please don't hesitate to ask me for more information.

## Violence, TV and Gun Play

Young children have amazing imaginations and I encourage them to use them to their full extent. That is why I do not allow children to play games that involve TV or movies. The characters on TV and in the movies were created by someone else. I encourage children to create their own characters and stories instead. Many of the shows and characters children pretend to be from television leads to stagnant and violent play. I would rather have children create characters that solve problems with words instead of violence. Plus, children are thinking in new and different ways when they lead their own play instead of just copying a storyline. As a result, you will not see any toys or books at this school that relate to the TV or movies.

We work very hard throughout the year to learn to work together and help each other and treat each other with kindness and respect. Playing violent games with guns and weapons involved often leads to children getting hurt and out of control. It also promotes practicing to hurt people instead of help people. If children start playing these kinds of games we have long discussions and brainstorm games that would be safer and better choices instead. I prefer to guide children into why it is important to choose games that promote positive outcomes instead of negative ones.



## Child Guidance

I view my role within child guidance as a facilitator. I believe in fostering problem solving skills by encouraging children to talk to each other and listen to each other. If two children have a problem with each other, my role as facilitator is to help them talk to each other so they can resolve their conflict and move on. I also support children by developing a sense of community. Part of community building is to foster a sense of respect for the environment and each other. This helps children learn different ways to communicate with each other which in turn will help them gain skills toward working out their differences with each other.

While there is flexibility within the daily schedule, I find keeping a routine helps the children become and stay engaged in different parts of the day which leads to them having successful days. Structure throughout the day helps children know what comes next, which in turn helps them feel more secure and comfortable. Children learn best when they feel safe and secure in their environment.

I believe in pointing out the positive things I see children doing as often as possible. I model behavior that I want the children to learn. Instead of asking a child to stop running inside, I will gently remind them to walk and explain we walk inside because it is safer, and that outside is a safe place to run.

Redirecting is a great tool to use to help a child regain focus in a different way. If a child is not having success in one area of the classroom (such as throwing toys, having repeated difficulties with a friend, etc), then I will help them find a new area to be more successful in.

Above all, consistency is key. I set gentle limits in order to help children feel safe, secure, and comfortable in their environment.

## Assessment

**4 The Love of Learning** is a small family oriented community where communication between caregivers is fostered at all times. Formal assessments will be done and sent home once or twice a year. However, if at any time you would like to discuss your child(ren) at length, please don't hesitate to request a conference.

## Illness

If your child will be absent for any reason, please call to let me know. Your child should stay home if they have any of the following: diarrhea or vomiting; a fever; contagious diseases or rashes, excessive coughing, excessive runny nose, or if they can't participate in the program for any reason. This helps to prevent other children and adults from getting sick as well as help your child recuperate faster. Your child should be fever/vomiting/diarrhea free WITHOUT MEDICATION for 24-48 hours before returning to school.

**\*\*PLEASE TEST YOUR CHILD FOR COVID IF THEY HAVE ANY SYMPTOMS IN ORDER TO HELP KEEP OUR COMMUNITY SAFE.** Please remember, especially with these newer variants, some people do not test positive for several days after symptom onset. Please test more than once, I suggest at symptom onset and before returning to school at least. If you have trouble finding tests, I do have some from the state that I can provide

### **ADDITIONAL COVID POLICIES**

1. If your child is positive for COVID, they will need to be out a minimum of 5 days with the possibility of staying out for up to 10 days on a case by case basis. They may be able to return if they have 2 negative tests 48 hours apart after day 5 and are symptom free.
2. If you have a Covid case in your household, you must test your child each morning before school and your child will not be able to attend if they have any symptoms.

**4 The Love of Learning** lice policies are as follows. Children will not be allowed to attend if they have active lice or any viable or nonviable nits in their hair.

If your child develops a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or contagious diseases during the school day, I will contact primary caregivers first and emergency contacts second. I realize that your day is busy and ask that you please arrive at the school within an hour of being contacted. Children prefer to be home in their own space when ill.

## Medication

I will give your child medication if:

- \*the medicine is a prescription from a doctor
- \*the medicine is in its original labeled container
- \*I have a signed parental consent form

If your child has specific medical needs, we will need to work together with your child's physician to create a health plan.

## Emergency Plan



If a child should need emergency assistance, the parent will be contacted immediately after I contact emergency services. If I am unable to care for the children for any reason during the day, I will call Nick to take over until parents can be contacted and arrive to pick up their children.

