



Growing Tree
Preschool
AT GURNEE PARK DISTRICT

Parent Handbook for children enrolled in Playschool for 2.5-3.5 year olds

2026-2027

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Growing Tree Preschool Philosophy

Welcome to the Gurnee Park District Growing Tree Preschool! Our goal and purpose is reflected in our Preschool Philosophy, and we are confident that the Gurnee Park District Growing Tree Preschool will aid in the growth and development of your child.

The Gurnee Park District mission is Enriching community through fun and nature and our preschool philosophy carries forward that theme. In preschool our philosophy is to educate children through guided and free exploration in a play-based, creative and nurturing atmosphere. We believe that honoring and nurturing the individuality of each child will encourage respect for oneself and for others. We strive to develop a united common goal between families and preschool staff to build academic, social and self-help skills. Our ultimate goal is for children to love coming to school.

Our primary goal is to provide your child with the best possible preschool experience. We value the diversity of each family, and each child's individuality, and strive to build self-esteem and respect for others. We look forward to every day and the happiness we can bring to your child's learning experience.

Included in this handbook are our objectives, general information, policies and procedures utilized in Playschool and other pertinent information. Please read the handbook carefully. Questions and additional information will be provided at the Parent Orientation Meeting.

Parent Orientation Meeting – for parents of children in the 2 ½ - 3 ½ year old Playschool class This meeting is for parents only. **No children of any age may attend.**

Tuesday, August 18, 2026

5:15-5:45 p.m.

Hunt Club Park Community Center Gym

920 N. Hunt Club Road, Gurnee

Meet the Teachers

Tuesday, September 8, 2026 from 9:30-10:00a. The child enrolled and parents may attend the meet and greet.

Class Start/End Dates:

Class begins on Thursday, September 10, 2026 and ends on Tuesday, May 11, 2027

Important Phone Numbers

Note: these phone numbers are land lines

Gurnee Park District (Main Office) (847) 623-7788
Room #1 (847) 599-5461

Sabrina Hinkens, Manager (847) 599-3767
Aimee Schneider, Coordinator (847) 599-5499

Program Location

Hunt Club Community Center
920 N. Hunt Club Road
Gurnee, IL 60031

Photography/video, for publicity purposes, may be taken during the program.

Entrance Age Requirement

2 ½ years old on or before September 1, 2026

Forms Required/Submitting Forms Using ePACT

We utilize a digital form collection system, ePACT. You will receive an email from member.support@epactnetwork.com with instructions to set up your account and complete the form. You will upload your child's birth certificate and health examination form to your online ePACT account. Please be sure to complete the parent section of the health form prior to uploading it to ePACT. We are unable to upload forms to your ePACT account and we are unable to accept paper forms. **Your ePACT account must be complete no later than August 18, 2026.** Children may not attend the program until all forms have been submitted.

Forms Required to attend Playschool

1. Online preschool information completed in ePACT
2. Uploaded Copy of Birth Certificate to ePACT
3. Uploaded Copy of Child Health Examination form listing necessary immunizations, signed and dated by the physician of record. This form is available at every physician's office.

Required Immunizations

Following are the required immunizations to be completed prior to starting school:

- 4 doses - DPT/DTaP: Diphtheria, Tetanus, and Pertussis
- 3 doses - IPV: Inactive Polio Vaccine
- 1 dose - MMR: Measles, Mumps, and Rubella
- 4 doses - Hib: Haemophilus b Conjugate Vaccine
- 3 doses – HepB: Hepatitis B
- 1 dose – Varicella

If medication is to be given during program hours or if your child has an allergy that requires medication while at Playschool, a separate Dispense Medication Form must be completed and uploaded to your ePACT account. Medication in the original container must be given to the teachers on the first day of school. Please contact the Preschool Manager for the Dispense Medication Form. This form can also be found at <https://www.gurneeparkdistrict.com/programs/preschool-programs/growing-tree-preschool/>

Preparing Your Child for Playschool

Help your child understand that you will come back by leaving your child with a trusted adult. **Leave your child with a trusted adult at a location other than your home as many times as possible before Playschool begins.**

Make sure your child understands the words/phrases (in English) that will be used in preschool:

- Mommy/Daddy always comes back
- Teacher
- No/yes
- Sit
- Wait
- Carpet (for circle time)
- Table/chair
- Wash hands
- Cubby (where your child will put belongings)
- Water bottle
- Later
- Listen
- Share
- Nice hands
- Quiet time
- Play time
- Do you have to go potty? (if independent using the bathroom)

Adjusting To Playschool

Because this class may be your child's first time participating in an activity without you, there may be a period of adjustment. Arriving too early or lingering too long in the classroom may cause your child to be anxious, nervous or unhappy when you leave.

