



Growing Tree
Preschool
AT GURNEE PARK DISTRICT

Parent Handbook for children enrolled in 3 and 4 year old classes

2026-2027

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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 preschool 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 enrolled in a 3 or 4 year old class regardless of location) This meeting is for all parents of children enrolled in a 3 or 4 year old class regardless of location. **No children of any age may attend this meeting.**

Tuesday, August 18, 2026
6:00-7:00 p.m.
Hunt Club Park Community Center Gym
920 N. Hunt Club Road, Gurnee

Class Start Dates:

Monday - Friday Classes begin Monday, August 24
Monday/Wednesday/Friday Classes begin Monday, August 24
Tuesday/Thursday Classes begin Tuesday, August 25

Class End Dates:

Tuesday, May 11, 2027 or Wednesday, May 12, 2027

Meet the Teachers – for the preschool student and parents

Viking Park Classes

Wednesday August 19

All Classes 5:30-6:00p

Hunt Club Classes

Wednesday August 19

Monday/Wednesday/Friday 3-year-old class 5:30-6:00p

Monday-Friday 3-year-old class 5:30-6:00p

Tuesday/Thursday 3-year-old class 5:30-6:00p

Monday/Wednesday/Friday 4-year-old class 6:15-6:45p

Monday-Friday 4-year-old class 6:15-6:45p

Monday-Friday Extended Day 4-year-old class 6:15-6:45p

Important Phone Numbers

Note: these phone numbers are land lines

Gurnee Park District (Main Office) (847) 623-7788

Viking Preschool Room #1 (847) 599-5491

Hunt Club Extended Day classroom (847) 599-5475

Hunt Club Preschool Room #1 (847) 599-5461

Hunt Club Preschool Room #2 (847) 599-5462

Hunt Club Preschool Room #3 (847) 599-5463

Hunt Club Preschool Room #4 (847) 599-5476

Sabrina Hinkens, Preschool Manager (847) 599-3767

Aimee Schneider, Coordinator (847) 599-5499

Program Locations

Viking Park Community Center
4374 Old Grand Avenue
Gurnee, IL 60031

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 Requirements

3 years old on or before September 1, 2026, for a 3 year old class

4 years old or older on or before September 1, 2026, for a 4 year old class

Independence in the Bathroom (Toilet Trained):

Pull-ups and diapers are prohibited. Children must be able to independently recognize the urge to go to the bathroom in an amount of time sufficient to get to the bathroom and use the toilet. The child must be able to independently pull down necessary clothing, sit/stand, wipe, flush, pull up necessary clothing, wash/dry hands. To maximize classroom instruction time, teachers are not able to send a child to the bathroom in regular increments (i.e. every 30 minutes), touch a child to facilitate urination, wipe or change children. It is understood that infrequently children may have an accident. We will monitor while the child changes clothes but will call parents to change the child should a bowel movement occur.

The beginning of the school year is a time of adjustment and some parents may want to send their child in a pull up as they acclimate. This will be allowed through October 1, after which children must attend in underwear.

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. Students who attended our preschool program in 2025-2026 will need to reconfirm the information in their ePACT account. Your ePACT account, new or reconfirmed, must be complete no later than August 18th. **Children may not attend the program until all forms have been submitted.**

Forms Required

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
- 3 doses - MMR: Measles, Mumps, and Rubella
- 3 doses – Hepatitis B
- 4 doses - Hib: Haemophilus influenzae type b
- 4 doses - PCV: Invasive Pneumococcal Disease
- 1 dose – Varicella

If medication is to be given during program hours or if your child has an allergy that requires medication while at preschool, 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/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2020DispenseMedicationForm_Fillable.pdf

Adjusting To School

Please arrive on time. Arriving too early can cause anxiety, arriving late causes your child to miss the part of the day when children and teachers greet each other and socialize during fine motor activities at the tables. Arriving late also requires a teacher to step away to unlock the door and disrupts the flow of class. Departing quickly allows the adjustment and the school day to begin. Tell your child that you will return and understand that some children need to experience that you will come back before they can fully adjust.

Our teachers are trained and experienced in their approach to helping your child adjust to preschool. Attending **Meet the Teachers** and talking to your child about coming to preschool is very important. Seeing new friends, the classroom, meeting the teachers, and finding their classroom cubby before school begins helps with the adjustment. Sometimes tears happen. Be reassured that we will care gently for your child, however, please be available for our call if your child is having an exceptionally difficult time adjusting during the first days of school.

