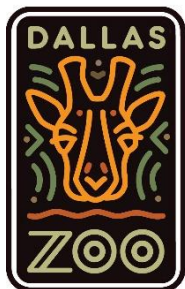


# Wild Earth Preschool Family Handbook



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## Welcome

Greetings, families!

We are delighted to introduce you to Wild Earth Preschool, a nature preschool at the Dallas Zoo.

This handbook is intended to assist you in making important decisions about your child’s care, and I encourage you to use it as a stepping stone to further conversations with me about the goals you have for your child and any questions you may have about your child’s best fit.

Policies in this handbook are subject to change as we progress, and we’ll notify you in writing if changes occur.

We look forward to meeting you and your family!

*Anna Lewis*  
Early Childhood Manager  
Wild Earth Preschool

## About Wild Earth Preschool

### Dallas Zoo

The Dallas Zoo is committed to engaging people and saving wildlife, with a vision of making a better world for animals. Wild Earth Preschool believes that by connecting young children to animals and nature, we improve the outlook both for the child and for the future of the natural world. Young children who are immersed in a sensory-rich, nature-rich, authentic, and dynamic environment benefit in the areas of cognition, physical skills, social skills, and emotional intelligence. And when children grow up connected to nature, they are likely to continue to inquire, explore, and protect it.

### Nature Preschools

As a nature preschool, Wild Earth Preschool brings together the tenets of high quality early childhood education and environmental education, with a focus on connecting young children to animals and nature for the benefit of both the child and the natural world. Inspired also by the Reggio Emilia approach, the preschool follows an emergent curriculum philosophy with opportunities for project based learning and for children to use their “100 languages” of expression. Our program is guided by the principles of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAEEE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Daily field trips to the zoo offer the child rich experiences in animal and plant interaction, global awareness, nature play, and the many ways the zoo community works together. [NaturalStart.org](http://NaturalStart.org) provides more information on Nature Preschools.

### Classroom Families

Wild Earth Preschool classroom families consist of no more than 15 children ages 3-5, facilitated by a dedicated and knowledgeable teaching team. Mixed-age classrooms provide benefits in whole child development. During field trips, any group containing one or more 3-year olds will have a ratio of 1:6. Groups that do not have 3-year olds may have a ratio of 1:8.

### Our Teachers

Our teaching staff are dedicated professionals, chosen for their interest in both the education of young children and the environment. The educator’s role includes appreciating and respecting each child; guiding child development with wonder, fascination, and awe; preparing and supporting the learning environment; developing a joyful and peaceful class family; and partnering with the child’s family and culture. Educators will structure the environment for child-directed learning and will provide opportunities for daily small group and individual interactions to scaffold learning, to model skills, to provide feedback, and to assess learning. Both indoor and outdoor classroom spaces will reflect the opportunity for children to experience a variety of materials in different centers for whole-child development across all domains.

### Our Families, visitation

We believe that families are powerful partners in educating their children. You are your child’s first teachers and their lifetime mentors, so the support you provide of your child’s play, learning, development, and growing skills in conservation will nurture their growth in our program. Parents and guardians are invited to actively participate in the school through school/home connections; family celebrations; and ongoing communication with both teachers and the administrators. In addition, parents and guardians are invited to visit the center at any time during our hours of operation without prior approval to observe your child, the program activities, or the facility. Participation in classroom activities may require a background check, health screen, facial covering, social distancing, and may be subject to limits to manage the number of adults present at a given time. If you have questions or would like more information about ways to be involved, please see an administrator.

## Our Administration

Wild Earth Preschool is a program of the education department at the Dallas Zoo which is operated by Dallas Zoo Management, Inc. (DZM) under a management agreement with the City of Dallas. The education department is led by Senior Director of Education, Marti Copeland. Wild Earth Preschool is headed by Early Childhood Manager, Anna Lewis. Anna had 10 years of experience with informal and private educational settings, with specialists in environmental education, early childhood education, family programming, outdoor safety, trauma – informed care and camp programs. She earned her B.A in Environmental Science and Technical Theatre from Eckerd College and is a Certified Interpretive Guide.

## Early Childhood Manager Designee, Additional Staff, Volunteers, and Interns:

At times when the Early Childhood Manager is not on site, a qualified designee will be assigned, and this assignment will be communicated to the preschool teaching staff. Assistant Supervisor, Rebecca Reeves, most often fills this role.

We are thankful to have the support of the Dallas Zoo education department, and the Dallas Zoo volunteer and intern program. Education instructors, staff, or volunteers who assist the preschool as substitute caregivers or manager designees will meet minimum standards for caregivers; and those who assist in the center in a non-caregiver role will meet minimum standards for employees. Staff or volunteers that meet the standards for employees, but not for caregivers, will not be left with the children in the absence of a caregiver. Volunteers and interns may be limited based on administrative discretion. Other Dallas Zoo staff may provide facility, maintenance, security, and animal care support. If on site during hours of operation they will be accompanied by a staff member and interaction with children will be limited.

## Licensing

Wild Earth Preschool adheres to the Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers and is licensed by Texas Health and Human Services. A copy of the Minimum Standards is available for review in the education office or online at [hhs.texas.gov](https://hhs.texas.gov). Licensing representatives can be contacted at **the local office:** (214) 583-4253 or the Child Care Information Line at 1-800-862-5252. The email contact for parents is [CCLQuestions@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:CCLQuestions@hhsc.state.tx.us).

Families may also request to review the preschool's most recent licensing, fire, and health and safety inspection reports located on the bulletin board in classroom T7. More information on child care for parents and our preschool profile can be found by following links at <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/safety/child-care>.

## Early Childhood Programs

Besides the licensed Wild Earth Preschool program, the Dallas Zoo offers other non-licensed early childhood education programs that are overseen by the Early Childhood Manager and the Assistant Supervisor of Early Childhood. The programs are Stroller Buddies, Wildlife Heroes Club, Thursday Safari and Friday Safari. A child can not be enrolled in Wild Earth Preschool and Thursday Safari or Friday Safari at the same time. They can, however, be enrolled in Wild Earth Preschool and Wildlife Heroes Club at the same time, as this program takes place on Sundays. These programs are run in the spring and fall and do not share spaces with the Wild Earth Preschool, Wednesday – Sunday. In the case of an emergency, these programs may be in the same room but will stay with their perspective class and caregivers/teachers for the duration of the emergency.

## Operating Times

### Hours of Operation

8:00 am – 5:30 pm

Monday – Friday, all months of the year

### Enrollment Options

#### **Days per week:**

Enrollment options include full week only. Partial week options are not available at this time. Attendance is not mandatory, but tuition remains the same regardless of attendance.

#### **Hours of attendance per day:**

Standard care enrollment is 8:30 am – 2:30 pm.

Extended programming, with gradual pick-up is 2:30 – 5:30 pm at no additional fee.

Early drop off between 8:00 – 8:30 am is available upon arrangement with no additional fee.

#### **Sessions:**

Wild Earth Preschool operates a continuous session throughout the year.

### Transportation

Parents or guardians are responsible for providing safe transportation for their children arriving to and leaving from the center, including the use of age appropriate child restraint systems as required by law.

### Center Closures

#### **Weather**

If Dallas Independent School District or the Dallas Zoo closes for business or opens late due to inclement weather, Wild Earth Preschool will follow their decision. The preschool will alert parents and guardians through the Brightwheel app.

#### **Holidays and Professional Development Days**

Wild Earth Preschool will close each year for certain holidays, professional development, and teacher work days. These dates are listed on the annual academic calendar that is provided with the admissions packet. Tuition is not adjusted for these days of closure.



## Curriculum and Activities

Early childhood staff at the Dallas Zoo have developed a robust nature preschool curriculum that begins with a therapeutic model of addressing children's well-being, draws inspiration from the natural world, explores related concepts through play, and incorporates authentic projects that build global citizenship through conservation and wildlife gardening.

### Investigation of Social and Emotional Learning Concepts

Each three-week emergent investigation is focused on universal social and emotional learning concepts like mindfulness, teamwork, diversity and inclusion, gratitude, resilience, and safekeeping. Strategies for these skills are modeled, discussed, guided, and developed through stories, books, and activities.

### Inspired by Small, Backyard Animal Observation

These investigations are inspired by the animals that children see in their own backyards and neighborhoods, as well as our natural spaces at the Zoo. We closely observe grasshoppers, birds, ducks, spiders, ladybugs, and more, gleaning life lessons about the way we are connected to these magnificent creatures and developing empathy for them.

