

Healthy Organizational Practices On-line Resource- Introduction and Section I

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Section I: EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM RESOURCES

I Introduction

Waldorf early-childhood education and care are continually evolving and are guided by recognized essential principles (1). Each school, center, or program provides the best care possible within practical and economic considerations; therefore daily rhythms and staffing patterns and group sizes vary.

The terms “kindergarten,” “nursery,” and “pre-school” are sometimes used interchangeably in American education. Licensing agencies will designate programs according to their accepted terminology. “Pre-school” or “Pre-K” (pre-kindergarten) are terms agencies use to designate groups of children under the age of 5 years old. Kindergarten is the term used in public schools for children in the year before first grade.

Waldorf schools are not be confined by this terminology in their own literature and within their school culture. Many Waldorf schools use the term “mixed-age kindergarten” to reflect their programs’ emphasis on play and activities that do not include direct academic instruction suggested by the word “pre-school”. The use of the words “kindergarten” and “nursery” thus distinguish the Waldorf approach from that of public education. . An image to characterize the “nursery” is that it is like the place where tender young plants are cared for, and therefore better describes a Waldorf program for young children. A kindergarten, literally translated: a child’s garden or garden for children also connotes this quality of care and nurture rather than academic instruction. Regardless of how a school labels its programs, the groupings and the nature of the program should be described well in parent literature to insure understanding.

A trained Waldorf early-childhood teacher or group of teachers designs the activities of each Waldorf early childhood program. This includes all aspects of the day’s activities, from early morning arrival through the morning into lunch and afternoon hours of care. Care programs in schools are most successful when the entire school and its leadership acknowledge that children’s experiences in these programs are as valuable and important as those in our morning kindergarten and nursery programs, and when this awareness is reflected in the allocation of pedagogical, practical, and economic resources. Successful programs staff and schedule their programs in various ways, always based upon careful study of young children’s needs and practical circumstances. There are many different ways of forming the day— the examples here represent some of the most common current practices.

(1) “The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education”, Susan Howard, *Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education*; and reprinted in *Gateways*, Fall/Winter 2006, Issue 51

IA Morning Programs

Every school defines “morning” differently. Often a morning program lasts for 3 ½ to 4 ½ hours, from 8 or 9 in the morning until before or after lunchtime. After the morning program children either return home or may participate in a care program for the afternoon (see “Care Programs” below).

Successful programs staff and schedule their programs in various ways, always based upon careful study of young children’s needs and practical circumstances. Trained Waldorf early-childhood educators design the programs. Note that there may be quite different ways of forming the day— the examples in Section 2A below represent some of the most common current practices for mixed-age kindergarten and nursery groups.

IB Care Programs: Afternoon and Extended Care

In Waldorf schools these programs are commonly referred to as *extended day* or *extended care* programs; programs continuing beyond 3:00 p.m. are commonly referred to as *aftercare*. Aftercare programs often have separate groups for early-childhood and elementary-school-age children; some combine the younger and older children. For this discussion we will use the term *extended care* to describe all care provided between noon and 6:00 pm.

All the afternoon programs include lunch, rest, and outdoor play. Sometimes simple seasonal craft activities, housework, or games are included depending on the season and the weather, but the primary focus is on a good meal, rest, and free creative play with as much outdoor time as possible.

Most schools and centers strive to create a “seamless day”—one that allows children to remain in the same group and the same environment (room) for the whole day with minimal change in educators and care providers. Where this is not possible an effort is made to limit the transitions children experience through changes in staff, group, and room.

Care programs in schools are most successful when the entire school and its leadership acknowledge that children’s experiences in these programs are as valuable and important as those in our morning kindergarten and nursery programs, and when this awareness is reflected in the allocation of pedagogical, practical, and economic resources.

IC Parent-Child Groups

In Waldorf schools these programs are offered for children from infancy to age 3 or 4 years. The program is designed by a trained Waldorf early-childhood teacher or group of teachers. A small group of parents and children come together with a Waldorf early childhood educator for both parent education and an opportunity for the young children to be together in an atmosphere of warm guidance. These programs serve schools for building community with young families and for outreach and enrollment. The groups typically meet one day a week.

