



# Simcha Preschool

at Temple Beth El  
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*Where learning and fun come together...*

**Simcha Education Handbook**

## **OUR EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY**

As a nationally accredited preschool program, our curriculum, adult-child interactions and home/school relationships are based on developmentally appropriate practice as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Developmentally appropriate practice requires that teachers know about the various stages of child development and the implications of this knowledge. This knowledge then becomes the premise from which they teach, construct their curriculum content, assess what to implement and when, assess what children have learned and how to adapt their curriculum and instruction to continually meet children's changing individual strengths, needs, and interests. Further, they must know the particular children they teach and their families and be knowledgeable as well about the social and cultural context.

In order to maintain developmentally appropriate practice, we have constructed a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment, and are continuously building a flexible, adaptable curriculum based on both teacher and child initiated themes and activities. In developing our curriculum, we consider both the typical developmental milestones that occur at each stage of a child's life as well as each child's individual strengths, interests and needs. Thus children practice newly acquired skills as well as having a chance to work at their individual capacity.

We have worked hard to balance our environment and curriculum to meet the physical, social, emotional and cognitive developmental needs of each child, while responding to the individual needs of our families. Our goal in this is to promote children's ability to develop their sense of self as a competent learner, and as a part of a community.

## **OUR GOALS**

### **For our children, an opportunity to...**

- Be themselves and develop at their own rate
- Express themselves freely and creatively with art and play materials
- Learn to be embracing, creative, cooperative, and imaginative
- Learn independence -- to solve problems and do things for themselves
- Learn interdependence – to feel pride from being cooperative, helpful and a part of something larger than themselves
- Learn to establish close relationships with adults other than family members
- Learn impulse control regarding safety, health and respect for the rights of others
- Build feelings of self-confidence, security, and acceptance of reality
- Increase their ability to understand their own emotions

### **For Staff and Families, an opportunity to...**

- Share and be involved in children's first experience away from home
- Become aware of the ways children perceive their world and develop a deeper understanding of their behavior, based on knowledge of growth and development
- Achieve a partnership through daily communication, group discussions, conferences and shared experiences
- Continually learn new techniques for working with children and insight into human relationships through participation in the parent education program and by observing experienced professionals

## **CLASSROOM GUIDELINES:**

A child's physical and emotional safety is very important to us. We provide a clear and consistent level of limit setting to ensure that each child is safe and feels secure. Children benefit from logical and predictable boundaries. When safety is not an issue, we encourage children to have input in defining the limits.

### **Supervision of Young Children**

- A primary role of adults in the child's environment is to **OBSERVE** their play. Avoid creating games, entertaining the children, or getting so involved with their play that you take over.
- Stay low. Children can feel overwhelmed when adults tower over them. Sit on the children's chairs, not the table, if you can't sit on the floor.
- Be aware of environmental safety. Prevent injuries rather than dealing with the aftermath.
- Place yourself where you have the best view of the area you are supervising. Move to areas requiring the highest level of adult intervention, such as climbing apparatus or situations involving power play.
- Talking with other adults and teachers is a valuable part of your experience. Please do so in quiet voices or outside the classroom, and be conscious of appropriate subject matter and supervision.
- Avoid making models for children with any materials. This often prevents children from freely exploring the materials in their own creative ways, and limits our understanding of their abilities.
- When speaking to children, assume their level and speak in a clear, calm, accepting tone. Talking to young children from across the classroom is not effective.
- Teach and model gentle actions and communication.
- Notice and reflect to children their thoughtful, creative and responsible play.
- Encourage children to do as much as they can by themselves. Provide the minimum amount of help (at times none is needed) so that children can experience a sense of accomplishment.
- Do not put children onto climbing structures. There is less chance of injury when children accomplish their own physical motor objectives.
- If you need to do something to or for a child, tell them first. "I'm going to check your diaper now." "I'm going to lift you up now." This prepares and includes them.
- Always stop children from hurting themselves, other children or adults.