### Skill Development through Literacy, Loose parts, Art, Habitat play, and Active play

In the indoor and outdoor environments, children will engage with activity centers and invitations to explore, designed by the teaching staff to develop positive social interactions and pre-academic skills. Children are invited to interact with teachers and the learning environment in a way that develops inquiry, creativity, and thought processes, or expands on a project or interest. Engagement opportunities include construction, dramatic play, language and literacy, social emotional learning, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and math), and daily living skills.

### Global Awareness and the Zoo Connection

The Dallas Zoo environment provides the context for children to develop an awareness of and an appreciation for the animals, ecosystems, people, and cultures of our world. Children broaden their understanding of our global community through guided investigations of zoo habitats with a focus on universal concepts such as use of water, homes, food, safety, families, and communities.

Zoo visits will generally take place once or twice per week and may include the following:

- Observation of zoo animals, habitats, and horticulture
- Interaction with zoo staff
- Interaction with animals, including feeding and contact
- Educator modeled mini-lessons or data collection to develop skills in the cognitive, social/emotional, and/or physical domains.

## Environmental and Conservation Projects

By connecting with, comprehending, and caring for the earth's environments, children develop a reciprocal relationship that contributes to their own well-being. They come to understand that plants help plants, animals help animals, people help people, and plants, animals, and people help each other. This understanding guides them in seeing themselves as a part of nature as they develop their own nature identity, one steeped in resilience and self-efficacy.

### **Integrated sustainability and conservation practices include:**

- Turning off lights and water when not in use
- Reducing, Re-using, and Recycling (the 3 R's)
- Respecting all living and non-living things
- Responsible collecting
- Collecting trash
- Composting
- Enriching and supporting habitats

## Sustainable Gardening Projects

Our organic gardening projects integrate social and emotional learning and connections to wildlife as we observe the plant life cycle from seed to seed and strive to understand how plants, animals, and humans are intrinsically intertwined. As native insects and bird sightings emerge through the year, so do the plants with which they are co-adapted. Sensory garden plants provide opportunities to ground children through mindful interactions; edible garden plants connect children to animals through shared nutrition experiences; and pollinator gardens provide a life cycle habitat for butterflies, bees, and beetles, among other animals.

## Independent Skills of Daily Living

Activities of daily living are integrated in the schedule as teachers provide the time and support necessary for children to dress, put on shoes and boots, put on coats and outdoor gear, prepare and eat food, wash hands, and care for animals, plants, and each other with increasing independence according to their development.

## Developing Healthy Minds for Well-Being and Brain Function

Wild Earth Preschool incorporates Dr. Dan Siegel's model of the Healthy Mind Platter, integrating into each day the seven essential mental activities that create well-being and optimize brain matter. These activities include Focus Time, Play Time, Connecting Time, Physical Time, Time In (reflection), Down Time, and Sleep Time. By developing these habits of the mind early in life, children establish a foundation for lifelong mental health and brain functioning.

### Sample Activity Schedule

Actual daily schedule may vary. Schedules may also vary by season.

Time	Sample activities
8:00 am -8:30 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Arrival by Arrangement, health screen</li> <li>• Prep for the day</li> <li>• Reading/Listening to books</li> <li>• Indoor or Outdoor Learning Centers</li> </ul>
8:30 am – 9:15 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arrival, health screen</li> <li>• Greetings, handwashing</li> <li>• Outdoor Learning Centers</li> </ul>
9:15 am - 10:15 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor Learning Centers</li> <li>• Invitations to explore and play</li> <li>• Provocations and projects</li> <li>• Excursion to Zoo, Gardening and/or Animal close-ups</li> </ul>
10:15 am – 10:30 am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morning Snack, bathroom breaks, handwashing</li> </ul>
10:30 am - 12:00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor Learning Centers</li> <li>• Invitations to explore and play</li> <li>• Provocations and projects</li> </ul>
12:00 pm - 12:45pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor</li> <li>• Handwashing</li> <li>• Lunch, stories</li> </ul>
12:45 pm -2:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor</li> <li>• Bathroom breaks, health screen</li> <li>• Rest, quiet individual activities or books for non-sleepers</li> </ul>
2:30 pm - 3:00 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor</li> <li>• Afternoon Snack</li> <li>• Bathroom breaks and transition</li> </ul>
3:00 pm – 5:30 pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor Learning Centers</li> <li>• Invitations to explore and play</li> <li>• Provocations and projects</li> </ul>
Inclement Weather/Safety Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoors: Manipulatives, invitations to explore, music &amp; movement</li> <li>• May include Indoor Learning Centers</li> </ul>

## Technology and Screen use Policy

For more information, see the document: [Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards, Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs](#)

In Early Childhood Education, technology refers to the use of tools for learning such as rulers, magnifying glasses, gears, hand tools, etc. in addition to the high technology of computers and electronics.

At Wild Earth Preschool, technology and interactive media are used with the 3-5 year olds as tools to intentionally address individual learning goals within a developmentally appropriate framework, to extend learning, and to enrich the curriculum.

Children will have the opportunity to view relevant digital content on the Seek app for species identification, iNaturalist for field guide photos; and digital photography and videography that correlates to their interest in nature. Time spent is generally 1-2 minutes per view, facilitated by a teacher, and not to exceed 30 minutes per day per child, general use is far less. The use of passive media such as television, film, videotapes, and audiotapes is discouraged, but may be used periodically, facilitated by a staff member, for a duration limit of 30 minutes. Other activities will be available to a child who chooses not to engage in the media.

Music, audio, and digital images will not be used as background ambiance in the learning environment, in order to teach children's brain to assign meaning to sensory input. These elements will be used only as part of a learning activity in which a child is actively engaging.

Parents and teachers are encouraged to work together to limit a child's total screen time at school and at home to no more than 2 hours per day, and to develop responsible digital citizenship. Excessive screen time in children, and inappropriate viewing material may contribute to restlessness, inattention, and disturbing social play. When these behaviors are seen in our preschool setting, a teacher or administrator will reach out to parents to share our concerns and ask for support in addressing them.

## Sign in and Sign out Procedures

### Arrival

When families arrive, a staff member will meet you to do a morning health screen and to provide a QR code for check in with the Brightwheel app on your mobile device.

We prefer an arrival by 9:00 am to ensure the class can transition smoothly to their expedition

If your child arrives after the classroom family has begun an expedition to the Zoo or other location, please send a message on Brightwheel and you will receive a response with drop-off instructions. The adult dropping off the child is responsible for meeting the classroom family at their location and supervising the child until the child is signed in.

### Absences

Attendance is not mandatory, but a reason for absence must be provided prior to the child returning to care to ensure that any return-to-care criteria are met. Reasons for absence may include general categories such as vacation, post-vacation monitoring, quarantine, family day, rest day, illness, illness monitoring, or doctor's visit.

### Greeting Rituals

When a child arrives, the receiving teacher will greet the child by name, look into his or her eyes, and welcome the child to preschool.

Likewise, goodbye rituals between a child and the family member that is dropping off provide a healthy and predictable tradition to help ease the transition. We encourage a warm goodbye between you and your child and the inclusion of goodbye rituals.

### Morning Health Check

During the morning greeting, the teacher will do a health check for any signs of illness or injury. If the child exhibits signs of illness that would exclude him or her from care, the teacher will ask the parent to make other arrangements for the child's care that day. See "Health and Safety: Illness regarding exclusion from care" as well as our Covid-19 addendum for more information. If the child exhibits a significant injury that was not present the day before, the teacher will ask the child what happened, will document the injury in Brightwheel, and may ask the parent to complete an incident report to document the injury.

### Pick-up

When picking up your child, make contact with the teacher and sign your child out through the Brightwheel app on your mobile device. Help your child collect their belonging. If you need to visit with your child's teacher about a non-urgent matter, please message them on Brightwheel to make an appointment so the teacher can give you their full attention at a time when he or she is not supervising children.

We recommend that all families have a back-up care partner and additional people authorized for pick up in case of child illness that requires exclusion from care or if a situation requires that the regularly scheduled pick up will be later than 5:30 pm.

## Early or Late Pick-Up

If picking up early, we ask that you support the class in providing an uninterrupted rest time. Please plan to pick up prior to rest time or after rest time, but not during rest time.

