



Parent Handbook

Willow Nest Studio, Inc.
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Willow Nest Studio Introductory Information

Willow Nest Studio, Inc is a NY State Licensed and insured Group Family Day Care Provider that operates in a studio space on the second floor of a Windsor Terrace dwelling. In September of 2015, the owner and founder of this childcare facility, Elisha Georgiou, obtained this license from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services while designing her home-based studio school. This license serves to allow Willow Nest Studio, Inc. to best provide playgroup services and arts enrichment classes to toddlers, preschool aged-children, and also school-aged children.

Story Tree Playgroup is a drop-off, home-based preschool alternative program at the **Willow Nest Studio** space in Windsor Terrace Brooklyn. Elisha Georgiou is the founder, director, provider and head teacher at Story Tree Playgroup and the owner of Willow Nest Studio. In addition to holding a NY State license to provide child care in her residence, she also holds a Masters of Education from Teacher's College, Columbia University.

Story Tree Playgroup is a mixed-age environment admitting children between ages 2.5-4.5. We suggest 3-4 days of enrollment per week, with a minimum of three hours per day and a maximum of six hours per day. Elisha is supported by one assistant when working with children more than 6 in number. All teachers are screened by the NYC Department of Health including fingerprinting and background check.

Story Tree Playgroup Approach

We believe in and value...

Children are unique individuals who come to school with a wealth of experience, culture and understanding already. The school environment should support the expansion of prior experience in a positive and inspiring way.

The Multi-Modal Arts are crucial to the Holistic Development of all human beings. Children are natural movers, sensors, observers, music makers, questioners, makers and inventors in so many, many ways. This is why we honor the development of the whole child through attention to all of the ways of being and expressing present in the languages of the arts and sciences.

An Inquiry based approach to teaching, meaning we help children to articulate questions and wonderings of their own whenever possible, gives children the permission to think for themselves, often “outside of the box” and to take the kinds of risks necessary for deeper exploration. This is the kind of exploration that leads to innovation and self-discovery. Children can be supported to discover their own “answers” to their own questions.

An emergent and project based approach to curriculum design is best because it helps teachers draw on the strengths and interests of children. Through careful observations of children’s playful explorations of materials, space, stories and relationships with friends, our staff aims to find themes that emerge from the direct interests of the children.

Following developmentally appropriate practice is essential to the emotional and cognitive well-being of children. Therefore, early childhood programs best serve children when they are both play-based and process-oriented so that children can explore new meaning-making of their own that reflects their abilities and strengths.

Documentation and careful process observations are how we assess children’s understanding and growth, help make their learning visible, and to develop learning activities that reflect the interests and awarenesses of children.

Community and parent input is vital to a strong home/school partnership. Children love to include their families in their learning experiences. We love to provide opportunities for families to join in.

Opening Times and Dates

The program runs from Mid September through Mid June. We follow the NYC public school calendar for closures and take an additional week off for the first week of January. Playgroups run Tuesday through Friday. Families can register for 3-4 days per week with the option of choosing between 3 or 6 hour days. The three hour program runs from 9:00-12:00. Early drop-off is available as needed at 8:30. Adding on lunch is also available as needed. Parents are asked not to leave children before 8:30am and to collect their children promptly.

Admission Requirements

A three-day minimum enrollment is suggested. Maximum enrollment is four days per week. Children must be basically potty trained prior to admittance. We will work with children’s individual potty-training needs on a case-by-case basis, provided we have the active participation of parents to help their children achieve being fully potty trained. All tuition deposits and supporting documentation must be submitted to Willow Nest Studio prior to a child being dropped off at the program.

