



The Nest:
A Montessori Toddler Program
Nature, Art, Montessori

Parent Policy Handbook

2024-2025

Welcome!

Hello Nest Family,

Welcome to The Nest, and thank you for choosing to be a part of our sweet little community! I recognize that choosing the right program for your child and your family is an important decision, particularly if you are sending your child to group care for the first time.

Because I believe that the child's first years are the most important in their life, I recognize, not only the immense responsibility that we hold, but also the great privilege and honor we have to work in partnership with your family to provide an optimal learning experience for your child. In addition, I am committed to providing a quality foundational experience that will serve you and your child during your time as a member of this special community *and* in the years to come.

Dr. Montessori believed in serving the whole child, and she emphasized the importance of the child's connection with the natural world. I'm thrilled that after eighteen years in this field (*with a little nudge from Covid*), our learning environment now fully encompasses our outdoor space and children have the opportunity to play, explore, learn, grow and have fun indoors and outdoors.

My goal with this handbook is to provide clear information about our program policies and protocols so that you have a more thorough understanding of my expectations and goals. If I discover a need to update our handbook at anytime, for any reason, you will receive written notice regarding the change(s) in advance and may be asked to return a signed statement acknowledging the change(s).



Meanwhile, I trust the information included in this handbook will help to guide and enrich your family's experience while enrolled at The Nest and that you will reach out to me if you have further questions.

Thank you again for choosing to be a part of our community. I'm looking forward to an amazing year!

Warmly,
Laura Delgado
The Nest Director & Toddler Guide

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Table of Contents

- Mission Statement
- Our Team
- Program Description
- Admissions & Enrollment
- Discipline & Guidance
- Parent Communication
- Annual Calendar
- Daily Operation
- Attendance Expectations
- Holidays & Birthdays
- Drop-Off & Pick-Up Policies
- Safety & Emergency Preparedness Plan
- General Health & Safety Information
- Illness & Medical Emergencies
- Food & Allergies
- Toileting
- What to Bring to School
- Clothing & Shoes
- Items To Leave At Home
- Water Activities
- Care of Animals
- Our Designation as a Gang Free Zone



Mission Statement

The Nest aims to provide a solid foundation for the young child by offering a safe and nurturing space which gracefully supports the child's initial transition from home to school.

Our Team

I currently serve as Director and guide of The Nest and hire support as needed. All staff are required to complete criminal background history checks prior to working with children and must have current certification in Infant CPR and First Aid. In addition, all staff are required to complete a minimum of 24 hours of continuing education each year. This includes training in awareness, prevention, and action steps in the area of suspected child abuse and neglect, as well as safe sleep practices, SIDS and shaken baby syndrome.

Licensing

We are licensed by Child Care Regulation, a division of Texas Health and Human Services. You may contact our local CCR office at (512) 834-3426 or visit their [website](#) for more information. You can view our most recent licensing inspection report on the CCR website at any time. A copy of the Minimum Standards is also available on the CCR website at all times.

Program Description

Nido, meaning nest, is an Italian term often used in Montessori settings in reference to programs serving infants and very young children. In our community, the "nest" extends to care of children from roughly 18 months to three years of age. The Nest, a small and nurturing environment, is primarily designed to provide opportunities which help support the young child's initial transition from home to school. Our indoor and outdoor prepared environments are thoughtfully-designed to support the child's budding independence as well as their need for exploration.

Montessori Our curriculum is rooted in the Montessori philosophy with special attention to the unique needs of the young child. Through *grace and courtesy* lessons, an important component of any Montessori community, our children will begin to learn how to take care of their own needs while respecting the needs of others and the environment itself. The *prepared environment* is designed to support independent as well as collaborative play, and children are given ample opportunities to develop concentration and focus while also learning how to share space with others, a skill that will serve them for the rest of their life.





In addition to refining *practical life* skills, such as washing one's hands, preparing one's own snack, eating with utensils, and using the toilet, the children will engage regularly in hands-on *work* or activities in the areas of language, math, nature, art, and more, all of which will serve as a foundation for future academic success.