If you will be picking up earlier or later than usual, please send a message on Brightwheel. Your child's teacher can prepare your child for the change.

A fee of \$25 will be charged to a parent/guardian whose child is picked up between 1 and 10 minutes after closing time. An additional fee of \$1.00 per minute will be added when they are left in our care after the first 10 minutes. Exceptions will be made for verified Zoo emergencies.

## Authorized Release

Any person collecting your child must be listed as an authorized pick-up on your child's profile and must bring a photo ID. If a photo ID is not available, the parent or guardian will be called and asked to verify the identity through digital photo exchange via text message. Children will be released only to an authorized adult who's ID has been verified and documented.

## Health and Safety

Wild Earth Preschool values the health and safety of all who are in our care. The teaching staff is trained to take an active role in preventative care, including maintaining the children's good hand-washing routines, maintaining a clean environment, encouraging children's hydration and nourishment throughout the day, providing excellent supervision, and teaching safe responses to weather related risks, such as resting and finding shade in the heat.

## Infectious Disease Precautions

Wild Earth Preschool is committed to following Center for Disease Control (CDC) and Dallas County Health and Human Services (DCHHS) recommendations for child care centers to the greatest extent possible. These guidelines may change quickly as infectious disease transmission rates change, and current policies will be sent as an attachment to an email and a Brightwheel message. As recommended, policies may include health screening before arrival, increased reasons for exclusion from care, frequent and thorough hand washing, increased cleaning and disinfecting, required use of facial coverings and distancing when facial coverings are removed. Policies may also include recommendation or requirement to stay home from care after certain high-risk or travel activities, and to quarantine after exposure.

## Immunizations

In accordance with Texas Department of Family and Protective Services licensing, all children must have their up-to-date immunizations on file with the child care center, and a current health statement must be signed by both a physician and the child's parent or guardian. If your child is not immunized, we must have a notarized affidavit on file for abstaining from immunizations due to medical reasons or a reason of conscious.

Annual flu immunizations are also required, unless an affidavit is provided.

Children are not required to have tuberculin testing, unless a risk factor exists.

## Hearing and Vision Screening

In accordance with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, each child four years of age or older by September 1 of each year must receive a professional screening for vision or hearing. You may have your child screened by your personal pediatrician or other health care professional. Wild Earth Preschool must receive a copy of the screening results. These reports are sent to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services each year as proof of our compliance with the Special Senses and Communication Disorders Act, Texas Health and Safety Code.

## Handwashing

Children, teachers, classroom volunteers, and any adult visiting the preschool program will wash hands at key times and when soiled, and will practice good hygiene throughout the day. Hands will be washed when arriving, entering the classroom from outdoors, before and after eating, after using the toilet, after touching animals, after coming in contact with body fluid, and when leaving. In addition, teaching staff will wash hands before and after administering medication, after removing gloves used for cleaning body fluid, and when returning to work after a break.

## Environmental Health

Wild Earth Preschool is committed to maintaining a child care facility that is as environmentally healthy as possible by following the guidelines of the Eco-Healthy Child Care Program (EHCC) of the Children's Environmental Health Network. These guidelines include the use of least-toxic cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfectant products feasible. We frequently ventilate the room by opening the windows. DZM Staff cleans and disinfects restroom facilities daily when the children are not present in the classroom, and the teachers routinely clean the classroom and toys to prevent the spread of infection.

## Pest Management

Wild Earth Preschool uses the principles of Integrated Pest Management and incorporates non-toxic methods to keep our facility and grounds free of pests. If a serious threat remains and pesticide application is the only viable option, parents and staff are notified by email and a licensed professional applies the least toxic, effective product at a time when children will have the least exposure to the application area for at least 12 hours. The Zoo maintains a contract with a professional application company with twice-a-week availability for consultation and treatment.

## Medication Administration

If your child requires medication while at Wild Earth Preschool, please see an administrator to fill out a Medication Administration form. Medication must be in the original, labeled bottle, with administration instructions appropriate for the child printed on the label. Emergency as-needed medications are carried in our portable first aid kit to ensure their immediate availability. Teaching staff is annually trained in safe medication administration.

## Minor injury not needing medical attention

Active children sometimes get skinned knees, and if your child receives one or another minor injury such as an insect bite without swelling, splinter, or small cut, the teaching staff will put on gloves, clean the wound with the provided wound-wash, bandage the wound, and/or apply a breakable ice pack. We will describe the incident on your child's Brightwheel feed and send it home by the end of the day.

### Injury to an area typically covered by clothing

Due to the inherent nature of big-body outdoor play, there may be times when a child may incur injury on the torso, shoulders, hips, or other regions typically covered by clothing. If a member of the teaching staff suspects an injury in an atypical location such as this, the teacher will call an administrator and the injury will be reviewed in the presence of both staff. This will also be noted on the daily take-home note, or, if medical attention is warranted, it will be noted on the "Illness and Injury report" as described below. This procedure will also be followed if a child complains of pain or irritation in an area typically covered by clothing.

### Illness or injury requiring medical attention

We are fortunate to have on the premises a paramedic team called AMR. This team can be immediately called to the class at any location in the zoo to help us evaluate a more serious situation and determine if treatment by a health-care professional is needed. One of our staff members will stay with your child during care, and we will call you as soon as possible to let you know of the situation. If AMR or an administrator determines that medical attention is necessary, we will complete an "Incident and Accident" Report for you to sign upon pick-up. This report will be kept in the child's file, and we will notify licensing of the event or illness.

### In a medical emergency

AMR (see above) will be the first responder, but EMS (911) will also be called to administer first aid, and the parent/guardian will be contacted as soon as possible. In the event a parent or guardian does not respond to the contact within 5 minutes, we will notify the emergency contact.

The teaching staff will complete an "Illness and Incident Report" for the parent to sign upon first contact, and the form will be maintained in the child's record. If EMS is called or if AMR recommends that your child be seen by his or her physician or another medical professional for an incident received in care, we will also notify licensing as soon as possible, but no later than two days after the incident.

### Illness requiring exclusion from care

Plan to keep your child at home to rest and get well when they are not feeling well. Your child's health and the well-being of the other children in care are very important to us. Please send a message on Brightwheel to notify us if your child will not be attending class. Confidential notification can be made by calling 469-554-7305 or emailing the Early Childhood Manager: [Anna.Lewis@dallaszoo.com](mailto:Anna.Lewis@dallaszoo.com)

We follow the Texas Department of State Health Services for guidelines on exclusion and readmission to care. Common reasons that we could ask you to make other arrangements for care include a fever equal or greater to 100 degrees (temporal); any symptom on a monitored infectious disease list; vomiting, diarrhea, cough, unexplained rash, significant ear or urinary pain, and red or infected eyes with discharge. In these cases, your child must stay home the next day and must be free from symptoms for 24 hours, without fever reducing medication before returning to class. If the symptom is on a monitored disease list (like Covid-19), children may return to care when their symptoms are managed AND after receiving a Dr. note of clearance, including a negative test result if recommended. Without medical clearance, the child may return 10 days after symptoms appeared, assuming the symptoms are managed. Please see the COVID-19 policy addendum for current information.

When making the decision about whether or not your child is feeling well enough to attend school, please consider our activity level and our time outdoors. We are not able to accommodate children who must remain indoors or who cannot participate in our regular activities, including Zoo visits.



## Communicable Diseases

If a child has been diagnosed with a contagious illness such as Covid-19, HepA, Fifth's Disease, chicken pox, etc. the child must meet re-admission criteria which may include a note from the child's physician stating that he or she is no longer contagious before the child may return to school. An administrator will post a notification on every classroom's bulletin board within 48 hours of our knowledge and we will email the parents and guardians. We will not provide the name of the child who has been diagnosed. This is confidential information. The health department and/or licensing will also be notified when required. Please see the Covid-19 addendum for current policies.

## Lice

Head lice are a common problem, and they can attach to anyone's hair, regardless of cleanliness or socioeconomic status. Although they can be a nuisance, they don't cause serious illness or carry any diseases. Head lice can be treated at home, and the home should also be treated, but it's important to check with the doctor first. State Health Services no longer considers lice to be a reason that children may not attend school. However, they can spread easily and we want to prevent the spread as much as possible.