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 may react physically (biting, hitting, pushing, throwing objects), and verbally ("you're not my friend" "I don't like you" "You can't play") at this point in development, and we will correct the situation as soon as it arises. You will be informed of the behaviors mentioned above should they occur on a regular basis, 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 we may determine that your child is not developmentally ready for a classroom setting.

Curriculum

Our curriculum is based on the Illinois State Board of Education Early Learning Standards for preschool. The eight learning areas are: Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Science, Physical Development and Health, Fine Arts, Foreign Language, Social/Emotional Development. Within these learning areas are more than 100 benchmarks that are incorporated in the curriculum throughout the three and four year old preschool years. More information as to monthly themes and daily activities will be provided on the monthly calendar and Class Dojo updates. More information about Class Dojo is on page 11. The most important components of our curriculum include learning to be flexible and being self-sufficient with clothing and belongings (i.e. zipping, switching from shoes to boots, stowing belongings in the cubby, bringing a water bottle, remembering home/school folder), returning a greeting given by teachers/staff, treating all children and adults with kindness and respect.

Role of the Parent

The first days of preschool are exciting days for both parents and children. Children enjoy carrying a special backpack, wearing a special outfit, and look forward to meeting old and new friends in the classroom. This day may also contain some anxious moments for your child and you.

- Be very positive, but being overly enthusiastic can cause anxiety in some children
- Adopt a calm, positive and reassuring approach if your child expresses hesitancy
- Some children have no anxiety or separation issues, some do on the first day(s), and some do not in the first week but experience this later
- Returning preschoolers may also have a period of adjustment and experience anxiety

Parent anxiety is common and should be expected. Preschool is a new experience for parents also.

- Know that your child's ability to be independent in a classroom setting enhances the parent/child bond
- You will enjoy hearing about the exciting new things your child is learning and about fun new experiences
- Avoid showing emotion (crying) in front of your child. Some children become upset when they see this.
- Preschool is an opportunity for parents to meet other parents and form lasting friendships

Parents can provide children with some important tools to ensure a smooth transition and ongoing success in preschool.

- Have your child stay with a trusted adult without you present before school begins to reduce separation anxiety
- Establish a solid bedtime routine so your child is well rested each school day
- Prepare a healthy breakfast for your child before coming to school
- Make school an important family priority
 - ✓ Empty your child's backpack and home/school folder together
 - ✓ Ask your child how they made the art project
 - ✓ Compliment their effort to write their name and practice at home
 - ✓ Have them sing a new song learned at school
 - ✓ Ask them which center was their favorite to play in
 - ✓ Tell your child how proud you are of them and what they accomplished
- Refer to the monthly calendar and be sure to help prepare your child for what is happening at preschool. Example: pick out a clothing item on "wear red day."

What to Bring and Wear to School

- Backpack large enough to hold 9"x12" home/school folder (folder will be provided)
- Reusable water bottle filled with water (no juice or milk)
- Complete set of extra clothes including socks and underwear
- Closed-toe shoes (gym shoes)- sandals and Crocs are highly discouraged
- Jacket or sweatshirt
- Sunscreen applied (fall and spring)
- Winter: warm jacket, snow pants, hat, mittens, snow boots with Velcro (tie boots are highly discouraged)

Children enrolled in the Extended Day Preschool, Adventure Club or lunch time enrichment classes will need to bring a lunch and snack to school each day.

Recommended clothing and shoes

Our weather can change dramatically in just a couple of hours and the children will play outdoors each day. Children should wear comfortable clothing that can get dirty. While every effort will be made to protect clothing, painting and other preschool activities are often messy. Sandals and Crocs are dangerous when children are running or using playground equipment, and woodchips from the playground surface result in splinters and hurt feet.

Toys/Items from Home

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

Outdoor Play

The children will play outdoors as much as possible when the temperature and wind chill is 20 degrees or above. Our curriculum includes teaching children to put on their winter gear and to keep track of their belongings. There may be days when the temperature allows for outdoor play, but the activities planned inside keep us from going outside.

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 preschool or Adventure Club
- 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 preschool 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 preschool.

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 school for at least 24 hours.

If your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease such as strep throat, Influenza, RSV, COVID 19, 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, coordinator or preschool 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 preschool 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 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.