There are also programs offered as a transition for children age 2.5 – 3.5 from parent-child to nursery groups. In these so-called “bridge classes”, parents gradually remove themselves as they see that the child is able to participate independently in the nursery group.

2 Practical Considerations

2A Morning Programs

There are many ways to configure groups of young children ages 2.9 to 7 years old (the usual age span of nursery through kindergarten). Careful study of young children’s needs informs our program planning. Each school or program has local regulations that may determine maximum group size according to available square footage; age range; and adult: child ratio.

Who is responsible for creating the rhythm of the day and week for each class/group?

The child’s need for a regular, predictable life is widely acknowledged in the field of early-childhood education and care. Waldorf programs establish a *daily rhythm*, a movement from one activity into another that is often compared to the alternation of in-breathing and out-breathing. The breathing rhythm in an early-childhood group offers a succession of active and quieter periods, and of full-group activities and opportunities for free play. A predictable, consistent rhythm promotes health and well being, deepens the children’s trust in their caregivers and the environment, and allows them to be at ease in play and group activity. Samplerhythms are at the end of this section.

The world of Waldorf early-childhood education and care is opening itself to varied and exciting new possibilities for forming the daily rhythm, especially in the morning hours. Strong influences include the well-established work of Helle Heckmann, Emmi Pikler, LifeWays, Bernadette Raichle, and others. While the needs of young children and the key role of a “breathing” rhythm are central in the work of all Waldorf early-childhood educators, there are diverse approaches to serving these needs and supporting healthy development. This variety creates opportunities for individual study and research, and may result in groups within a single school/center having different daily rhythms. Different time periods, for example, may be devoted to indoor and outdoor activities; story time may take place mid-morning, after snack and before outdoor play, or at morning’s end.

*If different groups have different daily rhythms, what factors make this possible?
What challenges have you met with the existence of different rhythms of the day in your school or center?*

Faculties must agree on a basic schedule: morning opening, midday dismissal, and mid-afternoon dismissal times.

Within the basic schedule, individual group leaders are free to arrange their groups’ daily activities, keeping in mind the importance of a breathing rhythm, the mission of the

school/center, and various practical considerations. In addition to philosophical considerations, practical or logistical factors may contribute to differences in the daily rhythm among groups in one school or center. Shared resources—outdoor play area, kitchen facilities, a visiting eurythmist—may require coordination. In cases where resources are shared, the faculty/staff group must work together to insure equitable access. Festival days and other special occasions may necessitate schedule changes, and these changes require planning and communication. Successful resource sharing and flexibility are possible when faculties embrace social practices that are respectful, team building, and collaborative, and when colleagues are capable of compromise. Equally necessary for successful cooperation is conscious acknowledgment of the pedagogical value of different daily rhythms in individual classrooms, as well as respect for individual research. Successful faculty groups report other positive social practices that build professional relationships and skills (See Section II : 4 “Working Together”).

Communication

Questions from parents regarding the differences among groups in the same school or program can be a challenge. Communication is a key to meeting and overcoming this challenge. Collegial trust and respect provide a positive model for parents and will help them understand that different approaches are equally valuable. When parents continue to express concerns about the differences in groups, faculty and staff need to look beyond the issue of different pedagogical approaches to see whether parents’ questions are grounded in deeper concerns.

Within a school or center, early childhood educators should also communicate with the full faculty/staff, the leadership body (such as a College of Teachers), and the admissions director about variations in daily rhythm among groups. Their knowledge and understanding will lend support to the early childhood programs as a whole.

Resources on Rhythm

R.B. Dancy, *You Are Your Child's First Teacher*, updated edition, p. 260-263, 290-295.

Dr. M. David and G. Appell, *Loczy, an unusual approach to mothering*, pp 42-44.