Guided by the teachings of Dr. Maria Montessori related to the *absorbent mind*, we believe young children, in particular, should be provided regular opportunities to move and utilize all of their senses. Most importantly, our children will be invited daily to move, get messy, explore and HAVE FUN!

Montessori is an education for independence, not just for school, but for life. Maria Montessori

Nature

Young children are natural scientists, inquisitive, curious and highly observant. Beyond that, they are constantly absorbing information about the world around them with the use of all of their senses. Lessons in nature are simple, yet impactful in that they support children in scientific action, such as observation, questioning, theorizing and exploring cause and effect.

We utilize both our indoor and outdoor environments to support the children's curiosity and understanding of the natural world. To support their developing vocabulary, children engage regularly in identifying objects in their natural environment, including plants and animals, and they are provided ample opportunities to explore, make observations and ask questions. Guides model respect for the natural environment and help foster an understanding of our connectedness with nature.



Art

Art provides children opportunities to express themselves creatively while integrating other aspects of our curriculum, including language, science, math and sensory exploration. While art is an invitation in our environment, meaning children are never required to engage in art activities, we provide a wide variety of mediums and approaches ensuring that children have choices and opportunities to engage in work that excites and inspires them. Most importantly, we emphasize **PROCESS** over product providing children ample time and space to explore and express themselves.

Senses, being explorers of the world, open the way to knowledge.
Maria Montessori

Art domains introduced in our environment include drawing, painting, clay and dough work, crafting and color theory. These domains provide children an opportunity to refine their understanding of the artistic process and, most significantly, have fun! Beyond providing children opportunities to imagine, investigate, construct and reflect, other benefits of art include an elevated sense of calm, refined motor movement, and increased focus and concentration.

Admissions & Enrollment

The Nest embraces children of all backgrounds between the ages of roughly 18 months and 2 1/2 years. Children younger than 18 months will be assessed for developmental readiness. Similarly, we will assess children who are close to three years of age to ensure continued goodness-of-fit within our program. If, and when, your child is enrolled, regardless of age, further attention will be given to ensuring a smooth transition for your child from home to school. Prior to your child's start, we will schedule a **home visit**, the purpose of which is to provide your child an opportunity to begin building relationship and trust with their guide(s) in a familiar space.



Enrollment Process

After acceptance, submission of an Enrollment Agreement and a non-refundable First Time Enrollment fee are required to secure your child's spot in our program. Additional fees and respective due dates are detailed on the Tuition and Fees sheet and in your Enrollment Agreement.

Mid-year Enrollment

If your child enrolls mid-year (after the start of the school year), tuition will be pro-rated based on a 41-week calendar (including weeks when school is closed) and your tuition, or first installment, will be due along with your First Time Enrollment fee to secure your child's spot prior to your child's first day.

Re-enrollment

While our program will likely be a one-year program for most children, dependent on age and development, there may be occasions when it may be appropriate for a child to continue for another semester or full school year. I will speak with you regarding the option of re-enrollment in the spring, and, if we are in agreement about your child's continued participation in our program, a re-enrollment fee will be due to secure your child's spot.

Continued Enrollment

While we believe our program will effectively meet the needs of most children, we recognize it may not be the best fit for every child. For various reasons, including, but not limited to, issues related to behavior, sensory processing, feeding, or other developmental delays, we may determine that we are not able to meet the unique needs of your child. If we feel that we are unable to continue serving your child, we will provide you with as much notice as possible, and any pre-paid tuition (for dates your child does not attend school) will be refunded in full.

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Similarly, if we feel we are unable to continue working with you, the parent, due to a lack of respect or a disregard for our policies or we determine that your actions or words negatively impact the well-being of the children or our community, we will discontinue your child's enrollment in our program. We reserve the right to terminate your child's enrollment without notice if merited. Tuition refunds will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Discipline & Guidance

Our approach to discipline and guidance begins with a deep and thorough understanding of the unique needs of the young child. We begin by providing a thoughtfully prepared environment designed to meet the needs of the whole child. Both our indoor and outdoor environments offer a variety of developmentally-appropriate activities that provide an appropriate level of challenge for the young child, promoting engagement, focus, and concentration.