If there is an emergency inside the house, the children will proceed outside to the end of the driveway where we will cross the street together and gather on the sidewalk directly across the street to take attendance and call emergency services. If there is an emergency outside of the house and it is safer to stay inside, we will remain in the house away from windows and on a lower level if necessary. If necessary, doors will be locked and shades drawn. In the event of a natural disaster, we will proceed to the Turners Falls High School which is designated as our nearest shelter. Before we leave and when we arrive, attendance will be taken. In addition, if an emergency requires us to shelter temporarily nearby, we will walk the children to 50 Randall Road where we have made arrangements with the property owner to use as a temporary shelter until children can be picked up. We will bring first aid supplies, any medication required by the children and food if necessary. We will hold a meeting circle with children until parents arrive. In the event of a power outage, a generator is available to power the entire school through a transfer switch.

In the unlikely event that a child goes missing from the program, the police will be notified immediately followed by a call to the child's parent.

In any of these situations, parents will be contacted by cell phone or the land line as soon as possible. Also, EEC will be notified as soon as possible after any emergency event per regulations.

## Admission and Enrollment

Enrollment is on a first come, first serve basis. I encourage parents to schedule a time to visit the program and meet with me. Parents can secure a spot for their child by filling out an enrollment form and returning the form along with a check for two weeks tuition as a deposit. One week will be used towards the first week of care and the second week will go towards one of the last two weeks of care when your child is ready to move to the next learning space.

## Rates and Tuition

Preference will be given to children who need 5 days of care. Rates are as follows:

Rates range from \$50-\$65 per day depending on how many days children are enrolled. I also offer discounted sibling rates.

**4 The Love of Learning** is completely tuition based. Tuition is due on the first day of care for the week following. Please be sure to pay on time so that the program can continue to run as smoothly as possible. If payment is not received on the first day of care, the parent will be given a verbal reminder. If payment is not received by the end of that week, a written reminder will follow. Termination proceedings for non-payment may be started as soon as one full week of a missed payment unless a payment plan has been discussed and agreed upon.

### **LATE FEE POLICY**

Family time is important to me and the school closes promptly at 4:30. If you are late and it was not previously arranged with me, there will be a late fee of \$15.00 for the first 15 minutes after 4:30pm (4:31-4:45pm) and \$20.00 for each 15 minutes thereafter unless it is an emergency situation (subject to definition by 4 The Love of Learning).

**\*\*\*Fees will be due within 48 hours of late arrival or the price will double.\*\*\***

After **3** late fee charges, these rates will go **up** as follows: \$30.00 for the first 15 minutes after 4:30pm (4:31-4:45pm) and \$40.00 for each 15 minutes thereafter unless it is an emergency situation.

After **6** late fee charges, these rates will go up to \$60.00 for the first 15 minutes (4:31-4:45pm) and \$80.00 for each 15 minutes thereafter. Perpetual late arrival can be grounds for termination.

Please make checks payable to **4 The Love of Learning**.  
If a check bounces, you will be responsible for paying the bank fees



## Closings and Vacation

**4 The Love of Learning** may be closed on the following holidays: Independence Day, Labor Day, Yom Kippur, Thanksgiving Day and Black Friday, Christmas Day and the day before or after, New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, Veteran's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, President's Day, Patriot's Day, & Juneteenth.

Some years the program may close for professional development which may take the place of a vacation.

The program will also be closed for two to three weeks of vacation per year. Parents will have at the very least one month's notice prior to closure for the remaining one or two weeks (which may be back to back or separate).

**Parents are responsible for paying tuition 52 weeks a year including holiday, professional development, vacation and sick closures, and snow emergencies, as well as if their child is absent for any reason including illness** (The school will close for sickness if the classroom cannot be covered by a substitute, such as if Covid is in the household, and will close for snow if the town or state declares a state of emergency or if it seems especially dangerous and banks, malls, and libraries are closing).

**4 The Love of Learning** is the primary source of income for my family. As most professionals receive vacation, holiday, and sick pay, I expect to earn paid time as well. I understand that this can be a hardship for families, and moved from having 5 weeks of vacation/sick time per year (in previous employment) down to only 2 or 3 weeks. Many families find it easier to schedule their own vacations to correspond with **4 The Love of Learning's** closings.

## Withdrawal/Termination

In taking time to make sure **4 The Love of Learning** is a good fit for you and your child, withdrawal should be minimal. However, I understand families needs sometimes change. Please give the program as much notice as possible if you are choosing to remove your child. At the very least, there is a two-week notice.

Again, with good communication and strong relationships, termination is rare. However, there are a few reasons a child may be terminated.

\*Termination may occur for nonpayment

\*Termination will occur if the child's behavior threatens the physical and/or emotional well being of the children (including themselves) in care.



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