N. Foster, *In a Nutshell*, pp 23-24.

E. Grunelius, *Early Childhood Education and the Waldorf School Plan*, p. 27.

H. Heckmann, *Nooken, A Garden for Children*.

Ruth Ker, ed. *You're Not the Boss of Me*.

B.Patterson and P. Bradley, *Beyond the Rainbow Bridge*, pp 30-38.

Thomas Poplawski. "Rhythm and the Healthy Development of the Child", *Renewal*, Fall/Winter 2006

J. Salter, *The Incarnating Child*, p.74.

B. Raichle, *Creating a Home for Body, Soul and Spirit*.

Where does the responsibility lie for the size of enrollment in each group?

A committee of early-childhood educators often determines the number of children in each group in a school or center program. Sometimes the committee makes proposals to a school leadership body or includes someone from this body in their deliberations, and this group may be responsible for the final decision regarding group size. In either case, early-childhood faculty representation is essential.

Health and safety and regulations will inform planning. Regulations may allow classes with 5- to- 7- year olds to enroll over 20 children (depending on classroom square footage), but these regulations are based on different space-use criteria than typically apply in a Waldorf School, where free, creative play is the basic indoor activity. Decision-making groups should therefore be cautious when considering these regulatory standards.

When assigning children to groups in a Waldorf program, group size is often influenced by financial considerations. Enrollment figures may dictate smaller or larger groups. Small class sizes may necessitate paying assistants very little, which can have social consequences.

Resources on group size

“Group Size: Some Further Thoughts.” Christine Christiansen, *Gateways* Fall/Winter 2000, Issue 39.

“Brief Thoughts on Small Kindergartens.” Stephen Spitalny, *Gateways* Spring/Summer 2000, Issue 38.

Where does the responsibility lie for deciding how ages will be combined or if groups will be age-specific?

It is important to consider the characteristics of the particular children enrolled and the various challenges and needs they present. There is general recognition that younger groups (up to 4.5 years old by September) need to be smaller than mixed-age groups. Younger children require more assistance with personal needs and need more frequent contact with the adults. They are also less able to handle the stimulation of a larger group. In some schools a few younger children (ages 3.5 years and up) can be carried in a larger mixed-age group because the older children can help them and serve as role models; a larger group of these younger children is not advisable for the reasons cited above. Most frequently reported group sizes among schools surveyed are 12-16 children in nursery groups ((up to 4.5 years old by September, with two adults), and 14-22 children in mixed-age kindergarten groups (4 years old and older as of September, sometimes including a few 3 year olds, with 2 adults). (3)

Decisions about the age range of groups typically rest with the same committee described above (in “Group Size”). There is a range of successful practices in combining ages, and how ages are combined is a philosophical consideration. A school or center may study

the question and share personal research and experiences when deciding how to combine different ages in nursery and kindergarten groups.

In some schools age grouping is determined by licensing regulations. There are a few kindergartens with single-age groups; this practice is most often found in charter and public “Waldorf-inspired” schools. Faculty committees responsible for arranging the groups often consider gender balance; placement of siblings and twins; parent requests; distribution of different ages; and the best placement for children in need of special care or who demand extra care. Programs with very young children often require that the children be toilet trained.

Resources on Group composition and mixed ages

Work and Play in Early Childhood, Freya Jaffke. In chapters 2 and 3, Jaffke refers to mixed-age groups. She also mentions group size.

You’re Not the Boss of Me, Ruth Ker, ed. Many articles in this collection give examples of children in the context of the mixed-age kindergarten. See “Creating a Flow in Time,” by Barbara Klocek, and other articles.

“Mixed Ages in the Kindergarten,” by Nancy Blanning. *Gateways*, Fall/Winter 2004, Issue 47.

Below is a sample of reported age-range compositions in mixed-age nursery and kindergarten groups.

Youngest and oldest ages as of September:

Nursery

2.9–4.9 years
3.0–4.3 years

Kindergarten

3.5 – 6 years
4.0 – 6 years
5.4- 6 years

Morning Program Rhythm of the Day samples

School #1 Mixed-age Kindergarten

Teacher's notes: All times approximate, of course. At my school I am the only EC teacher who starts outside all year long.