- Tears do happen. This applies not only to your child, but to you as a parent. Talk to your child about going to school and the fun he/she will have with the other children.
- Be positive
- Arrive on time. For those children who are upset, having *any* parent enter the room after the day has begun may start the tears flowing again.
- Have your child use the bathroom before entering the classroom. The classroom restroom is to be used during class time. If your child needs to be changed, there is a diaper station in the general public restroom.
- Departing quickly allows the adjustment and school day to begin. Tell your child that you will return and understand that some children have to experience that you will come back before they can fully adjust.
- Your child may cry, cling, or seem upset when you leave, but this usually passes quickly or with time. Remaining with your child can extend the period of sadness and may cause a chain reaction with other children who realize a parent is still in the room. Once all parents have left and the class begins, the children can begin the process of adjustment. Engaging in an activity can help the crying stop.

- Parents are always welcome to remain in the building during class. If your child is upset, it can be very emotional for you to remain outside the classroom. Please go to the lobby or outside as your child adjusts.
- Please call the classroom, the preschool director or the preschool coordinator with any concerns. If the teachers are busy and cannot answer the phone, feel free to leave a message and your call will be returned.
- Be available by phone during the time your child is at class. If your child has a bathroom accident, we must be able to reach you.
- The teachers or Preschool Manager will be in contact with you if they feel that your child is not quite developmentally ready to make the adjustment to being in the class.

Using the Bathroom at Playschool

Toilet training is not required for this class. We do suggest having your child wear a pull-up if not toilet trained. Children this age may be learning to use the bathroom and may be excited to use the one in the classroom which is child sized. Please understand that if you send your child in underwear, they must independently know when they have to go, and manage pulling up/down their clothing, wiping and hand washing. We are unable to send children to the bathroom on a scheduled basis (i.e. every 10 minutes), but we will ask the children if they need to use the bathroom at least three times during the 2-hour class period.

Should a bowel movement occur, parents will be notified and required to come to the program to change their child.

Drop off and Pick up Procedures

- Use the main entrance of the Community Center, as the preschool entrance doors are locked at drop off and pick up time
- **All drop off/pick up will take place at the classroom door**
- The classroom door will open when class begins, and will be relocked 5 minutes later
- Please be prompt
- Park in the parking lot when you arrive to drop off and pick up your child. The drive in front of the community center is a fire lane and is reserved for emergency vehicles, maintenance, and deliveries – please do not park in this area or the handicapped spaces
- Arriving early or arriving late may cause anxiety in your child as well as other children in the class. For some children, **any** adult entering the room after the door has closed can cause tears, especially at the beginning of the school year.
- Dropping off your child late interrupts the flow of the class, and necessitates that a teacher step away from their role as teacher to let you and your child in
- Only adults aged 18 or older and listed in your ePACT online forms portal as an emergency contact/authorized pick up will be allowed to pick up your child
- Individuals picking up must be prepared to show a photo ID
- Parents using carpools should list all parents as authorized pick-ups in their child's ePACT account

Parent/Guardian Communication using Class Dojo and Monthly Calendars

The teachers will be using the online platform [Class Dojo](#) to share daily class updates, the monthly calendar, messages, photos and videos. The Preschool Manager and Coordinator will use Class Dojo to notify individual classes of communicable illness in the class (without use of child's name) and will issue reminder notifications to all families and notifications of school cancellation. It is essential that all parents/guardians are connected using class Dojo.

Late Pick Up Policy

We ask that you observe the scheduled pick-up time of 11:30a. One warning will be issued at the time of the first late pick up. Thereafter, you will be charged a \$10.00 late fee per child for every 15 minutes or fraction thereof when you or your authorized pick up person is late. Repeated late pick-ups can result in dismissal from the program. Please note: Should you be more than 30 minutes late for your first late pick up, you will receive a warning for the first 30 minutes, and the late fees will be assessed at \$10.00 for each 15 minutes thereafter per child.

We understand that emergencies may occur, so if you find yourself in such a situation, please call the classroom (see page 4.) This courtesy will alleviate anxiety on the part of the staff and your child. A late fee will still occur.