Student Records Forms

Prior to Admission, we require signed copies of these forms:

- A signed, completed medical form from your child's physician.
- An up-to-date immunization record. If you have medical or religious reasons for not receiving immunizations, we require a signed letter from your physician or a signed waiver from you, releasing Willow Nest Studio from liability.
- A signed Emergency Medical Treatment Consent Form
- A signed Enrollment Contract - indicating you are aware of the program policies as outlined in the Parent Handbook, indicating you are responsible for tuition fees to be paid on time, and indicating what hours you wish to enroll your child with us.
- A signed Registration Form including Contact Information, Emergency information, Health Information and Dismissal information.
- A signed Travel Release Form
- A signed Permission to Photograph Release Form
- A copy of a lead screening certificate from your child's physician is suggested. If you do not provide one to us, you will be given information on lead poisoning and prevention so that you may take steps toward obtaining a lead blood screening test from your child's health care provider or from the local health department.

Fees, Payments and Termination Policies

We require a \$100 application fee with your application to be considered for placement. This fee will be refunded in the event we do not have space. You are responsible for monthly payments for the term agreed upon in your contract. Payment is due on the first of the month, with a first month's deposit due with submission of contract and supporting materials. Late fees will apply. You may pay with check, money order, direct deposit, and in some cases credit card (fees apply).

Checks may be paid to Willow Nest Studio. A fee of \$100 will be assessed for returned checks. After the second returned check, all fees must be paid by money order.

If you are a parent wishing to enter the program mid-semester, tuition will be prorated for each month missed. Arrangements to begin mid-month can also be discussed.

On occasion, we may be planning outings to local shows or museums. We will notify you of extra fees needed to cover these outings for you (if you wish to chaperone) and your child.

Should you wish to terminate your placement, fees will only be refunded from the time that we can fill the place reserved for your child.

Should you have cause to be late for your child's pick-up, there is a grace period of 10 minutes. After that, on the eleventh minute, an additional \$1.00 per minute late will be added to your following month's bill.

Early, priority registration for the following year is offered to returning families every January.

Discounts may be applied for returning families, extended day registration and payment in full. Tuition fees and discount policies may be adjusted annually.

WNS reserves the right to terminate enrollment of a student in the case of delinquent tuition payment or in the case that a child is assessed to lack readiness for group learning and/or poses any kind of safety threat to him/herself or to other children in the program.

Video and Photographic Documentation

A big part of Story Tree Playgroup's inquiry-based learning philosophy is to document the many languages of children. This includes their words, their image making, their building structures, their dramatic enactments, their dances and their songs. We document to help further the development of deepened inquiry through reflection. We also do this to help make your child's wonder of learning more visible to them and to you. Documentation in the form of video and photography will be displayed for children's own viewing and yours in the studio. On occasion, we will ask for permission to include this documentation on our website and in marketing materials. Your child's image, but not name, may be represented in this format. We ask that you complete a consent form for us to do so.

Media in the Classroom

Incorporated into our curriculum is the moving image. Children will occasionally be discovering the world of nature on film and incorporating their own narratives through that medium. This may take the form of little moments: a drop of water in a pond causing rings, a rainshower on a window, surf crashing on a shore, or birds flying across the sky, to set a few examples. Children will also be making up stories which will be filmed and played back to them. A projector, a computer and stereo system is provided to assist with these media explorations. We do not show other kinds of films. If we intend to, we will notify you of the film and the reason. We may also utilize the film screen to host screening of films related to education or parenting during hours outside of the Playgroup, to be announced in our monthly newsletter).

Parent Involvement

We strongly encourage parent involvement. Upon registering your child, we will provide a schedule of times you may like to visit the Playgroup and share a special skill, a cultural tradition or to tell or read a story to the group. Children love to introduce their families! We are a community and hope for all to feel at home here. If you are an artist or

would like to help children to develop a project that requires special materials, please do not hesitate to inquire about collaborating. We are open to new ideas.

Settling Children In

Some children settle quickly and others take longer until they are happy to stay without their parents and caregivers. We recognize that you may like to linger until you feel comfortable leaving your child. Our experienced staff will always welcome and advise you. Children have a short period of time to play freely in the space and get acclimated before we meet for circle songs, conversations and stories. It is advisable that you do not prolong the separation as it is confusing for your child and can cause them to behave in a more clingy manner. It can also be more distracting for other children than is necessary.