8:10 – kindergarten children and parents meet in the garden

8:20 – children and parents sing a good morning song, say goodbye, all aboard the “ready train”

8:25 – walk in the conservation land that borders the school property

8:50 – return and use bathroom, then change into indoor shoes

9:00 – circle (or Eurythmy; on Eurythmy days a longer morning walk beforehand due to scheduling needs. On birthdays, we insert the birthday celebration here and replace story with a game)

9:25 – rest

9:40 – table activity (chopping, kneading bread dough, etc.) followed by free play

10:40 – clean up

10:50 – snack

11:15 – snack clean-up

11:25 – story

11:45 – outdoor clothes and outside

12:30 – dismissal

School # 2 Mixed-age Kindergarten

7:30 - 8:00 Early Birds- any child arriving early comes to a single classroom and goes to her/his group at 8:00

8:00 - 8:30 Snack Preparation / Children Arriving

8:30 - 9:30 Creative Play Inside with Daily Activity* / Clean Up
(*walk/beeswax, bread baking, painting, coloring, walk/housekeeping)

9:30 -10:15 Circle / Rest / Bathroom Time

10:15 -10:45 Snack

10:45 -11:00 Story

11:00 -12:00 Outside Play / Walks

12:00 -12:15 Half-Day Children – Dismissal Outside

12:00 - 1:00 Full-Day Children – Lunch / Preparing for Nap/Rest

1:00 - 2:30 Nap/Rest / Quiet Activity Later

2:30 - 3:00 Wake Up / Clean Up / Outside Play / Dismissal Outside/
Transition to Aftercare

3:00-5:30 Aftercare includes outdoor play, indoor play/occasional crafts and a snack

School #3 Mixed-age Kindergarten

Two rhythms during the week for this group-

Daily Rhythm M & F (time approximate)

8:30- Arrival outside-dressed and ready for our Walk

8:30-10:00 – Walk- both classes together

10:00-10:40- toileting, morning greeting, and snack

10:40-11:00- Mon-beeswax story, Fri. Puppet show both classes together

11:00-11:30- wash dishes, set up for lunch, lunch prep

11:30-12:10- outside play

12:15- Goodbye Circle

Daily Rhythm T, W & Th. (time approximate)

8:30- Arrival inside

8:30-9:50- creative play, snack, lunch prep,

Activity of the day, T- Bread baking, chopping vegetables, W- Painting. Th- Coloring/crafts

9:55- tidy up, toileting, Circle time

10:25 Snack

10:45-11:00- rest /story

11:00-11:30- wash dishes, set up for lunch,

11:30-12:10- outside play

12:15- Goodbye Circle

Afternoons- Both K Classes combine those children remaining for care.

12:15-1:15 -Lunch with morning Lead Teacher A

1:15-2:00 -Rest with morning Assistants A and B

2:00-3:00- Outside Play with morning Lead Teacher B

3:00-3:15- Outside clean up and Goodbye Circle

School #4 Mixed-age Kindergarten

8:30 - 9:00 Work and play outdoors in the playground

9:00 - 9:30 Morning walk and play at the "Big Garden"
Seasonal garden work

9:30 - 9:50 Lavender hand wash and Circle Time

9:50 - 10:00 Rest time and Bathroom Routine

10:00 - 10:20 Snack time
helpers for kitchen clean-up

10:20 - 11:20 Freeplay
Life/artistic or handwork activity

11:20 - 11:30 Tidy-up Time

11:30 - 11:40 Story

11:45 - 12:00 Traditional and other games

12:00 Going home or to After-school care

School #5 Nursery group

8:30 outside(some days with a walk through the forest)

10:30 inside, change, ring time

10:50 meal

11:50 inside play and activities

12:15 puppet play (if time)

12:30 home or lunch for those who stay

School #6:Nursery group

8:00-8:30am Arrival...out door play as everyone gathers

8:30 Ring in for Circle* (Fridays puppet story or circle play)