Often, "misbehavior" arises from a lack of appropriate challenge. If a child is bored or overwhelmed, they may act out, particularly when they have not developed the ability to identify their needs and lack the verbal or emotional ability to communicate those needs. Misbehavior can also stem from a lack of proper sleep or nutrition, issues with self-regulation or sensory processing, or a need for clearer boundaries or expectations. Our task, as guides of young children, is to observe the child's behavior and search for the underlying reasons for the behavior. Having identified the unmet need, we can create a plan that focuses on addressing the child's need by altering the environment or our approach to the child, rather than one that focuses on "fixing the child."

Children in group care may also display behaviors that they may not have displayed prior to their experience in group care. Adapting to a new environment and learning how to meet one's needs while respecting the needs of others is BIG work, and, often the child will exhibit testing behaviors that are a result of the child's exploration and search for boundaries in a new space within a group of peers.

Guided by the Montessori philosophy of respect, our approach to discipline and guidance, in short, is rooted in respect for the young child's process of development and growth. We employ positive techniques, including the use of clear boundaries and expectations, consistency, redirection, and problem-solving with the children. In addition, rather than focusing on what we don't want to see, we make a concerted effort to model and ask for the behavior we do want to see. It is imperative that children never feel judged, shamed, or ridiculed in our environment, and we commit to partnering with parents to ensure that, together, we are consistent in employing techniques that nurture the evolving spirit of the young child.

Parent Communication

We recognize that you are your child's first, and most important, teacher, and to be most effective in serving your child, we are committed to partnering with you to help you gain a better understanding of your child's experience in our program. Towards that end, we are committed to regular communication with you about your child's experiences while enrolled at The Nest, including any progress and/or unique challenges. We will track your child's progress, particularly related to toileting, and in the area of social and emotional development, and we are happy to discuss their progress with you at any time upon request. We will also provide you with small anecdotes related to your child's day during our daily pick-up window. Please note that we will always speak with respect about your child and to your child. In short, if your child is present, we prefer to acknowledge their presence by involving your child in the conversation regardless of their verbal ability.

If we have a concern about anything or need to engage in a longer conversation with you, we commit to doing so at an appropriate time either on the phone or in person, and, ideally, not in the presence of your child. Similarly, if you ever have questions or concerns about your child's experience in our program or our policies and procedures, I invite you to reach out to me directly to schedule a phone conversation or a meeting. I am available most afternoons, though advance notice is always helpful.

We will also maintain a private classroom portal so that you can gain a glimpse into your child's day and a more thorough understanding of our program. We also encourage you to stay tuned to our [blog](#) for general information, resources and inspiration.



Annual Calendar

Our annual calendar closely aligns with Austin Independent School District with our school year beginning in early to mid-August and ending in late May. Specific dates can be found on the [Calendar page](#) of our website. We also follow the cancellation policy of AISD. In the event that AISD cancels school, delays the start of the school day, or closes early due to inclement weather conditions, we will likely follow suit. There will be NO refunds or tuition credits in any of the above occurrences.

Annually, we CLOSE for the following:

- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Week (one week annually in November)
- Winter Break (two weeks annually including Christmas Day and New Years Day)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- President's Day
- Spring Break (one week annually in March)
- Memorial Day

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Daily Operation

Enrollment includes 3 or 4 day options with details provided on our Tuition and Fees sheet.

- **Office Hours:** 7:30 - 8:30 a.m. and after 12:30 p.m. Monday - Thursday.
- **The Nest Program Hours:** 8:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Monday - Thursday.

Attendance Expectations

Enrollment in our program, regardless of the enrollment option you choose, assumes attendance for all days selected. Regular attendance provides your child consistency in routine allowing for a greater sense of security and ease with transition, more opportunities for social interaction and connection with their guides and peers, and an optimal learning experience. If you know your child is going to be absent in advance, for any reason, please inform us via email. In the case of an unanticipated absence, such as in the case of illness, kindly send us a text message informing us of your child's absence. Regular absenteeism has no bearing on tuition.