We hope you will trust that we are competent at helping your child to integrate into the day's activities. Please avoid sneaking out, as this causes distrust for your child. Assure your child you are coming back soon, you know they will have a great time, give them a hug and say goodbye. This will help your child to feel safe and comforted.

Daily Routine

9:00 Greeting, check-in, walk to park (or in bad weather) free play and investigation of the day's "provocation" inside the studio.
9:20 Morning Circle, snack, greeting songs, story, daily plan, provocation discussion, or puppet performance
9:40 Free play centers: arts (arts, crafts, blocks, loose parts constructions, etc.), dramatic play, building projects, cooking or sensory science
11:00 Active Indoor Play/music/movement stories/finishing projects/story time
(or) Active Outside Play Trip (includes getting packed and ready and walking to park)
11:30 Clean up, Circle Meeting, Goodbye song and get ready to go for first group
12:00 Wash hands, lunch for long day group & short day Group Dismissal
12:30 Free Play, Finish Projects, Story time, quiet restful activities.
12:45 Get ready to go, goodbye circle and song, recap and plan for next time
1:00 Long day group dismissal – set up for nap/rest
1:15 Nap/Rest
1:45 or 2:00 Wake up, get ready to go home
2:30 Dismissal Full Day

Please note that the daily routine may change slightly depending on the needs of children in the classroom.

Arrival Policy

Our program begins at 9:00am. Please try your best to arrive on time to ensure a positive early school experience for your child.

Hand Washing

In accordance with the Department of Health, children are required to wash their hands upon arrival and before meals. Hand washing is the best defense against the spread of germs. We ask that, upon arrival, you please assist your child in putting away his/her

belongings, taking off shoes, and washing hands in the bathroom sink. This routine should come to be a welcome way to begin the day for your child. Help your child to stand on the step stool, to find the best water temperature, to pump the soap, dry hands and step down from the step safely.

Health Check

Also at arrival, your child will receive a daily health check in your presence to assess his/her wellness. Please be vigilant in mentioning any kind of health or injury concern you may have at this time.

Sign-In Sheet

Then the parent or caregiver must complete the sign-in sheet. It is very important that you write the correct time of arrival and any special information in the comment box. For example, you may write that your child is going to have a play date with another child in the class and is going to be picked up by someone else. Or, you may mention that your child needs to be picked up early for a doctor's appointment or for some other reason. If something changes, all last minute changes must be in writing. Please e-mail Elisha at elisha@willowneststudio.com. She will not be able to check email during class time, but will, however check this mode of communication after class.

These four morning steps, putting away things, washing hands, participation in the daily health check and signing the attendance sheet are all mandatory.

Dismissal Policy

Children are to be released only to individuals listed on your signed copy of the dismissal agreement. At the end of the day, when the program is over, the parent or caregiver must sign the child out as well. Again, the time must be accurate. We are very serious about the safety of your child, and request that you comply with these procedures.

It is also essential that you keep us updated with any change in phone numbers, emails and home addresses.

How to Talk to Your Child About Playgroup

- ❖ Children are exploring and experiencing in every moment of their lives and aren't always readily able to answer the question, "How was your day?". Try to speak with them about specific events of the day to make recall easier for them. Here are some questions you might ask:
- ❖ Did you use paint today? What did it feel like? What colors did you choose? Was there a story in the painting?
- ❖ Did your teacher bring out a new material? What did it feel like? Did it move? Could you change it? Did it have a color or a smell? What shape was it?
- ❖ Can you tell me about a story you heard at story-time?
- ❖ What kind of make-believe story did you play? What character did you pretend to be? Did you wear a special costume?
- ❖ What did you see on your neighborhood walk? Did you find a treasure in the park? Did you play a game there?
- ❖ Can you remember a song you learned today? Would you like to teach it to me?
- ❖ What did you like about playgroup today? Did anything funny happen that made you laugh?
- ❖ Who did you play with outside?
- ❖ I wonder what you pretended when you played with your friend?
- ❖ I wonder what it felt like to play on the sand/light table?