If your child is found to have live lice or nits (the eggs), we will call you and ask you to pick up your child at your earliest convenience to have time that evening to consult your health professional and begin treatment. Teaching staff will follow a lice treatment plan for classroom furnishings also.

In addition, we will email all parents in affected classrooms to notify them and provide information about symptoms and treatment, maintaining confidentiality with regards to the name of the child.

## Teacher and Staff Health and Immunizations:

Teachers and staff in the child care center are routinely tested for TB by a health care professional prior to hire. Employees must not have an active, untreated TB infection or disease when working with the children. Failure to comply or exemptions due to contraindicated medical conditions or reasons of conscious will be evaluated by DZM Human Resources department, and Wild Earth Preschool will defer to that decision. Discrimination or retaliation based on exemption is prohibited. Records of TB tests are kept in the HR office and in the Preschool's record of the employee's file.

We highly recommend that our staff stay up to date on all immunizations, including Covid-19 and flu. The [CDC's Recommended Immunization Schedule](#) for adults is shared with all staff during onboarding and annually. Staff may voluntarily submit their immunization record, which will be kept in their preschool personnel file. If staff are not vaccinated for a monitored infectious disease, they may be required to follow additional precautions when recommended by Dallas County Health and Human Services. These precautions may include wearing a facial covering, wearing gloves, quarantine after exposure, travel, and/or certain high risk events. Failure to follow these precautions when required will result in action up to and including dismissal. See the Covid-19 addendum for current policies.

## Communication and Notifications

**Family Orientation:** Prior to admission, at least one parent or guardian must meet virtually, on the phone, or in person with an administrator to discuss policies, procedures, and individual care needs. Parents are directed to our online Family Handbook.

**Brightwheel Communication App:** Wild Earth Preschool uses the Brightwheel App to communicate with non-confidential information with parents or guardians. The app is free and available for Android or Apple devices. Parents or Guardians sign-up with a code that we provide. The app is used for the following:

- As-needed messaging between parents, teachers, and administration, including attendance and late arrivals or early pick up
- Daily health screening
- Sign-in and Sign-out
- Notification of minor incidents, health concerns, or bathroom incidents
- Weekly activity plans and event communication
- Photos, videos, and to record observation of learning objectives
- Weekly Newsletters
- Policy updates
- Alerts due to weather or safety events

**Email and Telephone:** Wild Earth Preschool will use email or telephone calls to communicate confidential, sensitive, or lengthy information. Parents and guardians are encouraged to use these formats similarly.

**Academic Year Calendar:** The academic year calendar will be distributed each year by email and sent as a Brightwheel attachment. If any changes are made during the year, an administrator will send a Brightwheel notification to families to inform them of the change.

**Parent Teacher Conferences:** Parent/Teacher conferences are available by appointment in person or virtually anytime throughout the year.

**Parent Participation:** We truly value the collaboration between home and school for the benefits it offers to children, parents, and teachers. A strong connection is associated with better child well-being and development, and open communication establishes trust and understanding between parents and teaching staff. We encourage parents to participate in regular family celebrations throughout the school year; to send messages and photos through the Brightwheel app; and to contribute ideas and resources to our learning environment. Parents who volunteer onsite must first onboard as a Dallas Zoo volunteer, and then be background checked and oriented as a preschool volunteer. When recommended by DCHHS or the CDC onsite interaction opportunities may be limited due to health reasons, or subject to precautions such as masking and distancing. See current COVID-19 policies for more information.

**Policy questions or concerns:** Parents and guardians are invited to visit with an administrator at any time. For extensive conversations or for specific scheduling, an appointment is recommended to ensure an appropriate environment for mutual understanding and quality communication. To schedule an appointment, contact the Early Childhood Manager by phone (469-554-7305) or email ([anna.lewis@dallaszoo.com](mailto:anna.lewis@dallaszoo.com)).

## Photography and Media Release

At times, the zoo staff or other photographers may request permission of the education department to photograph or take video of the children for marketing purposes or to share programmatic strategies. In addition, preschool staff may wish to share print or digital group photos that include multiple children with other Wild Earth Preschool Families for the purpose of communicating classroom activities and friendships. Parents may choose to consent to have their child photographed for these purposes or may choose not to allow it. Preference is indicated on the “Informed Consent” and admission form completed at registration, and may be changed by the parent or guardian at any time by completion of the “Change of Information” form.

Teachers will regularly photograph children for documentation of the learning process and parent communication; these photos will be maintained in a secure digital format and photos of only those children who have a consent on file will be shared with other parents, the marketing department or media outlets, including social media.

## Discipline and Guidance

Wild Earth Preschool defines discipline as the methods to assist a child in developing self-regulation, the goal of which is for children to learn to maintain composure, self-advocate, develop empathy, learn problem-solving skills, and to choose pro-social behavior. Learning these skills is a gradual and developmental process, and must be modeled by adults who exhibit, demonstrate, and actively teach the skills through methods of positive guidance. Structures of the positive guidance system at Wild Earth Preschool include the following:

- Individualized and consistent guidance appropriate to the child’s level of understanding.
- Using “I notice” statements and encouragement of pro-social behaviors.
- Reminding children of the desired behavior through the display of visual and pictorial classroom procedures and verbal cues.
- Creation of a family classroom culture and classroom responsibilities
- Provision of a safe space and self-selected time to allow a child to self-regulate in the midst of strong emotions
- Redirection to desired behavior with encouragement and problem solving techniques
- Assistance in defining the problem or conflict and generating resolution options
- Experience of the natural consequences, within a safe and pro-social environment, that enable a child to develop responsibility by learning from his/her mistakes.
- Incorporation of the Conscious Discipline approach [www.consciousdiscipline.com](http://www.consciousdiscipline.com)

In accordance with Texas Administrative Code, Title 40, Chapters 746 and 747, Subchapter L, the following treatments of a child may not be used by staff or by any adult including parents at the child care center:

- Corporal punishment or threats of corporal punishments
- Punishment associated with food, naps, or toilet training
- Pinching, shaking, biting, or hitting a child
- Putting anything in the child’s mouth
- Humiliating, ridiculing, rejecting, or yelling at a child
- Subjecting a child to harsh, abusive, or profane language
- Placing the child in isolation behind a closed or locked door without supervision
- Requiring a child to remain silent or inactive for an inappropriately long periods of time for the child’s age

## Continued Intervention and Discontinued Care

Wild Earth Preschool is committed to supporting its children and families to limit or prevent the use of suspension or expulsion. We train our teachers in strategies to support the inclusion of cultural, gender, and learning differences, and will work with families on an individual basis to resolve concerns that affect the child's success in the program, or recommend appropriate community resources for assistance or transition out of the program. If a child needs significant one-on-one attention, the parent may provide an aide to shadow the child. At the discretion of the Early Childhood Manager, the care agreement may be terminated for reasons including but not limited to family cooperation with program policies and the child's behavior affecting the safety of child, the group, and/or the teachers.

## Child Nutrition

Wild Earth Preschool recognizes that good nutrition contributes to good body and brain development, and is committed to advocating for a healthy, varied, low sugar, low fat diet for its children.

### Beverages and hydration

Parents will provide their child with a reusable spill proof bottle, labeled with their child's name, that will be refilled with fresh water as needed during the day. They will take this bottle home each evening to wash and sanitize it. We will provide a "loaner" water bottle if the child arrives to school without one. 1% Milk and 100% juice, when provided, will be served in a separate cup. Juice will be served no more than one time per day, and generally reserved for special occasions.

### Snacks

Children in care will be offered something to eat at least every 3 hours.

Wild Earth Preschool will offer all children in care a mid-morning snack and an afternoon snack. Each snack will meet the guidelines of [USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#), including food from two recognized food groups. Grains will be whole-grain rich, and foods such as yogurt and canned fruit will meet requirements for low sugar. A menu will be sent each month as an attachment to Brightwheel messages.

Additionally, snack crackers will be offered in late afternoon to children as needed.

Wild Earth Preschool does not have a kitchen area, so snacks will be purchased ready-to-eat from a grocery store and will not be time or heat dependent. Some snack foods, such as fresh fruit or shelf-stable milk, will be kept refrigerated for taste or to extend life.

### Lunch

Lunch will be served at a regularly scheduled time between 11:30 am and 12:30 pm.

Children will bring a lunch each day that is safely packed, low in sugar and fat, and is nutritious.

Refrigeration and microwaves are not available for children's lunches.