Holidays & Birthdays

At The Montessori Tree, we respect that each family has their own special traditions and rituals surrounding holidays and the change of seasons. We do not have parties, but do invite parents to share their traditions as a means of raising awareness of other cultures and of building community. Celebrations may include, but will not be limited to, the sharing of developmentally appropriate books, songs, or traditions, with the children.

Similarly, birthday celebrations are simple with a focus on the child. Families are invited to share a baby photo of their child which we will share with the children during a special birthday circle.

Drop-Off And Pick-Up Policies



To minimize disruptions to our daily routines, parents should utilize our drop-off and pick-up windows which are designed to provide ample time for smooth transitions. We will review drop-off and pick-up procedures with you prior to the start of the school year, and information regarding both will be included in your Welcome Packet which you will receive prior to your child's first day.

At all times, you should ensure that you connect with one of your child's guides during both drop-off and pick-up windows so that your child is properly signed in and out by your child's guides per Licensing.

Authorized Pick-up List

The only persons authorized to pick-up a child from our program are the child's parents or guardians, however, you may authorize another adult to pick-up your child from our program by adding that person to your Authorized Pick-up List (on your Admissions Information Form). By law, we will ask authorized persons whom we do not recognize to provide a valid Driver's License or state-issued ID displaying their full legal name. If they are unable to do so, we will not release your child to that person and will call you immediately. For safety reasons, our preference always is for you to directly introduce any new persons to us prior to their first day of picking-up your child.

To add a person to your Authorized Pick-up List, you will need to provide the person's first and last name, phone number, and the person's relationship to the child. You will have an opportunity to add persons to your list during the enrollment process. If you wish to add a person to your list after submission of your enrollment forms, you must contact me directly and provide the information above.

Safety & Emergency Preparedness Plan

We place top priority on the children's safety. Our Emergency Preparedness Plan ensures the safety of all children in case of an emergency, and includes details about evacuation, relocation, and lockdown as needed. You may request a copy of our Emergency Preparedness Plan or our emergency evacuation and relocation diagram at anytime. Per licensing, we are required to practice monthly fire drills, in addition to quarterly drills for severe weather and lockdown scenarios.

In the unlikely event of an emergency, we'll have access to a phone and emergency contact information. In addition to calling emergency services, as needed, we will contact you immediately with details and will continue to care for the children until they are released to a parent or someone on their Authorized Pick-up List.

General Health & Safety Information

Health Forms & Immunizations

Prior to your child's first day, we are required by Child Care Regulation to obtain:

- A health form, or written statement, from a licensed health-care professional who has examined your child within the last year indicating that your child is able to participate in our program.

In addition, you must submit, prior to your child's first day, either:

- A current copy of your child's immunization records which must be updated as applicable; OR,
- A notarized State of Texas Immunization Waiver form if you choose **not** to immunize your child.

Child Abuse or Neglect

All staff members are required to complete annual training in awareness, prevention, and action steps in the area of suspected child abuse and neglect. We are furthermore required by Texas state law to report any suspected cases of abuse or neglect of a child to the Department of Family and Protective Services or a law enforcement agency. For more information about reporting abuse and neglect, you can visit the [DFPS website](#) or call 1-800-252-5400 toll-free 24 hours a day.

Illness & Medical Emergencies

Supporting the well-being and health of our children is essential, and we are committed to doing all we can to keep your child and our community healthy. We commit to strong health practices, including frequent and effective hand-washing for both children and adults and we encourage our children to sneeze or cough into their sleeve to minimize the spread of germs. To support our efforts in keeping our community healthy otherwise, we ask that you review the following protocols carefully and encourage you to reach out at anytime should you have any questions or concerns.

- If you *suspect* your child might be ill, we kindly request that you keep your child at home out of concern for the health of our community *as well as* your child's own well-being and comfort.
- If your child is exhibiting *obvious* signs or symptoms of illness (as listed below), you must keep your child home until they are symptom-free for at least 24 hours *without* the use of medication.
- If your child develops or exhibits signs or symptoms of illness while at school, your child will be separated from the other children, and we will contact you directly to request that you pick up your child as soon as possible.