### **Limit Setting With Young Children**

- When limits are necessary, they should be clearly defined and consistently applied, so that the children know their adults can be counted on to maintain needed boundary lines.
- Tell children what they can do vs. what they cannot do: "Walk inside." vs. "Do not run."
- Offer safe alternatives to unsafe behavior: "Throwing blocks hurts, let's find some soft toys you can throw."
- Acknowledge children's ideas, feelings and age appropriate impulse behind the behavior.
- Never judge or label children's behavior subjectively (bad, nice, good, mean, selfish, etc.) Separate the child from the behavior: "I'm not going to let you hit Blake. Hitting hurts him."
- Give the child a choice only when you intend to leave the decision up to them. "Where do you want to park your bike before snack?" The child must come to snack but the choice of where to park is theirs.
- Encourage children to come up with their own mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts whenever possible.
- Avoid comparison and competition among children., it damages self-esteem and limits cooperation between children. "I saw you both hold onto the railing and climb the stairs fast."
- Ask another adult to take over in mediating a conflict between children if you become too upset to deal with the situation effectively.

All information concerning children and families is confidential. Never discuss a child within their or other children's hearing range.

The physical and emotional health and safety of the children is our primary concern!

## **ACCREDITATION BY THE NAEYC**

Our school is currently one of only nine Santa Cruz County early childhood programs to be accredited by the NAEYC. Accreditation standards ensure that we adhere to the twelve principles of developmentally appropriate practice as defined by the NAEYC; in regards to our environment, our teacher – child interactions, our health and safety practices, and our administration.

## **NAEYC'S 12 PRINCIPLES OF DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE**

Developmentally appropriate practice is based on knowledge about how children develop and learn. The following is a list of observationally based principles of child development and learning, which inform and guide decisions about developmentally appropriate practice as defined by the NAEYC. These principals are the basis to our educational philosophy.

### **1. Domains of children's development - physical, social, emotional, and cognitive - are closely related. Development in one domain influences and is influenced by development in other domains.**

Recognition of the connections across developmental domains is used in curriculum planning, For example: Children use their sensory/motor skills to manipulate sand and water in the yard. They also use and learn new language to describe what they are experiencing. This language, in turn, influences their ability to establish and participate in social relationships both with other children and with adults. A positive sense of self and as competent learners begins to develop and be reinforced as they continue to expand on their physical, cognitive and social experiences creating castles, moats or tea parties in the sand box each day. This self-image is then stored as fond feelings and memories about the exploration of our earth's natural materials, the ability to create something useful through manipulation and practice, and social relationships that form in the process of cooperation.

### **2. Development occurs in a relatively orderly sequence. Later abilities, skills and knowledge are built on those already acquired.**

Knowledge of typical development of children within the age span served by the program provides a general framework to guide how teachers prepare the learning environment and plan realistic curriculum goals and objectives and appropriate experience. For example: at Chanukah the children the in Toddler class are introduced to holiday symbols like dreidles, a chanukiah, latkes. They touch, smell, see pictures of and taste different holiday foods. They hear new words and simple songs. They have simple stories and flannel board pictures to manipulate. The Preschool class can hear a very simplified version of the Chanukah story. They might make some simple clay chanukiot. Dreidles will be out to play with. They might play a simple game like "what's missing" or find things in a feelie bag. The Pre-K class will hear more complex stories about Chanukah. Perhaps the puppets will be put out and they will make up stories of their own. They will learn songs and perhaps make Chanukah cards for their families or to exchange. They will play dominoes with Chanukah symbols and lots of puzzles. Not only are dreidles out but perhaps other kinds of spinner too. They will learn what the Hebrew letters on dreidles are and actually learn how to play.

### **3. Development progresses at varying rates from child to child. Development can also vary within different areas of an individual child's functioning.**

Recognition that individual variation is not only expected but also *valued* requires that decisions about curriculum and adults' interactions with children be as individualized as possible. Observation is key here. We have to learn what the child knows, what skills they have so that we know how to build upon them. We provide a wide variety of materials so that children can experience them at their own levels. We use books, toys, familiar objects, costumes, puzzles, games, and art materials that are open ended so that each child can be successful. We provide language experiences and music. We interact with children to supplement their knowledge. For example: a Toddler will play with blocks much differently than a Pre-K child, but both need the exposure and opportunity to manipulate, count, compare size and weight, and be creative with common classroom materials.