Lunches should be packed in an insulated lunch box or lunch bag labeled with the child's name. The following foods should be kept cold: meat, poultry, fish, egg, milk, cheese, yogurt, fresh fruit or vegetables, or opened cans of fruit or pudding. For cold items, provide an insulated lunch bag or cooler with 2 frozen gel packs, one under the food and one on top of the food.

Use an insulated container or thermos to keep food like soup, chili, and stew hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot — 140 °F (73.9 °C) or above.

For children younger than 4 years old, lunches should follow the AAP and licensing guidelines for choking hazards, maintaining a lunch that is free from:

- Whole or chunks of hot dog (slice vertically to prevent circular chunks)
- Whole nuts and seeds
- Chunks of meat or cheese (use slices); Chunks of raw vegetables (slice, shred, or noodle)
- Whole grapes, grape tomatoes, or cherry tomatoes: slice vertically in half
- Hard or sticky candy
- Popcorn
- Chunks of peanut butter (spread it on an item)

## Special diets

Medically necessary diets will be accommodated with physician's documentation.

Parents may provide their child's snacks if they choose to follow an alternative diet.

## Peanut and Allergy Policy

Wild Earth Preschool reserves the right to implement an allergy-free food policy on an as-needed basis for the safety of its students. If it is implemented, all parents will be notified in writing. Children with a food allergy will have a medically documented allergy plan in place, and will not be served foods that contraindicate the plan.

## Eco-Healthy Celebrations

Celebrations are important! We want to ensure that birthdays and cultural celebrations are as healthy for the environment, and for our children's bodies and minds as they are for their social development.

Wild Earth Preschool will follow the guidelines of Eco-Healthy Child Care, a program of the Children's Environmental Health Network, when planning in-class celebrations. <http://cehn.org/our-work/eco-healthy-child-care/>

- Families may provide a lower-sugar baked good or frozen treat that is commercially packaged. Alternatives must be provided for children with food allergies.
  - Recommendations include: muffins without icing, oatmeal cookies, and frozen fruit bars
- The class rides the carousel once per month to celebrate all the birthdays in that month.
- When goodie bags are offered, please provide options that are eco-healthy and child-healthy, such as mini oranges, playdough, recycled notebooks, eco-friendly soap, etc. in re-usable containers or compostable bags.

## Enrollment Procedures

### Enrollment Eligibility and Priority

Children must be at least 3 years old by the date of planned admission, and no older than 5 years old by September 1 of the school year session (not yet eligible for public kindergarten). They must also be using the restroom (mostly) independently by the child's first day of class.

Priority for admission will be given as follows:

- Children currently enrolled
- Siblings of children currently enrolled
- Children of Zoo Staff
- Children of SSA Staff

- Children on the pre-paid wait list
- Children on the contact list and general public

Admission is subject to availability and program needs.

When an opening exists, early enrollment of a duration of 6 weeks may be granted for children who are awaiting age or developmental readiness. Early enrollment is dependent upon full tuition being paid while awaiting the child's admission.

## Inclusive Program

Wild Earth Preschool does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, culture, gender or ability. The preschool program is committed to providing a developmentally appropriate education for all learners, and implements the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression. If a child needs significant 1-on-1 attention to be successful in the program, the family may arrange for a professional aide to shadow the child/

## Admission Process and Fees

The admission process has 6 steps:

1. Parents or guardians visit the website for general information, read the Family Handbook and frequently asked questions, and complete the "contact us" request.
2. Parents or guardians receive more information about the program by attending an Open House, touring the classrooms, and/or communicating by phone or email with an administrator. Due to staff availability, individual tours will only be offered when a family is eligible for a current opening.
3. Parents or guardians may choose to sign up on our waitlist for \$50 per child. Wait list placement for each session is determined by the waitlist fee time/date stamp when a child is age-eligible.
4. When families are contacted for enrollment, they submit the completed document, "Is Wild Earth Preschool Right for your Family?" and an enrollment fee of \$100 to secure the child's place in the session.
5. Families complete and return the admission packet. See below for list of documents.
6. At a virtual, phone, or in person intake meeting, administrative staff and the parent/guardian will discuss individual care needs of the child and key policies and procedures. If classes are in session the parent may request a time to visit the classroom and meet the teachers, or will be invited to a meet-the-teacher event.

Completed admissions packets include:

- Informed Consent: Consent information for photographs, field trips, insect repellent, etc.
- Admission Information (6 pages), including:
  - Authorization for emergency medical attention
  - Vision and hearing screen information (for children age 4 or older)
  - Vaccination information, verified by a health professional
  - Health care professional's statement or waiver affidavit
- Child Assessment Form (care information about the child)
- Authorization for Dispensing Medication form if needed
- Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan if needed

## Change of Information

Please keep contact information, medical information, and family information current by completing a “Change of Information” form and handing it to your child’s teacher or by calling or emailing the education office with the information. Include any documentation needed, such as medical recommendations or court orders.

## Financial Agreements

For financial planning, an annual tuition chart and schedule of additional fees is provided. Tuition payments remain the same regardless of absences, holidays, vacations, etc. Tuition is billed weekly in advance through a digital Dallas Zoo account unless other arrangements are made.

## Discounts and Scholarships

Limited need based scholarships may be available in some years. Ask an administrator for current availability and an application.

## Exiting the Program

Should circumstances arise that require you to withdraw your child from Wild Earth Preschool, written notice is required at least 30 days in advance. In cases where shorter notice is provided, tuition draws will continue for the duration of the 30 days.

## Protocols for Outdoor Learning and Physical Activity

Time outdoors not only provides a healthy environment for play and learning, it benefits the child’s well-being, physical development, cognitive development, and language as children explore sensory-rich diverse materials and their interest is piqued by animals, plants, and weather conditions in their environment. Moreover, both moderate and vigorous physical activity, along with a healthy diet, help to prevent obesity and benefit long-term heart and lung health while developing muscle strength and regulation that will aid them in future school settings.

When weather conditions are safe for outdoor learning, classroom families will spend the majority of their day outdoors, coming inside primarily for lunch, rest, and afternoon snack between 12:00 pm – 2:30 pm.

Both free play and structured physical games are provided daily.

In unsafe weather conditions, like thunderstorms, high heat indexes, or poor air quality, children will participate in physical activity in their classrooms, like music and movement and obstacle courses.

## Big Body Play

Big body play: Wild Earth Preschool recognizes children’s need for big body play that develops the proprioceptive sense which is integral for emotional and behavioral regulation in response to sensory stimulation.

Opportunities are provided for this physical activity in the following forms:

- Obstacle courses, games, and free choice activities that include crawling, running, jumping, somersaults, crab walk, rolling down hills, tossing bean bags, kicking balls, tag, Simon Says, and balancing on a low tree trunk or rocks.
- Music & Movement activities including dancing and parachute play
- Body awareness games like drawing body outlines with chalk, making a pretend “pizza” on someone’s back or wrapping in a blanket “cocoon” with heads uncovered.
- Heavy lifting and resistance activities, including using and moving heavy sand bags, rocks, and logs



- Functional activities like wiping benches and tables, raking or shoveling, pulling the wagon, carrying heavy watering cans, pulling weeds
- Socially-appropriate contact-based greetings such as short tight hugs, high fives, fist bumps, and elbow bumps

Children will be redirected from body-on-body play, including wrestling, holding, pulling, piling on one another, aggression, or weapon play.

### Using Sticks

Children are encouraged to use sticks in their play, but to maintain safety, teaching staff will model, teach, and reinforce the following guidelines:

- Big sticks need big spaces. The child with the stick will check that they have space to use it in the desired manner. Other children will approach with care, and provide the child with the needed space.
- Larger sticks stay below the belly
- Sticks are for walking play, not running, jumping, or rolling play
- Sticks will be kept away from faces, necks, and other tender spaces

### Using Logs and Stones

Children are encouraged to use logs and stones in their play, but to maintain safety, teaching staff will model, teach, and reinforce the following guidelines:

- Check the habitat: When encountering a log or stone to move, roll it toward you so that the opening faces away from you, allowing any animal that is taking shelter to leave. Avoid using any that are harboring poison ivy, or animals that bite or sting. Some spaces will be designated as habitat only, where rocks and logs are left in place.
- Check the weight: Heavy logs or stones may need 2 or more people to move. Very heavy items may need to stay in place.
- Roll it: Some logs and stones are best for rolling rather than picking up to move.
- Set it down gently: Rocks, stones, pebbles, and logs will be set down gently rather than dropped or thrown.