Talking to children about their art:

Please remember that young children need specific references to how they created their work and what it means to them. It is helpful for you to acknowledge their ever expanding language of line, shape, color, and feeling in their graphic representations. Even a squiggle on the page, while it may not represent anything in particular, is early writing and children need to have their new drawing skills valued by adults. What it "looks like" to you may be very different for the child. Ascribing our ideas to their work can be stifling for them.

- ❖ I see you used red and green and blue in your picture.
- ❖ I see you made wiggly lines and round, circling shapes.
- ❖ I wonder if your picture tells a story?
- ❖ Did the shape you made remind you of anything? What did it look like to you?

Strollers and Belongings

Due to fire dept. regulations and other safety concerns, you may NOT leave strollers inside the building. Folded strollers or scooters may be stored in the back of the building in the covered space provided. However, we cannot be responsible for stolen property left there.

Dressing for Play

Some of the playgroup activities are messy, so we do provide smocks, but they may not be fully protective and some children do not like to wear them. We suggest that your child wear comfortable, washable and practical clothing. Please also be sure your child is prepared for cold and inclement weather as they enjoy trips to the outdoors in all seasons.

We ask that you provide a change of clothing in case of emergency (some potty-trained children still have accidents occasionally) or in the event they are soiled or wet from snow/rain. Please label all clothing items.

Napping Arrangement

Napping is mandatory only for children who are staying for the 6-hour session. For children staying 4 hours, we provide quiet time for rest after lunch.

Nutrition

Please provide a healthy snack and water for your child daily. If your child is staying for lunch, please bring a bagged lunch and water bottle with your child's name on it. We do have a refrigerator if you like to bring cold food but we do not heat up food in the microwave.

Please do not allow your child to bring sweets, except for pre-planned celebrations. You must indicate if there are foods your child is not allowed to have during celebrations or snack times.

We will occasionally experiment with cooking and preparing healthy snacks together. This is the joy of having a playgroup in a home with a kitchen available! We may occasionally ask for help with contributions to these fun preparations.

Toys and Playthings from Home

We will have sharing days where your child will be encouraged to bring toys or objects from home. But generally, it is acceptable if your child wishes to bring his/her own toy on other days, we can put the toy in a special place so that it will not be lost or broken during the playtime.

Birthdays

If you would like to celebrate your child's birthday at the Playgroup, you are welcome to bring in a treat for all the children to enjoy at snack time. **Please do not bring in treats to share which contain nuts.**

Walking Trips

We will be taking walking trips daily, weather permitting. Trips will be either around the neighborhood (on sidewalks) or to the park across the street where they will be playing games in the field, exploring well trafficked trails, making art and treasure hunting in nature. Occasionally children may want to visit Vanderbilt Playground where they can play on a structure. Children will be escorted safely to areas where all children can be seen at all times. Children will be wearing vests or t-shirts that help us to identify them. We ensure that children stay together safely crossing streets by providing a walking rope with handles, with one teacher in front and one in back of the line at all times. A release form is required from parents so that we may take children on these excursions. If you do not wish to allow your child to participate, this Playgroup cannot accept your child, as we will not have a person on staff to wait indoors with your child.

Contacting Staff During Playgroup

If a parent has an emergency need to withdraw a child from a playgroup session, he/she may contact the director by telephone at 646-236-3116. Texting might be best, unless it is an emergency. Please refrain from contacting us during playgroup hours as this is disruptive to the flow of our class. We are happy to speak with you about any concerns on off hours.

Emergency Playgroup Closure

In the event that the director has an emergency need to be absent, we will attempt to notify parents of need to cancel the session. In the rare event that this happens, we offer make-up days on Mondays, to be scheduled by the teacher. When New York City public schools cancel opening on any given day, such as for snow, so too will Story Tree Playgroup.

Substitute Teachers and Parent Volunteers

If you are interested in helping out by being a substitute teacher for the assistant, or a regular volunteer, contact Elisha to find out about paperwork needed to register you. Filing paperwork for this purpose can take some time.