Per licensing regulations, a child **must be sent home** and **may not attend school** if any one of the following conditions are met:



- An illness prevents a child from participating comfortably in childcare activities, including outdoor play;
- An illness results in a greater need of care than a caregiver can provide without compromising the health, safety, and supervision of the other children;
- A child has one or more of the following:
 - A temperature of 100.00 degrees or higher;
 - A fever less than 100.00 accompanied by behavior change or other signs or symptoms of a respiratory illness, such as a cough, shortness of breath, or a sore throat;
 - Symptoms and signs of possible severe illness such as lethargy, abnormal breathing, uncontrolled diarrhea, two or more vomiting episodes in 24 hours, rash with fever, mouth sores with drooling, chills, behavior changes, or other signs that the child may be ill.

Communicable Diseases

Finally, your child may not attend school if a healthcare professional has diagnosed your child with a communicable disease, and you do not have approval for your child to return to school. We are required per licensing to report any illness deemed notifiable by the Texas Department of State Health Services within our community to Child Care Regulation. Minimum Standards also require us to notify all parents in writing within 48 hours of becoming aware that a child or employee has contracted an illness deemed notifiable by the TX DSHS.

Return to School Policy

Following an illness, a child may return to school once the child is free of symptoms of illness for 24 hours (without the use of medication) * **or** you have obtained a health care professional's statement that the child no longer has an excludable disease or condition.

Medication Policy

We do **not** administer medication to children at school, though we are authorized, per licensing, to administer medication to a child in the case of a medical emergency or life threatening situation.

Medical Emergencies

In the case of a medical emergency, we will:

- Call 9-1-1;
- Administer medication and/or first aid as needed; and,
- Call the child's parent(s)/caregiver(s).

We keep a First Aid kit in a labeled, designated location, accessible only to adults, in our classroom. For minor accidents, such as scrapes and bumps, we will administer first aid as needed and share details of the accident with you directly or via an Accident Report. An Incident Report will be filed and reported to Licensing if emergency medical service is required.

Food & Allergies



Nutrition is a valued part of our curriculum, and children will learn through modeling and conversation the importance of eating foods that help their growing minds and bodies, including protein, fruits and vegetables. Meal times are also significant as they provide an opportunity for the children to learn important *grace and courtesy* lessons, such as sitting in one's chair and using a napkin.

Parents are asked to send their child with lunch daily. Lunches should be sent in a well-insulated lunchbox and food items should allow for independence in eating. We are unable to warm lunches, so any warm lunches should be sent in a Thermos. In an effort to minimize waste, we also kindly request that you limit packaged foods and disposable packaging where possible.

Finally, please note that we have a **no dessert** policy, and any sweets sent to school will be sent home in your child's lunchbox to enjoy at home. Details related to snack will be provided in your Welcome Packet upon enrollment.

The children will have access to water for drinking at all times. Please do not send a drink in your child's lunchbox. We will provide cups for use, although we also request that you send a labeled water bottle for your child which will stay at school. We will also provide cloth napkins, utensils, placemats and plates for the children.

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Allergies

Due to the severe nature of peanut allergies, please note that we have a strict **no peanut** policy. Other nut butters and nuts are welcome. For the safety of our children, we reserve the right to implement further food restrictions if we discover that a member of our community has a severe, diagnosed food allergy or a suspected serious food allergy.

It is your responsibility to inform us in writing on your Admissions Information form of any food allergies or sensitivities your child has and to inform us in writing if there are any changes to your child's health or diet ongoing. If your child has a diagnosed allergy, we are required to keep a **Food Allergy Emergency Plan** on file which must identify the allergen, provide a list of potential symptoms, and outline a thorough treatment plan, which may include the use of an EpiPen.



Please note that all staff members are required to complete training on how to identify and treat potential allergic reactions, including training on how to administer an EpiPen.