**4. Early experiences have both short-term and long-term effects on an individual child's development. Optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning.**

Children's early experiences, either positive or negative, are cumulative in the sense that if an experience occurs occasionally, it may have minimal effects. If positive or negative experiences occur frequently, however, they can have powerful, lasting, even "snowballing" effects. For example: making challah bread, lighting the candles and singing the blessings on Shabbat has a cumulative effect on children. As children become familiar and comfortable with this ritual, they take on a sense of ownership of the values it represents, at their own developmental pace. As they grow, they are able to expand on their own feelings and reflections of celebration and ritual, because rituals and celebrations were provided with consistency and inclusiveness in their earliest years.

**5. Child development progresses in predictable directions toward greater complexity organization, and internalization.**

Learning during early childhood proceeds from behavioral knowledge to symbolic or representational knowledge. Developmentally appropriate programs provide opportunities for children to broaden and deepen their behavioral knowledge by providing a variety of first-hand experiences and by helping children acquire symbolic knowledge through representing their experiences in a variety of media. For instance, most learning for early toddlers is sensory and motor, but by age 2 children use one object to stand for another in play (a block for a phone or a spoon for a guitar). We use hands-on activities and provide the medium for them to draw, paint, and construct models and props to do dramatic play as a way to internalize and organize new knowledge. We also take advantage of teachable moments during children's play to point out new concepts in building empathy or cognitive understandings.

**6. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by a variety of social and cultural contexts.**

Children's development is best understood within the socio-cultural context of the family, educational setting, community, and broader society. These various contexts are interrelated, and all have an impact on the developing child. Because we have families and staff with varying beliefs and cultural backgrounds, our teachers are sensitive to the varying customs, beliefs and behavior patterns of the families they serve. We do this through communication and partnership with families, taking time to get to know each family and learn about their values and how they feel about their child's experience at school. This communication fosters a consistent and cohesive integration of home and school, which allows each child to be secure enough to explore and learn.

**7. Children are active learners. They need direct physical and social experience as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to build their own understanding of the world around them.**

As children process new experiences, those experiences continually reshape, expand, and reorganize their cognitive structures. When teachers and other adults use various strategies to encourage children to reflect on their experiences by planning beforehand and "revisiting" afterward, the knowledge and understanding gained from the experience is deepened. For example, a teacher may expand curriculum around dried fruit that a child has brought in to share, and begin using a food de-hydrator for snack with the children. Next, the teacher may begin soliciting ideas of which types of foods the children want to dry. They can create charts where children record taste texture and size, before and after. Teachers revisit experiences by reminding a child at snack time "Remember last summer when we put those plums you brought to school into the food dehydrator?"

**8. A child's development and learning are a result of their biological maturation as well as their environment, and include the physical and social worlds that children live in.**

Development is viewed as the result of an interactive transactional process between the growing, changing individual and his or her experiences in the social and physical worlds. Observing a child and providing the enrichment and challenges they need on an individual basis is important in the classroom. Answering questions and providing spiritual enrichment are a part of the process. For example: When we see that a child loves music, we give that child many opportunities to hear different kinds of music, both recorded and performed, to sing and dance to. The teachers make special time to sit and sing familiar songs with that child. The teacher will ask questions that provoke the children to think about music and dance while they are physically learning the pleasures of listening, movement and balance on their own.

**9. Play is an important vehicle for children's healthy social, emotional, and cognitive development. It also provides adults with a reflection of their development.**

Play gives children opportunities to understand their world, to interact with others in social ways, to express and understand emotions, and to develop the ability to process information. It provides a context for children to develop and practice newly acquired skills, to take on new social roles, to attempt novel or challenging tasks, and to solve complex problems that they would not (or could not) otherwise do. Children's play also gives adults insights into their development, so that we may personalize our teaching strategies. Child-initiated, teacher-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice. For example, when children express an interest in trains, we can set up blocks, train tracks, train books, and other train materials for children to use. With these materials children build on their math skills (counting, replacing, problem solving), reading skills (making signs, reading train stories), social skills (taking turns, helping each other, listening to each other), and sense of self (self confidence, mastery of materials, creativity with materials).