Please park in the lot when dropping off or picking up. The area is directly in front of each building is a fire lane.

What to Bring and Wear to Playschool

- Backpack large enough to hold 9"x12" home/school folder (folder will be provided)
- Reusable water bottle filled with water (no milk or juice)
- Complete set of extra clothes including socks
- Children who are not fully toilet trained may wear a pull-up and can try to use the toilet
- Children should wear clothing that is easy to pull up and down
 - No belts, overalls or multiple layers such as tights under their pants
- Closed-toe shoes (gym shoes) – no sandals, flip flops or Crocs

Toys/Items from Home

Please do not send toys or other personal items with your child unless specifically requested on the calendar.

Learning Through Play

The goal of Playschool for 2 ½ - 3 ½ year olds is to help children learn to be without a parent or caregiver in a classroom setting, transition from one activity to another, follow directions, take turns and play cooperatively. Learning for children in this age range is episodic. The ideas change quickly, and activities vary with the moment. Within any single activity, such as digging in the sand table, the child may have numerous events that are educational. The child may discover, for example, that a spoon handle makes a different mark in the sensory table sand than the bowl of the spoon. Children may also learn that a playmate cannot see an object on their side of the block tower, or that play is more enjoyable when toys are shared. All of these encounters are educational, add value to the child's knowledge base, and are an essential part of a classroom experience. Because of the experiential nature of the program, much of what the children learn in class cannot be taken home in their backpack.

Children learn through play and develop tangible skills socially, emotionally, physically and educationally. Not all children learn at the same rate and through the same process. Playing in a group environment is a very important part of learning at this time in your child's life. Certain behaviors are common among young children such as biting, pushing, and a limited ability to share and take turns. Please know that we will be working with the children to develop appropriate cooperative play, however, repeated incidents of biting mean that a child is not developmentally ready for a group setting.

Social Skill Development

Our teachers strive to provide a happy and positive atmosphere in which children learn and grow. Sometimes children find themselves in situations that require redirection and reminders. We make every effort to keep children safe and happy, however, sometimes children need our guidance to help them with social situations. Please be aware that some children will react physically (biting, hitting, pushing, throwing objects), and verbally (“you’re not my friend” “I don’t like you”) at this point in development, and we will correct the situation as soon as it arises. You will be informed of hitting/pushing/biting should these behaviors occur, or if there is a pattern of behavior about which we are concerned. We may ask for your suggestions and confer with you on specific ideas to help your child's social development and may determine that your child is not developmentally ready to be in a classroom setting.

Health Policy

It is extremely important to work together to stop the spread of illness at school.

- Wellness Checks – all parents will assess their child's wellness every day before dropping off at Playschool
- Teachers/staff will regularly conduct visual assessments of children for signs of illness, which could include flushed cheeks, congestion, coughing, fatigue or other symptoms
- Please keep your child at home if there is **any** indication of possible illness

Symptoms to watch for: cough, congestion, runny nose, fever, sore throat, headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, chills, fatigue, muscle pain.

- Children experiencing any of the symptoms listed above should stay home
- Children experiencing any of the symptoms listed above will be sent home
- If anyone in your household is experiencing any of the above symptoms or has tested positive for COVID-19, Influenza, RSV etc. your child must stay home
- Please do not send your child to Playschool if he or she exhibits any signs or symptoms of being ill or if exposed to a contagious illness. If you are concerned that your child may be ill, please take him/her to the doctor before dropping off at Playschool.

Children must be fever free without the use of fever reducing medication, symptom free, no sign of rash and feeling well prior to returning to Playschool for at least 24 hours.

If your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease such as strep throat, Influenza, COVID 19, RSV, pink eye, Impetigo or other rash, Rotavirus, head lice etc.) and attended class within one class day of onset of symptoms, please inform the classroom teacher.

Children may be asked to wear a mask to reduce the spread of germs from coughing, sneezing or runny nose.

The health and safety of each child in the class and their family, as well as the health and safety of the teachers and their families depends on each parent adhering to these health guidelines.

Please be available by phone if your child should become ill. Sick children will be isolated from contact with their class. The longer a sick child remains at school the greater the risk of transmission to other children and staff. **The teachers or Preschool Coordinator/Manager will make the final determination if a child should be sent home from school.**

If your child is injured or becomes ill while at Playschool and requires more than first aid, the following steps will be taken:

- Contact the parent/caregiver/emergency contact
- If possible, the child will be removed from the area and given care. All staff members are trained in CPR/first aid/AED, classrooms are equipped with first aid kits, and portable first aid kits are taken to the playground and other outside areas in case immediate care is needed.
- If necessary, an injured/ill child will be transported by ambulance to the nearest hospital. A teacher will remain with the child until a parent arrives.