9:00-9:50am	Indoor play (painting, baking, cooking, sewing, cleaning etc.)
9:50-10:00am	Clean-up
10:00 ish	Wash up for snack
10:00-10:30	Snack blessing and snack
10:30-10:40	Tidy up after snack and set up for lunch and story...
10:45-11:45	Outdoor play
11:45-12:00 noon	Story (Fridays, story if replaced by extended outdoor time)
12:00 noon-12:30pm	Lunch
12:30-12:45 pm	Tidy up after lunch and transition to rest time
12:45-1:00pm	Story book time...quiet singing by the teacher...on our cots
1:00-2:00pm	Rest time
2:00-2:15pm	Getting up from rest and putting away cots and books, etc.
2:15-3:15	Outdoor play till pick-up
3:30pm	Transition for aftercare...(finger play circle and simple story and snack
Care is available till 6:00pm	

2B Care Programs: Afternoon and Extended Care

Who is responsible for designing the rhythm of the day for the care program?

A trained Waldorf early-childhood teacher or group of teachers designs the activities of each Waldorf early childhood program. This includes all aspects of the day's activities, from early morning arrival through the morning into lunch and afternoon hours of care.

In many cases, some children are dismissed just before or after lunch while other children stay longer for care. Depending on enrollment, groups of children from several morning programs are sometimes combined. In some programs children who stay the whole day are placed in the same group. The afternoon begins with preparing and eating lunch. The meal should be pleasant and leisurely. This is followed by preparation for a rest time. Some care providers include practices such as washing hands in lavender water, hand massage, and singing lullabies to help children become restful. Once the children are all settled, many programs report that children rest for 30–45 minutes; children who fall asleep are not disturbed. After rest the children tidy blankets and go outside to play. We strive to create an expansive atmosphere where the children feel that there is plenty of time to accomplish the tasks at hand.

Is the care program part of a “seamless day” design for children who need all day care?

It is most beneficial to minimize the transitions children experience in a single day. Enrollment is a factor in how we group the children after 12:00 p.m. Ideally, children spend the entire day with the same group of children in the same room. Ideally, children should be in the care of as few different adults as possible within a single day. Typically, 3–4 adults care for children in the course of a 7:30–3:00 day away

from home. In a program that runs from 7:30-6:00 children may be involved with 4–6 different adults. Successful programs have reported a variety of staffing patterns. Below are some examples of (A) staffing, and (B) rhythm of the afternoon.

(A) Extended Day Staffing samples

- The morning assistant remains through the afternoon and is a full-time salaried faculty member with benefits. The assistant takes a break during lunch and returns to care for the children until 3:00 p.m. as leader of the afternoon program. The children eat lunch with the morning teacher, and possibly an afternoon assistant who arrives at 11:30.
- The morning teacher stays with the children until 3:00. This allows the teacher to arrange activities usually reserved for the morning (circle, story, creative play, etc.) throughout the longer day. The teacher has a scheduled break. Other staff care for the children from 3:00 to the end of the day (5:00–6:00 p.m. depending on the program definition).
- An extended-day director (full-time salaried with benefits) who is also a care provider joins the children at lunchtime and continues with the children throughout the afternoon, joined by afternoon assistants or the morning assistant who continues for the day.
- Extended-day staff arrive at noon and remain until the end of the day (5:00–6:00 p.m.). Sometimes this includes two or more caregivers, and sometimes staffing is decreased or increased at 3:00 p.m. depending on enrollment.

(B) Extended Day Rhythm samples

School Program #1

Staffing includes Extended Day director and an assistant

Separate Extended Day room (times approximate)

12:30 Children come from both mixed-age kindergarten classes for lunch

1:15 lunch ends

1:30 Rest – with story and song

2:15 Up from rest

2:30 Outdoor play (or indoor games)

2:45 Outdoor play if we are inside

3:00 Dismissal for some

3:40 Snack

Indoor or outdoor play

5:30 Final dismissal

The children come to one room for lunch at 12:30. (The morning assistants go over to the other room and set up the nap pads and blue curtains on the windows to darken the room.) Their lunches are brought in from home.