**10. Development advances when children have opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, and when they experience a challenge just beyond the level of their present mastery.**

Development and learning are dynamic processes requiring that adults understand the developmental learning continuum, observe children closely (to match curriculum and teaching to children's emerging competencies, needs and interests), and then help children move forward by targeting educational experiences to challenge but not frustrate them. For example, the teachers may introduce a sea animal theme at a circle time. The teachers then find many ways, both formally and informally to introduce sea animals further. Puzzles, games, art projects and stories about sea animals are introduced, and there is much conversation about oceans and fish, etc. All throughout this time, the teachers look for "teachable moments" or opportunities that happen spontaneously to challenge and promote knowledge, awareness, and skill building around the aspects of ocean life the children are most interested in, and move children to more complex levels of understanding.

**11. Children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning, and different ways of representing what they know.**

Part of the teacher's job, with the families' help, is to start to recognize preferred modes of learning of each child and provide not only opportunities for individual children to use their preferred modes to capitalize on their strengths but also opportunities to help children develop in the modes in which they may not be strong. Different children learn in different ways, so the teachers will provide many ways for children to address specific issues. On Tu B'Shevat, for example, we experience trees in many ways. We climb them, we sit in their shade, we circle them and dance around them. We plant them. We use their leaves for pictures and their pinecones for bird feeders. We listen to the wind in the leaves and make up our own songs and poems about them.

**12. Children develop and learn best in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure.**

We address children's physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs as well as their intellectual development. Our greatest goal is to provide a warm and nurturing environment in which each child knows he or she is loved and has a special place in the world and in our lives. At Simcha we do this in a number of ways. We provide a safe environment that is both up to, and exceeding State Licensing requirements and NAEYC Accreditation standards. Our classrooms are welcoming and child friendly. We display children's art prominently. Our philosophy on discipline is to gently guide a child and provide a respectful model of positive behavior. We promote inclusiveness and community within the program, and with our larger Temple Beth El community.

**OUR JEWISH EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY**

Simcha is a Jewish Preschool. We not only want to attain the highest quality in a developmental preschool, but we also want the children to learn and feel good about Jewish heritage and traditions. We are in a unique situation in which we can create a Jewish atmosphere; warm memories of Jewish life and rituals, and a feeling of community with all our class members, families, staff and with our Temple Beth El community, while embracing the rich diversity of our larger Santa Cruz community.

Our underlying goals are for children to learn to treat each other, the earth and all its plants and creatures with kindness and respect. We want them to find joy ("Simcha" means joy in Hebrew) in the things that they do. We integrate these goals with the Jewish values of Tikkun Olam (repairing the world or taking care of the world), Mitzvot (doing blessings or acts of kindness) and Tzedakah (charity) and build them into the everyday classroom life.

Temple Beth El is the Jewish Community Center for Jewish people in Santa Cruz County. Simcha Preschool is an integral part of our Jewish community. The Temple provides us with access to the sanctuary, to the building and grounds as needed, and also to our rabbi's. Every week the children spend time with either Rabbi Paula or Rabbi Rick to sing songs, tell stories, talk about Jewish ritual objects, to get acquainted with the sanctuary and to celebrate Shabbat. Rabbi Rick also leads our Pesach Seders, and we occasionally go downstairs to visit the rabbi's in their office to see where they work and what they do.

At Simcha, we see families as our partners and our program as an extension of our families' homes. We strive to learn from each other about each individual child's cultures and backgrounds. As a Jewish Preschool we can also teach each other about our particular family traditions. Families are encouraged to share songs, stories and other learning experiences with the children. Part of this sharing happens at our Tot Shabbat Service every other month, which all our families are invited to be a part of. Part of this sharing happens in the classrooms as families spend time and co-op in their child's class. We encourage families to share the shawl that great grandmother wore on the boat to this country, pictures from big sister's Bat Mitzvah, or your unique recipe for kugel. Each family enhances our community.

**ACCREDITATION BY THE BUREAU FOR JEWISH EDUCATION**

Our program is the first in Northern California to pass the Accreditation of the Los Angeles Bureau of Jewish Education. As part of the process we needed to be accredited by NAEYC (The National Association for the Education of Young Children) and adhere to their principles of developmentally appropriate practice guidelines as well as show what we were doing to provide a top quality Jewish Curriculum.

