

**NATURAL
LEARNING
ALTERNATIVE
HANDBOOK**



Natural Learning Alternative

"WHEN A CHILD IS DOING SOMETHING SHE'S PASSIONATELY INTERESTED IN, SHE GROWS LIKE A TREE-IN ALL DIRECTIONS. THIS IS HOW CHILDREN LEARN, HOW CHILDREN GROW. THEY SEND DOWN A TAPROOT LIKE A TREE IN DRY SOIL. THE TREE MAY BE STUNTED BUT IT SENDS DOWN THE ROOTS, AND SUDDENLY ONE OF THESE LITTLE TAPROOTS GOES DOWN AND STRIKES A SOURCE OF WATER. AND THE WHOLE TREE GROWS."~ JOHN HOLT

**NLA MISSION/VISION:
TO CREATE A LOVING FIRST LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT THAT CELEBRATES EACH
CHILD'S UNIQUENESS. WE BELIEVE
CHILDREN NEED FREEDOM TO EXPLORE
AND DISCOVER AND THAT CHILDREN
LEARN NATURALLY AT THEIR OWN PACE
THROUGH PLAY, NATURE AND ART.**

NLA Philosophy Influences

Bev Bos: Roseville Cooperative School

Susan Caruso: Sunflower Creative Arts

Other Resources:

Hand in Hand Parenting: online classes/articles

AhaParenting.com Laura Markham

Unconditional Parenting moving from rewards and punishments to love and reason by Alfie Kohn

Janet Lansbury all books, blog, soundcloud audio and articles

Teacher Tom blogs

Heart-Centered Teaching Inspired by Nature by Nancy Rosenow

What if Everybody Understood Child Development by Rae Pica

The Power of Guidance by Dan Gartrell

Explorations Early Learning: Podcasts

The Nature Principle by Richard Louv

The Power of Play by David Elkind

Taking Back Childhood by Nancy Carlsson-Paige

Easy to Love, Difficult to Discipline by Becky A. Bailey

It's Ok Not to Share and Other Renegade Rules for Raising Competent and Compassionate Kids by Heather Shumaker

Bright Not Broken by Diane M. Kennedy and Rebecca S. Banks

Video: Dr. Peter Gray on the Decline of Play

NLA VALUES:

*Child-led Play is central to learning!

*All children should be treated with respect and should be seen in the highest light.

*Conflicts are opportunities for learning and growth for everyone! Conflict resolution should be kind, tender and respectful of where the child is developmentally.

*Feelings are important and children should be encouraged to express them.

“Feelings are like fingerprints, the color of our eyes, the sound of our voices, unique to each and unrepeatable. When you bury your feelings, they don’t die, you bury them alive.”~John Powell

*Children are active learners as they move their whole bodies to explore, experiment and solve problems. We trust a child's innate curiosity allows them to navigate what they are ready to learn. Earlier is not better!

"Every stage of development is complete in itself.

The 3 year old is not an incomplete 5 year old. The child is not an incomplete adult.

Never are we simply on our way!

Always we have arrived!

Enjoy Now!" ~J.C. Pearce

*Children learn best through hands-on experiences using all senses.



**"If it hasn't been
in the Hand...
and the Body...
it can't be in
the Brain!"**



- Bev Bos

*Learning should be developmentally appropriate and meaningful to a child's life.

*Children do not have adult motivations for actions, but are driven by developmental needs. Sometimes this need is simply "connection."

*Instead of "misbehaviors" we view conflicts as "mistaken behaviors."

*Guiding and helping children learn social skills (they are not born knowing and it takes lots of practice) helps build a loving, accepting community. Learning democratic life skills includes children being allowed to express strong emotions in acceptable ways, to understand how others are seeing things, to solve problems cooperatively. Some adults

don't ever learn these skills, so let us remember these are children just beginning this process!

*Nature provides endless opportunities for exploring and discovering!

*Mixed-age learning communities offer a family like environment that encourages cooperation and collaboration.

"....age-mixed play allows the younger children to learn skills and sophisticated ways of thinking from older ones, and it allows the older ones to learn how to nurture, lead, and, in general, be the mature person in the relationship."~ Peter Gray (Free to Learn)

Parent Cooperative Model:

NLA is a Parent participant program! Our Toddler and Mixed-age programs require a parent to stay and engage in the environment facilitating activities and problem solving.

A Cooperative Model requires the help and engagement of the community.

If Conflicts arise:

Address conflicts as they arise (with the child, the parent or a lead/assistant teacher).

Emailing later the same day is another option to get the conversation started.

Conflicts can be matters of high emotion for both the children and the adults. We cannot expect to solve every situation perfectly, but we can work towards a resolution that we are all comfortable with. Every conflict should be viewed as a "learning" opportunity and a chance to model healthy communication (as uncomfortable as it may be).