School Program #2

Similar rhythm; children remain in a classroom used for morning programs.

School Program #3

Staffing includes Morning teachers and assistants continue into the afternoon. Here denoted as Teacher A, Assistant A, Teacher B, Assistant B

Two kindergartens combine children remaining for care.

12:15-1:15 Lunch with Teacher A
1:15-2:00 Rest with Assistant A and B
2:00-3:00 Outdoor play with Teacher B
3:00-3:15 Outdoor clean up and good-by

Are the early childhood children combined with children from the elementary grades?

Many schools report that they combine early-childhood-age children with elementary-school children after 3:00 p.m. This is a practical and economic decision. These “family” groups are successful when young children’s needs for free creative play are met, an undisturbed play area for the younger children is provided, an adult is always available to maintain an appropriate environment, and the group is small. Below are some pedagogical and practical points to consider in determination of group size and age range in our programs.

In programs offering care beyond 3:00–3:30, to coincide with the elementary grades’ dismissal and aftercare, later afternoon pickup time is typically determined by parents’ needs. Some schools, however, limit pickup to specific times; for example, parents may be asked to choose between pickup times of 4:00 or 5:00 p.m.

Extended day rhythm sample when combining with elementary program

School Program # 3

Staffing includes Extended Day director and an assistant

- **12:30 to 1:00** quiet lunch and getting ready for rest time. Two afternoon program groups- one for mostly 5 day children and another for 3 day children. This year’s enrollment has 5 day group with 12 children and two adults and the 3 day group with one adult and 4 children.
- **1:15 to 2:15-** Rest- 75% of the children sleep and all rest in total silence.
- After rest time children have two options; to eat the rest of their lunch or color at the table- to wake up slowly and lightly and let other children wake up gracefully.
- **2:30,** Outdoor play. Everyone is awake and we usually go outside and play until parents pick up children. Dismissal.
- **3:00** kindergartners who stay join the elementary aftercare group. One lead teacher and assistants. Separate the kindergartners at about 4:00 and have them play in a separate space if their play is infringed on by elementary children’s play. Many older children help me and also protect the young ones from older children games.
- **5:30** Final pick-up.

Successes and Challenges in Extended Day programs

The greatest challenge to successful and pedagogically sound extended day programs in Waldorf Schools is to have all levels of school leadership recognize the importance and deeper implications of having young children at the school all day. Programs in schools are too often “add-ons” managed by a committee without the conscious support of the full faculty and administration. When the value of these programs is recognized and embraced, school leadership provide them with appropriate supervision and resources, and staff them with early childhood educators trained in Waldorf Education. Some other factors to consider:

- Many schools consider extended care programs and elementary after-school programs to be an existential necessity. Some schools serve a large number of two-parent working families and therefore have large enrollment. Some programs report small care groups but still find it critical to offer these programs to bolster the school’s overall enrollment. Waldorf Schools seek to serve their communities, and aftercare programs offer families important support.
- Some schools find they must offer a somewhat flexible attendance policy for their extended day programs. However, irregular attendance complicates record keeping and billing. At least some advance notice of a child’s attendance is necessary. Some programs have experienced utter chaos in attempting to offer drop-in/“swinging door” policies. It is most efficient for families to contract for care and pay for it along with their tuition.
- Though some programs dedicate a space for care, this is rarely possible. Sharing rooms with other educators is a social exercise in compromise and clear, regular communication.
- Budget considerations sometimes encourage combining children of different age groups. Children fourth grade and up are best not combined with young children unless the groups are small (under 10) and a true “family-style” group can be well supervised.
- Successful programs report regular weekly meeting and/or frequent informal contact among the educators. Extended care providers often keep journals to report their observations of children and particular situations, and pose questions regarding particular children to be carried by their colleagues.
- Support for professional development and attractive compensation may encourage the loyalty of committed staff.

