

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 7:30-5:30. 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.

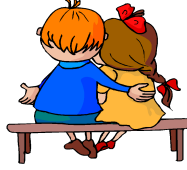
About our Family

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 the Yankee Candle Company in S. Deerfield. He is also a volunteer firefighter on the Turners Falls Fire Department. 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 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.

Daily Schedule

(subject to change)

7:30-9:30: Arrival and Choice Time

9:30-9:45: Clean-up

9:45-10:00: Family style breakfast time

10:00-10:30: Circle time

10:30-11:00: Curriculum time

11:00-12:00: Outdoor play

12:00-12:30: Family style lunch time

12:30-1:00: Bathroom and book time

1:00-3:00: Rest time

3:00-3:30: Wake up and snuggle

3:30-3:45: Family style snack time

3:45-5:30: 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.

Please remove shoes when entering the house. Since the children will often be playing on the floor, it will help keep the floors cleaner for their play. Feel free to bring in slippers for your child. Slippers are a cozy alternative for all times of the year!

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 are encouraged to try to use the toilet when they are ready. 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. Slippers are great for inside. Flip flops and Crocs are not safe for playing so please leave them at home.

*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 going 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.

Children love to bring a snack to share with friends and are encouraged to do so. Parents can sign up to bring a healthy snack once or twice a month. The sign up sheet will be located on the parent board (I will list any allergies if applicable). I especially encourage bringing snacks that link to family traditions or customs. It is yet another way for us to get to know each other.



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 banner 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, 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.

4 The Love of Learning follows lice policies set forth by Gill-Montague public schools. 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. Your child should be fever/vomiting/diarrhea free for 24 hours before returning to school.

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. In the event of a natural disaster, we will proceed to the Turners Falls High School which is designated as our nearest shelter.

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 \$35-\$45 per day depending on families needs. I also offer discounted sibling rates. **4 The Love of Learning** takes part in the Voucher program as well.

Afterschool rates are \$5 per hour, with a one hour minimum per day.

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.

Family time is important to me and the school closes promptly at 5:30. If you are late and it was not previously arranged with me, there will be a late fee of \$10.00 for the first 15 minutes after 5:30 and \$15.00 for each 15 minutes thereafter unless it is an emergency situation.

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, Christmas and the day before or after, New Year's Day, Memorial Day.

Instead of closing for all of the other Monday holidays, I may take 1-3 professional days each year in order to attend professional development conferences. (If the school closes for 3 days in order for staff to attend a National Conference, it will be in place of one week of vacation.)

The program will also be closed for two to three weeks of vacation per year. One week will be in August. 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 for holiday, professional development, and vacation closures as well as if their child is absent for any reason including illness. In the event of a family emergency in which the program closes, families will not be charged.

4 The Love of Learning is the primary source of income for my family. As most professionals receive vacation pay, I expect to earn paid vacation time as well. I understand that this can be a hardship for families, so I have opted to not take paid sick days and move from having 5 weeks of vacation/sick time per year 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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