Absence Policy

For three-day per week students, we allow for two make-ups per child in the event that he/she needs to be out of school. This helps children with consistency and does not overly complicate our scheduling. We are unable to offer more than that.

Emergency Evacuations, Sheltering in Place Procedures & Safety Drills

In the event of an emergency evacuation, we will call 911 and notify parents after reaching the safe place to meet. Our safe places are as follows:

Primary Relocation Site: PS 154, 1625 11th Ave., 718-935-4267

Secondary Relocation Site: Bene Pizzeria, 157 Prospect Park SW, 718-686-0046

Other Relocation Site: Elk Café, 154 Prospect Park SW, 718-835-5500

We will contact you to notify you where we are so you can collect your child. We will also leave a notice on the door to alert you as to where we are. Make sure to always update us in writing if there is a change your contact information.

In the event of emergencies that require sheltering in place, we will also contact you.

We conduct a fire drill once a month and a shelter in place drill twice annually. You will be notified in advance when these drills are to be conducted.

Allergies

If your child has any allergies, please make sure you note this on the registration form. If any child in the playgroup is allergic to nuts, we will maintain a nut free environment. In an emergency, where a child is suffering an allergic reaction, we will respond by calling 911 and getting your child to the nearest emergency room.

Illness and Infectious Disease

If your child contracts an infectious disease or illness, e.g. measles, mumps, chicken pox, conjunctivitis, strep throat, etc, please let us know. The Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control and the Medical Committee of the Day Care Council guidelines require that you do NOT bring your child to school when ill. We are not permitted to deviate from these guidelines.

Please let us know if your child is unwell due to a sickness, diarrhea, a virus or flu, or has an unusual rash. If your child has a fever, he/she should not attend the playgroup until the fever has passed for 24 hours. Also let us know if your child was injured since the last time he/she was at the playgroup (including cuts or bruises).

Every parent is depending on the cooperation and good health policies of all the families in the program. In the event that a child is ill during the Playgroup session, a parent will be notified for pick-up. In the event that a parent cannot be reached, we will contact the people on the child's emergency contact list. Therefore, it is very important that the list be kept up-to-date. While waiting for a parent or caregiver to arrive, classroom staff will settle your child into a quiet part of the classroom. Please do not send your child to the Playgroup if you suspect he or she is "coming down with something", as many illnesses are most contagious in the early stages.

Parental Requirements:

- If your child will be absent from the program, please contact us to report the absence as well as his/her symptoms.
- Before returning your child to the playgroup, ask for a doctor's note, indicating the diagnosis and the date of return. If your child develops a highly contagious disease, an email will be sent to the rest of your class to inform them of exposure, but will not identify the child.
- We may need to contact the physician, if additional information or clarification is needed. Make sure you keep us updated with any changes to medical forms.
- Maintain your child's immunizations and schedule regular check-ups.
- Keep all of your emergency telephone numbers at the program up to date.

IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING SYMPTOMS ARE PRESENT, YOUR CHILD IS TOO ILL TO ATTEND THE PROGRAM:

- Fever- (before the use of fever reducers) 99-100 degrees F
- Unusual lethargy or irritability
- Diarrhea
- Change in consistency/frequency of bowel movement
- Grey or White stool
- Constant, copious runny nose with green or yellow mucus
- Vomiting- 2 episodes within 24 hours or 1 episode with another symptom

- Sores or rashes unless a physician confirmed allergic reaction

- Severe coughing or wheezing
- Cough is a high-pitched, croupy or whooping sound
- Persistent cough that interferes with the child's activities
- Eye irritation- discharge of pus, swelling, redness of eyelid lining

Children must be symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to the program. **Please keep you your child home until he/she has been fever-free, vomit free, and diarrhea-free for 24 hours.**

Our program is licensed by the Department of Health. Besides the common cold, we report all communicable disease to them and follow their recommendations. We strictly enforce our sick policy. If a child develops a fever while in our care, the family will be contacted to come pick up their child.