Toileting

Toileting is an integral part of our curriculum, and our goal is to foster independence in this area for all children in our care regardless of where they are in the process upon entering our program, and children will never be forced or coerced to use the toilet. We do this by integrating regular toileting routines into our mornings. Our approach includes an introduction to the potty from the child's first day and regular changes with the child *standing up*. We also support the child's independence by involving them in the process of dressing and undressing.

All staff are trained in proper toileting practices, and measures to protect the health of both children and staff are posted in the classroom, including reminders about washing hands and wearing gloves. We acknowledge that there is a lot of information related to toileting accessible to parents. Ultimately, we believe the best plan for your child is the one that best suits the unique needs of your child and family, and we are happy to discuss toileting further with you at anytime.

Items To Leave At Home

As an added safety precaution and to minimize disruption to the child's routine and allow for smoother drop-offs, we ask that you refrain from bringing toys, media, costumes or accessories, or other unnecessary items, including candy, to school. While some children benefit from the use of a "transition item," it would be most effective and best serve your child to create a plan with us prior to utilizing a transition item. If any of the above are brought to school, we will put them away until the end of the day. Weapons, including toy weapons, are prohibited and will be sent home immediately.

Last updated on 5/03/2024.

What to Bring to School

Prior to your child's first day, we will send you a Welcome Packet which will include a list of items to bring to school. This list will include, but may not be limited to wipes, diapers, as needed, and spare changes of weather-appropriate clothes. This is especially important as we spend a significant amount of time outside ALL year long.

Clothing & Shoes



Supporting your child's development of practical life skills and fostering independence are core components of our program. For this reason, we encourage you to send your child in clothing and shoes that allow for comfort and complete freedom of movement. As toileting is an integral part of our curriculum, you should also send your child in clothes that allow for independence in dressing and undressing. **Loose cotton pants and underwear with elastic waist bands are ideal.**

Children in our program should also come to school prepared to play. We highly discourage you from sending your child in "nice" clothing as we regularly engage in messy work. Whether gardening, art, or practical life, your child is likely to get wet and/or dirty. Soiled clothing will be sent home daily in a wet/dry bag, and we request that you replenish your child's supply as needed. Ideal clothing options include loose shorts and/or pants, simple tees, and close-toed shoes. Also keep in mind that we spend

time outdoors daily and weather-appropriate clothing is always helpful to have on hand. **All items should be labeled with your child's name.**

Water Activities

Texas summers are hot and long! To keep our children cool outdoors, we will engage in regular water play, which may include sprinkler play, as well as the use of water in practical life activities and gardening. Indoors, the children may be provided opportunities to wash their hands and pour their own water.

Care of Animals

As a part of our curriculum of respect and care for all living beings, the children will have the opportunity to care for small animals, such as fish, rodents or reptiles within our learning environment. Per licensing, we will notify you in writing if/when we introduce a new animal into our community. In our outdoor environment, the children have ample opportunities to observe nature in action, including squirrels, a wide array of birds, and a great number of pollinators, including bees, caterpillars, and butterflies. On occasion, we will build temporary homes for smaller creatures, such as snails, for the purpose of observation, though we will eventually release them to the wild where they belong.

Our Designation as a Gang Free Zone

As a result of House Bill 2086, which passed during the 81st Legislature, Regular Session, Chapter 42 of the Human Resource Code includes section 42.064, effective September 1, 2009. This statute requires that we distribute information about gang-free zones to our families.

What are gang-free zones and what is their purpose?

Similar to the motivation behind establishing drug-free zones, the purpose of gang-free zones is to deter certain types of criminal activity in areas where children gather by enforcing tougher penalties. A gang-free zone is a designated area around a specific location (in our case, The Montessori Tree, LLC) where prohibited gang-related activity is subject to increased penalty under Texas law. The gang-free zone exists within a 1,000-foot perimeter of our location. Engaging in a gang-related criminal activity or organized criminal activity within 1,000 feet of our location is a violation of this law and is therefore subject to increased penalty under state law. For more information about what constitutes a gang-free zone, please consult sections 71.028 and 71.029 of the Texas Penal Code.