### Investigating Animals and Plants in the Natural Environment:

Children are encouraged to investigate native animals and plants in their play, but to maintain safety and respect for the environment, teaching staff will model, teach, and reinforce the following guidelines:

- Ask a teacher before investigating something new. Some animals may bite or sting; some plants may cause dermatological reactions or may be harmful if swallowed. To ensure that children are safe in their environment both with parents and with teachers, we teach them to ask for a positive ID before investigating something new. If a plant or animal is not identified as harmless, children are taught to look with their eyes, but not touch or move it. Children will not touch reptiles or poultry found in natural environments due to the potential of salmonella. Teaching staff will demonstrate how to observe without touching.
- Harvesting and eating garden plants: We grow some plants that can be eaten by children and/or by Zoo animals, including herbs, fruits, and vegetables. Teaching staff will model, teach, and reinforce food preparation before eating to ensure that children know that some plants found in landscapes or natural spaces are not safe to eat. With the children's involvement, garden food is harvested, washed, and then served rather than eaten straight from the plant.
- Sustainable collection and safe handling: At times, children may collect bugs, snails, worms, etc. for observation. Teaching staff will model, teach, and reinforce skills for safe handling, including gentle



touches and moisture when appropriate. Animals will be returned to their place of collection. Collected plant parts will be sustainably harvested, maintaining a strong, healthy population of the plant in its original location.

## What to Bring to Wild Earth Preschool for Indoor and Outdoor Activities:

Please label all belongings.

- ✓ One weather-tight plastic box that will go home daily. It contains the following items:
  - Any extra clothing or weather-related gear needed for that day
  - Safely-packed, low-sugar, nutritious lunch – Many of our families like [Bentgo Boxes](#)
  - Spill-proof water bottle – *wash and sanitize daily*
  - At least two extra clean and sanitized face coverings daily when current policy requires.
- ✓ A second weather tight box that will go home at the end of the week. It contains the following items:
  - Blanket or All-in-one naptime roll – *wash with hot water weekly*
  - A cuddle item for rest if desired - *wash and sanitize weekly* (may also come daily if needed)
- ✓ A mesh bag with 1-2 changes of clothes, underwear, socks, and shoes. This will stay at school. When clothing is changed, the dirty clothing will be sent home. Please replace items used the next day.
- ✓ A smile!

## Dress and Nature Play

Nature play can get messy! Children at Wild Earth Preschool are encouraged to engage in play and focused activities that include water, sand, soil, non-toxic plants, the investigation of non-stinging insects and animals, etc. During the course of play they will get dirty and wet. Please dress your child in sturdy play clothing, any winter or rain gear needed, and shoes appropriate for the weather. Any clothing or gear that will be needed later in the day is packed in the plastic box. Multiple changes of clothing are sometimes needed.

Please provide [modesty shorts](#) or leggings under dresses.

[Shoes](#) should be closed-toe for your child's safety, and water resistance is recommended. Adjustable straps or ties are preferred for comfort. Shoes that slip will leave blisters and cause a child to fall.

### Fall and Spring Clothing:

In the fall and spring, appropriate clothing for the weather varies greatly. Please check the forecast to decide the best option, and provide layers and jackets as needed for abrupt temperature changes.

[All-in-one rain suits](#) and rain boots are preferred for rainy days. Slicker rain jackets are an alternative.

### Winter Clothing:

In the winter, layers are a must! Fleece outerwear is preferred by most children for ease of movement.

Many parents love this [all-in-one fleece outerwear](#).

Leggings, long underwear, warm socks, and boots keep children warm outside during play.

Hats and water-resistant gloves or mittens keep extremities warm.

To prevent strangulation, children should not wear scarves or clothing with neck-ties, like some hoodies.

A neck gaiter is a safe alternative to a scarf, and helps especially with children who have cold-triggered asthma.

### Summer Clothing:

In the summer, your child should wear lightweight shorts, pants, T-shirts, dresses, etc. For water play days, children will wear their water-play gear and bring a change of clothing. Water play gear includes a swim suit (2 piece for girls) with cover-up, water shoes, and a towel.

### Heat and Cold Safety

Wild Earth Preschool will follow the Child Care Weather Watch Guidelines for weather, which was sponsored by US Department of Health & Human Services, Health Resources & Services Administration, and the Maternal & Child Health Bureau. These guidelines use heat index and wind chill factors when considering adverse weather conditions for heat and cold. [https://www.daycare.com/news/daycare\\_and\\_weather.html](https://www.daycare.com/news/daycare_and_weather.html)

### Air Quality Safety

Wild Earth Preschool will follow the Air Quality Index guidelines produced by the Environmental Protection Agency when considering adverse outdoor conditions for air quality. These guidelines can be found at [https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqi\\_brochure.index](https://airnow.gov/index.cfm?action=aqi_brochure.index)

### Sunscreen

Sunscreen will be applied daily by the parent or guardian prior to arrival. Parents or guardians will sign a consent or non-consent to allow the teachers to reapply. If consent is not granted, the child will need an alternate form of sun protection. Wild Earth Preschool uses a sunscreen with at least 35 SPF.

### Insect Repellent

Insect repellent will be applied daily by the parent or guardian prior to arrival. Parents or guardians will sign a consent or non-consent to allow the teachers to apply insect repellent. If consent is not granted, the child will need an alternate form of insect protection. Wild Earth Preschool uses a family-safe, EPA approved insect repellent.

### Dry skin and lips

Parents or guardians will sign a consent or non-consent to allow the teachers to apply protection for dry skin and/or lips. If consent is not granted, the parent may send their own option. Wild Earth Preschool uses child-safe products for skin and lip protection.

### More Information on Field Trips, Water Activities, and Animals

#### Field Trips

Wild Earth Preschool is located on the grounds of the Dallas Zoo, which provides a stimulating learning environment and promotes whole-child development through authentic experiences, enrichment, and investigations.

Each daily excursion away from the licensed classrooms and outdoor area into other zoo property and guest areas will be considered a field trip, and the following standards will be applied:

Notification:

- Dallas Zoo field trips: Permission for field trips to the Dallas Zoo is provided on the Informed Consent form signed by parents or guardians during enrollment. This consent is granted from the date signed until the end of each year in August. It will be renewed each year that the child attends.
- Field trips to other locations: If other field trips are provided, a separate notification and permission slip for the trip will be provided to the parent or guardian for consent.

Field Trip Ratios:

According to DFPS licensing standards, the preschool will maintain a field trip ratio of 1:6 for 3 year olds and 1:8 ratio for 4 year olds. Ratio is determined by the youngest child in the group. Volunteers or other zoo staff may be used to meet field trip ratio, as long as they have cleared background checks and the licensed classroom ratios of 1 paid caregiver: 15 children are followed. At least two adults will supervise each group, ensuring that they stay within eyesight and earshot of one another and every child.

Field Trip Clothing:

- Each child will wear their Wild Earth Preschool identifying field trip tag, appropriate clothing for the weather and activity, and closed toe shoes. Identification on the tag includes the center name and phone number.
- Educators will wear their zoo education department uniforms.

Field Trip health and safety:

Each educator will use the Brightwheel app to maintain the list of children in attendance, and will conduct name-to-face checks each time they leave a location and arrive in a location, noting the time of each check. They will scan and do head counts frequently throughout an activity.

Each educator will be trained in pediatric CPR and first aid, will carry a communication radio, and will have close access to their first aid box which contains:

- emergency medical release form and emergency contact information for each child
- food allergy emergency plan and medications, if applicable
- first aid kit

Field Trip Transportation:

Children, educators, and volunteers will walk on sidewalks to the Dallas Zoo from the education complex.

In the possibility that transportation to other non-walkable locations becomes an option:

Children, educators, and volunteers will ride a bus with seat restraints when taking a field trip to another field trip location, if an opportunity is provided. Parents may be asked to provide car seats if appropriate seat restraints are not available.

All educators who transport children will have a certificate in their training file and posted on the classroom wall, indicating they have received their annual transportation training. Training is provided by an online provider such as CCEI and the Early Childhood Manager will supervise practice and execution at least twice per year when transportation is used.

## Water Activities

Wading pools at the preschool center: Wading pools at the licensed area of the preschool will be filled to two feet of water or less, drained and sanitized after each use, and stored in a locked storage shed when not in use.