Parent Responsibilities:

Our Parent Participant cooperative model is only successful with parent interaction!

Come ready to “plug in” to and for the children without computers/cell phones. If you have an important phone call to make (it happens to us all) please pull another parent “in” and step “out” to the far backyard or front yard, so as not to disturb the children’s environment. No cellular or game devices for the children while at NLA please.

You know your child better than anyone and you can help us as teachers and parent helpers to know and understand your child’s unique needs. We are all unique and we have different ways of dealing with stress and conflict. Approach each situation objectively. Within a community we have people from all walks of life with different experiences and tools to work with. Let us work together as things come up. There is no one size fits all approach or answer to

parenting or to any given situation, but let us remain as “learners” (just like the children) supporting, growing and working together. We have resources and provide parent chats too. Our community is a safe place to question, talk about and work through issues that arise. We are all works in progress. Sometimes parenting issues will arise that feel uncomfortable and require us to come up with solutions together (with conversation about differing opinions and parenting styles)! Just like the children we can look at these as opportunities for growth.

See each and every child in the “highest light.” We are all learning and growing and we look at any conflict at NLA as a “learning opportunity” for us all.

Model calm and respect for everyone while at NLA. We all have things going on in our lives and if you need extra help or if you or your child are “processing” something or are just not feeling 100% let us know :). We are

all human ;).

Observe:

We can learn so much about and from children by just “observing.” This doesn’t mean “hover” or “interrupt” their play, but staying around just in case you are needed.

Yes, you can play too :). Get involved as long as it doesn't change the child’s play or ideas.

Listen:

Listen to the conversations and write down anything you want to share later! You can also write down their stories and songs! We love to “share” these with the other children at the end of the day.

Help guide:

Observe, listen and help guide when needed. This doesn't mean solve their conflicts, this means guide when a child needs help (with the words, with not “hurting” someone, with helping someone they have hurt). Every situation and every child is different, so there is no “one-size fits

all” here and no “magic wand” to solve each situation that may arise. Remember model “**respect**” for all children and adults and to “lead with your heart.” When **you** “need a little help from a friend” please ask.

Attending our **Parent Toolbox** sessions can shed some light on how to help guide conflict/resolution during our time together as well as explain why we do what we do.

An example: We don’t force apologies at NLA, but try to help find a way to recognize a “hurt” that the child can understand (a wet paper towel, an ice pack, the NLA peace bird, a picture or a hug).

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Facilitator:

Help facilitate activities without modeling. All of our activities are “open ended” and most are more about the “process” than the “product.” It is amazing how creative the children are and how they approach each activity differently. Be as excited and full of wonder as the children are and ask

questions!

If a child is engaged in an activity leave them be. No need to force story/song time. They are listening and will join us when they are ready.

Clean-up:

During the day tidy up areas that the children have moved on from to make it more inviting for the next group of children. At the end of the day jump in and help with clean-up. You will learn where things go and if you don't know just ask.

If you need to be with your children that is the priority of course! Make sure there are parents watching and assisting children while cleaning is happening. If you have an infant we understand, just do what you can!

Sharing Time:

Sharing time (aka show and tell) is a special time for NLA'rs. It is a time for each child to be in the spot light, to be heard and to be a part of conversation with the community!

Sharing time offers the children a chance to use expressive language and creativity as they give clues and guesses and it is just plain FUN!

Things to keep in mind:

No need to force your child to share.

Sharing time will be different for each child depending on their age and personality.

Adult Sharing:

You are invited to bring your passions, talents, careers to our community!

Celebrations:

Let us know in advance and we will celebrate your child's birthday with a beautiful candle and song.

Treats on the healthier side are welcome (doesn't have to be homemade) nor completely sugar-free ;). We do have some children with allergies, so let the group know what you are bringing so they can plan for their own child.

Inclement Weather:

NLA follows Cobb county weather closings.

If the weather is questionable please check Meetup to see if the day has been canceled. Check your email and text messages as well before heading out. You are also welcome to call or text me (770) 820-4044. Canceled days will be credited.

Payment Requirements:

To secure your weekly space please pay for four days or a month at a time. "Drop-ins" must be okayed in advance. In order to make sure our rent and everything is paid we can not offer "credits" if your child misses a day (long term illness or other serious reason are exceptions).

Meetup is now using "Wepay" instead of "Paypal", but Payments can still be made through my Paypal email :Joyniss@aol.com

Checks should be made to Natural Learning Alternative

Cash in person is fine too.

Please sign-in every day when you arrive.

List of items we always need:

Art supplies: glitter, glue

Big bottles of vinegar

Big bags of Baking soda (Costco)

Play sand

Birdseed

Wood glue

Tinkering items: items to take apart and explore

Big appliance boxes

Interesting recyclables for building

Gallons of drinking water

Coffee

Paper Goods/plastic ware

