



# What to Look for in a Waldorf Early Childhood Classroom

The Waldorf approach is founded on a scientific understanding of children's developmental needs. Waldorf education honors each child as a unique being of body, soul and spirit and is designed to cultivate each child's developing capacities. Through opportunities for self-initiated movement and play, diverse sensory experiences, and respectful and warm relationships with caregivers and classmates, Waldorf programs nurture the wholeness of each child. Since its founding in post-World-War-I Europe in 1919, Waldorf education has become an international educational movement with 1,928 kindergartens in 70 countries around the world. Waldorf education is just beginning to expand into Head Start-funded programs and there is a strong interest in continuing this expansion. When you visit a Waldorf early childhood classroom, here are some things to look for:

## Environment

- **Mixed-age classes** for children ages 3-6. Children may stay with the class and teacher for up to three years.
- **Intentionally planned classroom spaces** providing ample space to play, work, and rest. Classroom decor is simple, uncluttered and reflects the seasons.
- An atmosphere of **loving warmth, care and curiosity** that promotes joy, wonder, and reverence.
- A focus on **real life experiences** helps children form healthy relationships with themselves and with the world.
- **Centering stewardship** and care-taking of the self, the other and the environment.
- **Social-emotional development**, respect for others, empathy and a willingness to help is strengthened through imaginative play, story imaginations in storytelling and through an intentional culture of care.
- **Intentionally balanced integration** of indoor and outdoor learning opportunities.
- **An array of sounds of children at play and work along with seasonal singing** fills the atmosphere as children engage in activities.



## Children

- Children are engaged in **daily activities** which include activities for experiencing and **strengthening the senses**, large and gross motor movement experiences, storytelling and imaginative play, circle and seasonal activities. Examples of meaningful **practical work** are cooking, baking, gardening, sweeping, mending, sewing, repairing broken toys, caring for and watering plants, and dish washing. **Artistic activities** include singing, drawing, beeswax modeling, and painting.
- **Open-ended and ample time for child-initiated free play.** Children have free choice to initiate use of classroom play materials to be used without a preconceived purpose or instruction.

- **Daily opportunities to engage in teacher-directed individual, small-group and large-group activities and seasonal projects.** Throughout freeplay times children may choose to engage in guided sensory-rich, fine motor activities with their teachers.
- Children cultivate **independence, confidence and bodily self-mastery** through repetition of self care, body hygiene, and good nutrition practices. Examples are getting dressed for outdoor play in the winter independently: buttoning winter jackets and tying shoes.
- **Children with all abilities** are welcome in Waldorf classrooms.

## Adults

- At least one teacher holds a **Waldorf credential** from a Waldorf Early Childhood Association of Northern America recognized teacher preparation program.
- Teachers engage in a process of **lifelong professional development** and pay close attention to inner attitude and outer behavior to be worthy of imitation of the young child.
- **Teachers support every child** on their individual path towards **self discovery and mastery.**
- **Teachers provide loving attention, calm and consistent presence** developing trust and dependable relationships where children can feel a deep sense of safety and belonging.
- **Parents/caregivers and families are seen as partners working collaboratively together.** Cultivating partnerships with parents and caregivers is an essential support to bridge home and school life. Home visits and regular correspondence with families and caregivers are part of the work of the teacher and help the child to feel seen and to feel a sense of communal belonging.
- Teachers offer **loving interest in and acceptance** of each child and family and center **culturally responsive and anti-bias teaching.**



## Structure of the Day

- **Harmony through rhythm.** Work through the rhythm of the day, rhythm of the week, and seasonal year.
- **Daily sensory rich experiences with nature** and the natural world
- **Nap and rest times** are essential and are woven into daily classroom life.
- **Extended time for child-led and initiated freeplay,** nurture and support developing imagination and a deep sense of wonder.
- Meaningful practical work such as cooking, baking, gardening, handwork and domestic activity that provide opportunities to develop unfolding human capacities.
- **Literacy, language acquisition and other pre-academic capacities** are woven through activity and seasonal curriculum blocks through storytelling, creative free play, circle games and nature experiences.
- Experiences are **process oriented.**

### Learn More

[Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America](#)

[The Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education](#)

[The Waldorf Early Childhood Teacher and the Task of Preparing for a Healthy Future Generation](#)

[A Journey of Becoming](#)