Wading stream at the zoo: The Lacerte Family Children's Zoo area has a manufactured wading stream that holds less than 2 feet of water in a recirculating, filtered system. The stream covers less than 2,000 square feet of area. The zoo maintains the system with machinery rooms locked up, and water chemicals inaccessible to the children. A trained children's zoo employee has access to and is capable of turning off the pump and filtering system in case of an emergency.

When the stream is used an administrator will ensure that the staff is trained and the following safety regulations are met:

- Educators are actively supervising, with one educator stationed in close proximity to each drain gate, and they can clearly see all parts of the wading area and the bottom of the wading "stream".
- Educators and children are trained to maintain boundaries that avoid drain gate areas
- At least 2 life saving devices will be available
- At least 2 educators are supervising the play, maintaining water play ratios as specified in Minimum Standards 746.2105 (currently 1:6 for 3 year olds, 1:8 for 4 year olds).

## Animals

Interacting with animals helps children empathize with them and the natural world, and they are an essential part of the Wild Earth Preschool Program. As a part of the Zoo, we will benefit from the varied experiences available, and will support the children as they connect to the animals.

In addition to studying animals in the zoo habitats and surrounding urban wildlife habitats, we have the opportunity to interact with program animal ambassadors in the classroom, in our outdoor spaces, and in the Zoo. Some of these animals may be available for the children to carefully touch with the guidance of a trained handler. All animals in the Dallas Zoo collection have been properly vaccinated and are under the care of staff veterinarian. Children will not touch reptiles, amphibians, or poultry due to salmonella risks.

## Security and Emergency Plans

In the event of an emergency, the Early Childhood Manager or designee will notify all parents of the nature of the emergency and the location of the children as soon as it is safe to do so. When parents pick up their child, they will sign the child out of care as usual. If a parent wants to leave Zoo grounds with their child during an emergency, child care staff may not prevent them from doing so.

The Early Childhood Manager or designee will also call the DFPS child care licensing department at 214-583-4253, 800-582-6036, or the number provided by the agency to notify them of the nature of emergency and steps taken to secure the children's safety.

### On-Site Security

The Dallas Zoo contracts with a security company that makes continual safety rounds and is available to the teaching staff by radio. In addition, 24 hour security is provided by an onsite Dallas Police Officer.

### Automatic Exterior Locks

External doors to the classrooms have an electronic lock system, so doors remain locked until opened from the inside or with a keycard.

### Dallas Zoo Staff Radio Communication

At least one teaching staff member for each group of children will carry a two-way radio for communication for the entire zoo. This radio links the classroom to on-site security, onsite medical services (AMR), preschool administration, and all other departments. All preschool staff also carry a small two-way radio for communication between preschool staff, teachers and admin.

## Emergency Drills and Evacuation Locations

### Fire Drills

Fire drills are practiced once a month. The evacuation location for fire is the education parking lot. Each classroom is equipped with a smoke detector and carbon monoxide detector which are both tested monthly. Each classroom also has a fire extinguisher and a flashlight. Two exterior exits are available from each classroom.

### Weather Drills (tornado, hurricane, severe thunderstorm)

Severe weather drills are practiced four times a year. For a weather emergency or emergency requiring an alternate shelter, the designated gathering place for the licensed childcare areas is the zoo auditorium. Since tornadoes may form at any time and little ones may take quite a bit of time to walk, children will be moved toward the safe area inside the zoo when a watch is first issued. Regardless of a severe weather watch, if lightening or flash flooding is present, all children and education staff will shelter in an indoor location.

### Active Threat Emergencies/Dangerous Person or Animal

Active threat/lock down drills are practiced four times a year. Teaching staff will be notified by radio code and will move the children to the shelter location, close the door, and maintain silence. The door to the exterior will remain closed and locked.

### Emergency Procedures while on a Field Trip to the Zoo

When classes take a field trip to the zoo, there are designated safe places in every area of the park. If classes are in the zoo when an emergency alert is given, they will take shelter at the nearest safe place. These are listed in Appendix 1: Safe Places, and Appendix 1A: Safe Places Checklist, in the DZM Emergencies Procedures Manual.

### Plan for evacuating zoo property

There may be instances when an evacuation of the zoo becomes necessary. These may include: bomb or terrorist threat, major fire or disaster in the zoo, severe weather warning or other natural disaster, or escape of a dangerous animal. An evacuation of the zoo will be called for by the Zoo Director, Vice President of Operations or the most the most senior member of leadership on grounds at the time such a decision has to be made. Should an evacuation be necessary, staff will follow the instructions provided on radio channel 1.

## Information on Child Maltreatment

### Wild Earth Preschool Policy on Child Maltreatment Prevention and Training

Wild Earth Preschool requires that all staff and regular volunteers clear the required DFPS background check requirements prior to hire and every five years.

During all program hours, a minimum of two caregivers will be in close proximity to one another for mutual supervision by sight and/or sound. At least one of the adults will be a Wild Earth Preschool teaching staff member. The other may be a teaching staff member, or an approved education staff member or volunteer. If the group needs to separate, like for bathroom breaks or rest time, each group will contain at least 3 people.

Staff will radio the Early Childhood Manager or designee if additional adult assistance is required.

Prior to supervising children, and on an annual basis, teaching staff will be trained on recognizing the signs and symptoms of child maltreatment and how to call the abuse hotline to report suspected abuse. This training will include face-to-face instruction and may also include an online component.

Families seeking assistance will be referred to the Dallas Children's Advocacy Center which offers family advocacy, connection with community resources, therapy, and financial assistance.

### Morning Health Check

During the morning greeting, the teacher will do a health check for any signs of illness or injury. If the child exhibits signs of illness that would exclude him or her from care, the teacher will ask the parent to make other arrangements for the child's care that day. If the child exhibits a significant injury that was not present the day before, the teacher will ask the child what happened and ask the parent to complete an incident report to document the injury. See "Health and Safety: Illness regarding exclusion from care" for more information.

### Mandated Reporting

In the state of Texas, everyone is a mandated reporter of child abuse. Please remember that suspicion of abuse is all that is necessary to file a report. Your information can be given anonymously. You will be asked to describe your concerns about the child. It will be helpful if you can provide the child's name, age, address, gender, school attending, and names of parents. If you don't have all of that, provide all the information you can. Call the Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline at 1-800-252-5400 if you suspect abuse, report online at <https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/Default.aspx> or call 911. Both are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Parent/Guardian Awareness of Child Maltreatment

Raising awareness among all citizens about the signs, symptoms, and effects of child maltreatment is the first step in keeping children safe. The Dallas Children's Advocacy Center provides the following information to help raise awareness among parents, teachers, health professionals and the general public. For more information see [www.dcac.org](http://www.dcac.org). Throughout the year, our communications will include tips to generate awareness.

### How to Protect Your Child

1. Take the time to talk to your child.
  - a. Be calm and confident before discussing this topic with your child.
  - b. Do not scare your child; your tone should be neutral, educational and empowering.
  - c. Let your child know that you are always there for him/her and always want to protect him/her.
  - d. Teach your child that the parts of their body that a bathing suit covers are private parts and that no one is allowed to see or touch them there.
  - e. Allow time for your child to process and to ask you questions.
  - f. Have your child identify 5 safe people they can talk to if someone ever makes them uncomfortable.
  - g. Make talking to your child about personal safety an ongoing dialogue rather than a single conversation.
  - h. It's important not to interrogate children. Ask simple, open-ended questions in a calm manner: "Has anyone ever made you feel uncomfortable or scared? Has anyone ever asked you to keep a secret?"
2. Familiarize yourself with the policies and practices of organizations where your children spend time.
  - a. Confirm background checks are conducted on all employees and volunteers.
  - b. Ensure policies are in place that prohibit situations where an adult can be alone with your child in one room when no one else is around.
  - c. Talk to your child to find out if the policies are being followed when you are not there.
  - d. Require all staff and volunteers to be trained annually on child safety and on how to make a report.
3. Be vigilant and ASK questions
  - a. Watch for changes in your child's behavior. If your child is reluctant to go certain places or to be with certain people, ask questions.
  - b. Notice their behavior before and after spending time alone with an adult.
  - c. If a child does reveal something concerning, believe the child. Reassure him/her that he/she has done the right thing in telling you and that what happened is absolutely not their fault. Call CPS (800) 252-5400 or local law enforcement to report your concerns.
  - d. Please do not interview children or contact the alleged offender—report your suspicions and let the appropriate authorities investigate.