Behavior Management

1-2-3 Magic model is used in our classrooms and is a very useful and positive technique for preschool aged children. The environment in the classroom is developed so that children understand that everyone makes mistakes and acts inappropriately at times and the system is explained. Positive reinforcement is given to children engaged in appropriate and desirable behavior. Inappropriate or undesirable behavior is addressed simply in a soft voice with the first warning. If the behavior continues or is repeated, the child is prompted with a second warning. If the behavior occurs again, a consequence is given. The consequence can be different depending on the age of the child and the circumstances and may include but is not limited to redirection or a break from an activity not to exceed the child's age.

Code of Conduct

Children are expected to exhibit appropriate behavior while participating in programs and activities. A positive approach to discipline for children, specifically 1-2-3 Magic will be used in the preschool classes. Children who have behaviors that impact their own safety or that of others, who have behaviors that negatively affect the experience of others, use inappropriate language or actions, or who are physically violent or threatening may be dismissed from the program. The Gurnee Park District reserves the right to dismiss a participant whose behavior, or that of their parent, is inappropriate or endangers the safety of self or others, and/or negatively impacts the experience of others.

Emergency Closings

Go to your child's Class Dojo (more information on Class Dojo on page 10) to see if Playschool is closed due to weather or other emergency circumstances. Information will be posted by 7:00 a.m. It is always your discretion that determines if your child will attend in bad weather.

2026-2027 School Calendar – Important Dates 2.5-3.5 Year old Playschool

September 8	Meet the Teachers 9:30-10:00a
September 10	1 st day of school
November 3	Election Day – No School
November 23-27	Thanksgiving Holiday Break - No School
December 21-January 4	Winter Break – No School (school resumes 1/5/27)
March 22-March 26	Spring Break - No School
May 11	Last Day/Moving Up Celebration
May 15	End of Year Event

Communication through Class Dojo, Home/School Folder

Teachers will be using the online platform, Class Dojo, to share messages, updates from class and photos. This is also the way emergency school cancellations are communicated. Please use the message feature to communicate with the teachers before/after class. Issues that are specific to your child's development can be discussed in person once all other parents and children have left, or by phone. Your child will be provided with a 9"x12" pocket folder. Please check your child's folder for items sent home. Please note that their backpack must be large enough to accommodate the home/school folder.

Class List

Because of privacy concerns, we do not give out name, address, email and phone information for the students in our classes. However, if you check the appropriate box when completing your child's ePACT form, you will authorize us to include your information on a list that will be distributed to all students in your child's class who have also authorized release of their information. We hope you will find this list helpful when contacting other families for play dates or mailing invitations to social events. Contacting families for solicitation of any kind is strictly prohibited.

Playground/Large Motor Days

Once the children have settled into the classroom routine we may schedule special playground or large motor activities during the last 15-20 minutes of class. This will most likely occur in the spring portion of the school year.

Look What I Can Do!

The focus of Playschool for 2 ½ year olds is social development. As such, much of what your child will learn in the classroom cannot be sent home but is instead about the experience of being with peers and teachers. You will receive a Look What I Can Do progress report in December and in May, and you may schedule a "check in" meeting with the teachers at any time. The program is designed as an intro to preschool experience in a program that builds as the children progress from year to year. You and your child will have much to look forward to in the three and four year old preschool years!

Payment Policy and Procedures

Participants will pay a \$75 non-refundable registration fee at the time of registration. The first tuition payment is due on July 15. If registering after July 15, the \$75 registration fee and one tuition payment will be due at the time of registration and, once paid, are non-refundable. Subsequent payments are automatically withdrawn from the account or card you provided at the time of registration and are made on the 15th of the month prior (i.e. October tuition is withdrawn on September 15th). Tuition is based on the **total number of days in the school year divided into nine equal installments and not on the number of school days in the month.** You will receive an email statement on the 15th when the automatic payment has processed. Once made, tuition payments are non-refundable and tuition is not pro-rated for partial month attendance.

- Our Federal Tax ID Number is 36-2712925.
- Questions concerning payments? Call Kim McCormack at (847) 599-3751.