Besides keeping your child home when sick, the best line of defense is hand washing. Therefore our teachers are vigilant with our hand washing policy (arrival time, before meals, after sneezing, coughing, wiping noses etc.)

Medication

You are required to notify us when medication is administered to your child upon daily admittance to the program. This is regulatory law and also helps us to know better how to address any health issue your child may have on a daily basis. When your child is ready to return to school but requires medication during the school day to do so, a parent or approved caregiver must come to the school to administer it to the child.

If you wish to allow us to administer over-the-counter topical ointments, lotions and creams, and sprays (such as sunscreen or insect repellent), a signed letter of approval from you is required.

There are only two conditions under which we are allowed to administer emergency medication: severe allergic reactions (anaphylactic shock) and asthma. We are authorized to administer an epinephrine auto injector, Diphenhydramine in combination with an auto injector, and/or asthma inhaler and nebulizers in emergencies. However, these items must be provided by parents if your child is at risk.

Confidentiality

While we encourage frequent communication and discussions, any conversation, medical information or written communication about a child is absolutely confidential. If you would like to be part of a class list in order to better communicate with other parents and set up play dates, please provide written consent and your contact information will be added to an email group.

Child Safety and Protection Guidelines

We will be receiving periodic inspections from the Department of Health. Records are kept on site for this purpose. We keep records of your child's developmental and emotional progress, as well as, records of your child's health history and daily health. Information about any child in the program is confidential and will not be given to anyone except the Department of Health Office, its designees or other persons authorized by law unless the child's parent gives written permission.

We keep accident reports in the event that your child is injured during the program. As a licensed provider, one staff member who is CPR and First Aid certified is on the premises with children at all times. When skinned knees, cuts or scrapes occur, teachers clean them with soap and water and apply a bandage or ice pack as needed. If the injury is minor, parents are informed at pick-up. If the accident is more serious, parents are notified immediately. In the case of an emergency affecting your child, 911 will be called immediately and your child will be taken to the nearest emergency room and notify you right away. A teacher will remain with your child at all times.

As a licensed daycare provider, we are mandated reporters. We follow strict regulatory compliance procedures in order to maintain the safety of children and to uphold our license. Should you feel the need to file an abuse or neglect report on behalf of your child, you are advised to call the Offices of Child and Family Services at: 1-800-342-3720.

Behavior/Discipline Policy

Our approach to discipline promotes the positive self-esteem of children through clear and gentle guidance. It is important that we provide the kind of environment that supports a positive experience for all children present.

Our methods of discipline help children develop problem-solving skills that support self-control and learning to assume responsibility for one's actions. Our responses and guidance relate to the child's action and are handled without prolonged delay so that the child can become aware of the relationship between his or her actions and the consequences of those actions. We set clear and consistent rules and limits appropriate to the ages and development of children, outlining positive class rules together from the outset and frequently revisiting them as needed. This helps children understand what is expected of them and feel safe and helps them to feel they are taking an active part in enforcing the rules.

Children are never isolated, shamed or physically punished as a form of discipline. A child whose behavior harms or is likely to result in harm to the child, others or property, may be briefly separated from the group, to a safe and quiet place where he/she can be supervised and supported by a caregiver. Immediate interaction between child and caretaker will guide the child toward appropriate group behavior. We will report difficult behavior to parents when we deem it necessary to do so.

The Story Tree Playgroup environment is engaging to children and facilitates open-ended, creative and collaborative play. We carefully observe our children daily and find that children who experience being in the play zone we've constructed are generally very happy. However, if we are ever to come across a child behaving in a seriously violent manner, becoming a danger to themselves or others, we will have to contact parents for an ensuing evaluation of enrollment. Story Tree Playgroup is intended to be a fun, safe and nurturing environment for all children present. Therefore, we reserve the right to terminate enrollment for any child that has not demonstrated sufficient maturity or is otherwise disruptive to the playgroup. We expect to maintain a safe environment and appreciate parents who help support us in doing so.

We thank you for choosing Story Tree and look forward to working with you and your child.