## Types of Child Maltreatment

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent or guardian that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm. Physical abuse also includes failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child.

Definition taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001.

**Neglect**

The leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of physical or mental harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child, and the demonstration of an intent not to return by a parent or guardian of the child. Definition taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001.

**Emotional Abuse**

Inflicting mental or emotional injury to a child, and/or causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning.

Definition taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001.

**Sexual Abuse**

Sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of indecency with a child, sexual assault, or aggravated sexual assault; failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child; compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct; and causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene or pornographic.

Definition taken from Texas State Family Code, Section 261.001.

**Signs and Symptoms of Child Maltreatment****Physical Abuse**

- Frequent injuries that are unexplained and/or when the child or parent cannot adequately explain injury causes such as: bruises, cuts, black eyes, fractures, burns
- Burns or bruises in an unusual pattern that may indicate the use of an instrument
- Lack of reaction to pain
- Injuries that appear after the child has not been seen for several days
- Evidence of delayed or inappropriate treatment for injuries
- Injuries involving the face, backs of hands, buttocks, genital area, abdomen, back, or sides of the body
- Frequent complaints of pain without obvious injury
- Complaints of soreness or discomfort when moving
- Aggressive, disruptive, and destructive or self-destructive behavior
- Passive, withdrawn, emotionless behavior
- Fear of going home or seeing parents

**Neglect**

- Obvious malnourishment or inadequate nutrition
- Lack of personal cleanliness
- Torn and/or dirty clothes
- Need for glasses, dental care, or other unattended medical attention
- Consistent hunger, stealing or begging for food
- Distended stomach, emaciated
- Lack of supervision for long periods of time
- Frequent absence or tardiness from school
- Regularly displays fatigue or listlessness or falls asleep in class



- Reports that no caretaker is at home
- Self-destructive behavior
- Extreme loneliness and need for affection

### **Emotional Abuse**

- Speech disorders
- Delayed physical development
- Substance abuse
- Ulcers, asthma, severe allergies
- Habit disorders (sucking, rocking, biting)
- Antisocial or destructive behaviors
- Delinquent behaviors (especially adolescents)
- Developmentally delayed

### **Sexual Abuse**

- Torn, stained, or bloody underclothing
- Pain, swelling, or itching in genital area
- Difficulty walking or sitting
- Excessive seductiveness, inappropriate sex play, or premature understanding of sex
- Role reversal, overly concerned for siblings
- Significant weight change
- Suicide attempts (especially adolescents)
- Threatened by physical contact or closeness
- Extreme fear of being alone with adults, especially if of a particular gender
- Sudden refusal to change for gym or to participate in physical activities
- Sexual victimization of other children
- Major change in normal mood or behavior

## Information on Safe Sleep and Breastfeeding

When applicable, all staff, substitute staff, and volunteers at Wild Earth Preschool will follow the safe sleep recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) for infants to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome/Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS/SUIDS). For detailed information, see the DFPS Operational Policy on Infant Safe Sleep, form J-800-2550, copied below. Parents can review the information as education to reduce the risk of SIDS/SUIDS.

- Always put infants to sleep on their backs unless you provide an Infant Sleep Exception form 2710 signed by the infant's health care professional [§746.2427 and §747.2327].
- Place infants on a firm mattress, with a tight fitting sheet, in a crib that meets the CPSC federal requirements for full size cribs and for non-full size cribs [§746.2409 and §747.2309].
- For infants who are younger than 12 months of age, cribs should be bare except for a tight fitting sheet and a mattress cover or protector. Items that should not be placed in a crib include: soft or loose bedding, such as blankets, quilts, or comforters; pillows; stuffed toys/animals; soft objects; bumper pads; liners; or sleep positioning devices [§746.2415 and §747.2315]. Also, infants must not have their heads, faces, or cribs covered at any time by items such as blankets, linens, or clothing [§746.2429 and §747.2329].
- Do not use sleep positioning devices, such as wedges or infant positioners. The AAP has found no evidence that these devices are safe. Their use may increase the risk of suffocation [§746.2415 and §747.2315].
- Ensure that sleeping areas are ventilated and at a temperature that is comfortable for a lightly clothed adult [§746.3407(10) and §747.3203(10)].
- If an infant needs extra warmth, use sleep clothing (insert type of sleep clothing that will be used, such as sleepers or footed pajamas) as an alternative to blankets [§746.2415 and §747.2315].
- Place only one infant in a crib to sleep [§746.2405 and §747.2305].
- Infants may use a pacifier during sleep. But the pacifier must not be attached to a stuffed animal or the infant's clothing by a string, cord, or other attaching mechanism that might be a suffocation or strangulation risk [§746.2415 and §747.2315].
- If the infant falls asleep in a restrictive device other than a crib (such as a bouncy chair or swing, or arrives to care asleep in a car seat), move the infant to a crib immediately, unless you provide an Infant Sleep Exception form 2710 signed by the infant's health care professional [§746.2426 and §747.2326].
- Our child care program is smoke-free. Smoking is not allowed in Texas child care operations (this includes ecigarettes and any type of vaporizers) [§746.3703(d) and §747.3503(d)].
- Actively observe sleeping infants by sight and sound [§746.2403 and §747.2303].
- If an infant is able to roll back and forth from front to back, place the infant on the infant's back for sleep and allow the infant to assume a preferred sleep position [§746.2427 and §747.2327].
- Awake infants will have supervised "tummy time" several times daily. This will help them strengthen their muscles and develop normally [§746.2427 and §747.2327].
- Do not swaddle an infant for sleep or rest unless you provide an Infant Sleep Exception form 2710 signed by the infant's health care professional [§746.2428 and §747.2328].

## Breastfeeding Mothers

In accordance with DFPS Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers, parents have the right to breastfeed or provide breast milk for their enrolled child while their child is in care. An adult sized chair is provided in each classroom for your convenience. Please speak with the Early Childhood Manager if you have additional requests.

## Gang Free Zone

Under Texas Law, the childcare center is within a designated gang-free zone that extends 1,000 feet from its boundaries. Anyone engaging in organized criminal activity or certain gang-related criminal activity within this area is in violation of this law and subject to increased penalty under state law. Notification is posted on the bulletin board in each classroom of Wild Earth Preschool and can be found in sections 71.028 and 71.029 of the Texas Penal Code.

## Weapons Policy

DZM prohibits any person, except authorized law enforcement and contracted security personnel, from entering its premises with weapons of any kind. Employees shall not possess weapons while performing DZM business or in the licensed child care unless authorized to do so in the event of a Code Red animal situation. In this circumstance, children and preschool staff are directed to a safe place.

## Smoking Policy

The Dallas Zoo is a non-smoking park. Wild Earth Preschool staff members or zoo employees who smoke must do so in designated areas which are at least 25 feet from the licensed childcare center, and must wash their hands before returning to work. Smoking must not be seen or smelled by the children.

## Communication about policies and concerns:

We believe that an open 2-way door of communication is the best way to resolve concerns and come together to discuss matters of importance about the care your children are receiving, and we understand that this care is a partnership between families, the preschool, and the Zoo.

If you have concerns that can be addressed by your children's teachers, we ask you to reach out to them first. The Brightwheel app is a great way to communicate to all staff at once or to request a meeting time.

For concerns that need elevating or address policies, please contact Early Childhood Manager, Anna Lewis at drop off, pick up, by phone, or by email: [Anna.Lewis@dallaszoo.com](mailto:Anna.Lewis@dallaszoo.com)

Alternatively, or to elevate concerns, please contact

Director of Education, Marti Copeland: [Marti.Copeland@DallasZoo.com](mailto:Marti.Copeland@DallasZoo.com)

### Other Important Contacts:

Dallas Zoo Main Line: 469-554-7500 [www.Dallaszoo.com](http://www.Dallaszoo.com)

Local Child Care Licensing Office: (214) 583-4253

Child Care Information Line: 1-800-862-5252 or email: [CCLQuestions@hhsc.state.tx.us](mailto:CCLQuestions@hhsc.state.tx.us).

Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline: 1-800-252-5400 or online: <https://www.txabusehotline.org>

Welcome to Wild Earth Preschool!

We wish you well!