## OUR HOLIDAY POLICY

As a Jewish school, we build community and teach history and culture through the celebrating of Jewish holidays. It is important to our Jewish families that their children be part of a community that reinforces their identities and demonstrates the richness and joy inherent in Jewish culture. For non-Jewish families, these celebrations offer their children the experience of participating in rituals and experiences outside of the dominant culture, broadening their understanding of our diverse world.

All holiday celebrations at Simcha are designed first and foremost to be developmentally appropriate. Children are active participants not silent observers. Their ideas, questions and reactions help shape each classroom's approach. Ideas and concepts are presented in ways that make sense to two year olds, or four year olds depending on the classroom in which the celebration occurs.

In addition, all children growing up in California need skills for living in a racially, linguistically, religiously, & culturally diverse world. Providing these skills prevents our children from becoming either the target of or the perpetrators of bias. Helping children to understand the great similarities between people, our shared humanity, our right to dignity and respect is only half the equation. Children also need help understanding the differences between people and the qualities that make groups and individuals unique. Even while teaching Jewish traditions and holidays, it is important to acknowledge that Jewish families have many ways of expressing their identity, and that each family's approach is to be respected.

To support these ideals, all classrooms celebrate Shabbat each week. It is a special way of ending our week that builds on the sense of the classroom as a family and focuses the children on being part of the community. In addition, all our classrooms celebrate the following:

- Rosh Hashanah
- Passover
- Sukkot
- Chanukah
- Tu B'Shevat

Each class may also celebrate the following holidays, depending on the age of the children and the particulars of the group:

- Purim
- Yom Kippur
- Yom Hatzmaut,
- Simchat Torah
- Rosh Chodesh
- Shavout

The time spent on each holiday and the approach taken will vary depending on the age of the children and the particulars of the group. In addition to this, each classroom will spend equal amounts of special time with our Rabbis, and all our families will receive the same handouts explaining the meaning of the holidays, suggestions for celebrating at home, and things we may do at Simcha to celebrate.

Simcha does not celebrate non-Jewish religious events. If children come in with questions or stories about their own experiences with these events, teachers listen respectfully and answer questions honestly, just as they do with any experience of importance to children.

Non-Jewish holidays based on historic or social events (such as Martin Luther King Day, Thanksgiving, Gay Pride Day, Mother's Day, etc.) may or may not be celebrated at Simcha. Our staff will think together each year about which ones might be important to broaden children's understanding of the world they live in, or to deepen values that are significant in Jewish culture (e.g. the struggles for social justice). Plans will be made to bring these holidays into our curriculum in a meaningful way, that supports anti-bias practices, and strengthens our children's skills for living in a racially, linguistically, religiously, & culturally diverse world. The plans implemented may not involve every classroom, but will always involve dialogue with families and teachers and Temple staff.

## **OUR ANTI-BIAS PHILOSOPHY**

We are committed to creating a learning environment where every child can develop a strong self-identity and sense of community, as well as an appreciation for participating in a diverse community. Children begin to notice differences at a very early age. We embrace an age-appropriate curriculum that makes every effort to reflect the diversity of our community and the larger world in a way that expresses complete respect for ethnicity, race, gender, age, socioeconomic class, body image, family structure, and physical ability. During the course of the year we strive to:

- Help children develop a sense of pride in their self-identity, family story / history and in their culture and heritage.
- Help children develop a knowledge of, language for and delight in human diversity.
- Help children develop an ability to recognize bias, stereotyping, oppression and injustice in themselves as well as in others.
- Help children (alone or with others; and on behalf of themselves and others) develop the ability to resist and challenge bias, stereotyping, oppression and injustice.

We do this by presenting children with a wide range of materials that reflect our differences and that challenge prevailing stereotypes of women, men, children, the elderly, of family structures, people with disabilities, working class and the poor, people of color and body images. We design circle time stories, art projects, and other classroom materials that encourage children to relate to people and diversity with respect and appreciation. We also find opportunities to model our values on celebrating diversity as they come up with the children in the classrooms. Lastly, we encourage our families to share their personal family cultures with the staff, and with the children - in collaboration with our teachers.

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In all of our work with children, we begin with the premise that the role of the teacher is to help children explore their world in an open-minded and enquiring way. The teacher presents alternatives, asks thought-provoking questions, and gently guides children to think critically. We are happy to share our resources with you, and/or to discuss any ideas or questions you may have. And, thanks for being a part of our program!