Resources for Extended Day Programs

Sleep and Rest

“Toward Human Development: the Physiological Basis of Sleep” - Lisa Gromicko, *The Developing Child: The First Seven Years*, Susan Howard, ed.

“The Importance of Sleep” - Susan R. Johnson, MD. *Gateways*. Spring/Summer 2001 Issue 40

"Sleeping and Waking", by Margret Meyerkort , *Lifeways- Working with Family Questions* by Gudrun Davy and Bons Voors.
Sleep by Audrey McAllen
Caring for the Sick at Home, by Bentheim, Bos, de la Houssaye and Visser, Chapter 9

Meals and Food

Nutrition: A Holistic Approach, Dr. Rudolf Haushka
The Incarnating Child, Joan Salter
The Dynamics of Nutrition, Gerhard Schmidt
Cooking for the Love of the World, Anne-Marie Fryer Wiboltt
For cookbooks from Waldorf kindergartens: www.waldorfbooks.com

The Role of the Adult and Children's Activity

"For the small child before the change of teeth, the most important thing in education is the teacher's own being." R. Steiner, *The Essentials of Education*

"The joy of children in and with their environment must therefore be counted among the forces that build and shape the physical organs." R. Steiner, *The Kingdom of Childhood*

A Warm and Gentle Welcome, T. Atchison and M.Ris, ed.
Childhood-Creating a Home for Body, Soul and Spirit, Bernadette Raichle
Nokken, A Garden for Children: A Danish Approach to Waldorf-Based Child Care, by Helle Heckmann
On the Play of the Child, Freya Jaffke, ed.
Working with the Angels, Susan Howard, ed.
"The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education", Susan Howard, *Mentoring in Waldorf Early Childhood Education*; and reprinted in *Gateways*, Fall/Winter 2006, Issue 51

2C Parent-Child Groups

For how long do parent-child groups meet?
What is the parent-child group size?

Groups vary from 1.5 – 2.0 hours. Sessions vary from 8 weeks to the whole of the semester. Group sizes vary according to pedagogical philosophy, the children's ages, and the size of the environment.

Does the educator work alone or have an assistant?

In the schools surveyed, there were an equal number of programs staffed with a single educator, or with an educator and an assistant, depending upon program activities, group size and environment.

Some examples of ages, group size and staffing:

12–30 months	6–8 parent-child	1 educator
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	pairs	
18months–2.5 years	6–8 pairs	1 educator
2–3 years	6–12 pairs	1 educator + an assistant with over 8 pairs
Infant classes	5–8 pairs	1 educator

What is the approach in the program?

Schools report several successful approaches. Pedagogical decisions (activities, parent education, class duration) often rest with the educator(s) forming the program. For descriptions of specific parent-child programs view individual Waldorf School websites (www.whywaldorfworks.org, click header: “Find a school”).

Parent-child group considerations

It is very important to articulate the purpose of these classes to insure support for them throughout the school. The mission of parent-child groups commonly includes introducing new families to the school to build enrollment and offering parenting support and education. This strengthens parents’ understanding of Waldorf education, helping to create a committed and supportive parent body. The educator leading such a group is always a trained Waldorf early-childhood teacher or someone with experience and skills that will best represent the school and Waldorf Education, and she is compensated accordingly. Many of these programs do not “pay for themselves” entirely through tuition income due to enrollment numbers, the wish to keep fees relatively equivalent to those prevailing in a given area, and the cost of a qualified educator to lead the group.

Parent-child group resources

A Warm and Gentle Welcome, T. Atchison and M.Ris, ed.

Beyond the Rainbow Bridge, Barbara Patterson and Pam Bradley

Nurturing Children and Families: One Model of a Parent/Child Program in a Waldorf School, Sarah Baldwin

"Parent/Child Working Group", Nancy Foster, *Gateways*, Spring/Summer 2004

"Conversations with Parent/Child Founders", Nancy Foster, *Gateways*, Spring/Summer 2005

See Waldorf school and program websites for descriptions of parent-child programs.