Drop Off Service Procedures (may be subject to change)

All children must be walked to the classroom door at the beginning of the school year by their parent/caregiver. You will be notified when drop off service will begin.

Each child must be signed in each day. Please note the time of drop off along with a signature of the person dropping off.

For the safety and care of the children enrolled in our programs, please follow the guidelines listed below for arrival at preschool when curbside drop off begins.

- Cell phone use is prohibited during drop off
- There is no parking anywhere in the driveway in front of the buildings at either location as this is a fire lane
- Use the handicapped parking only if you have a tag or license to park there. Blocking access to handicapped spaces is not permitted.
- Arrive on time. The preschool entrance and classroom doors will be unlocked 10 minutes before class begins. Classroom doors, hallway and preschool entrance doors are locked when class is in session. If you are late, park in a parking lot and escort your child to the classroom.
- Each child must be signed in with the teacher. Please note the time of drop off along with a signature of who is dropping off.
- Please have your child fully dressed, backpack accessible, goodbyes given and ready to go. If needed, the parent will get out and unbuckle their child and return to their vehicle to keep the flow of traffic moving.
- Once your child has been dropped off, exit to allow room for the next vehicles to pull forward. Should you need to discuss a matter at length with the teacher, please do so after class, write a note, or call so that we can keep the flow of traffic moving.
- Wait until the car(s) in front of you pull away before you leave.
- If your child is not ready to walk in safely and independently, or if you want to walk your child in, please continue to park in one of the lots and escort your child into the building without crossing between cars in the drop off lane. Please inform anyone bringing your child to school of this procedure.
- The beginning of the preschool day is an important time of socialization and acclimation. It is difficult for children who arrive late to a class already in progress, creates a distraction for the other children in the class and disrupts the teaching process.

Drop Off Service: Procedures During Inclement/Extreme Weather

We are pleased to provide drop off service as a convenience to our families however, the safety of our teaching staff is also of utmost importance. Please note the procedures below.

- Drop off service will be cancelled if:
 - The lightening detector is active, the teachers will not be able to remain outside
 - The temperature **and/or** wind chill is zero degrees or below on Weather.com at the time of drop-off and at the location of each community center.
- We will notify you by posting in Class Dojo if drop off is cancelled due to extreme weather.
- If drop-off service is cancelled, the teachers will stay at the preschool entrances of each building. You may walk your child to the safety of a sidewalk in front of the building within view of a teacher who will visually watch your child walk the rest of the way. Using this method, no one is outdoors in bad weather for prolonged periods of time.
- In this instance the teachers will sign in the students on the sign in sheet so parents are not exposed to the elements for an extended period of time.

Pick Up Procedures

Only those persons listed as emergency contacts/authorized pick-up in ePACT, who are over 18 years old, will be allowed to pick up your child. The individual signing out must show proper identification. Children must be signed out daily. We will not release your child to anyone you have not authorized in ePACT. If you have a friend/relative in town who will be picking up, you must add them as an authorized pick-up in ePACT. If you participate in a car pool, please authorize those parents in your child's ePACT account.

Late Pick Up Policy

We ask that you observe the scheduled pick-up time. 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.

Behavior Management

1-2-3 Magic model is used in our preschool classrooms and is a very useful and positive technique for preschool 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 the 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.

Parent Guest Readers

Opportunities to be a guest reader in your child's classroom will begin in October. We will communicate when this begins. How guest readers are handled may vary from one classroom to another.

Parent/Guardian Communication using Class Dojo and Monthly Calendar

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, or no drop off due to severe weather. It is essential that all parents/guardians are connected using class Dojo.

Classroom Celebrations

Classroom celebrations will consist of games, crafts and other fun activities.

Parents may:

- Attend their child's classroom celebrations with siblings
- Optional: Provide one (1) non-edible item for each child in the class. No goodie bags or food items.

Birthdays

We will celebrate each child's birthday (including summer birthdays) during class. Parents may send in **one (1) non-edible item for each child in the class, but this is optional. No goodie bags or food items.**

Invitations at School

Nearly everyone at one point or another in their life has experienced what it feels like not to be invited to a special party or activity that everyone else seems to be planning to attend. To avoid this type of hurtful situation at preschool, for both parents and children, parents may not distribute invitations or thank you notes or exchange gifts in the classroom, hallway or on the playground unless everyone in the child's class is being invited.

A gentler alternative is to use the class information list that is described on the next page to mail/email invitations and thank you notes. We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in this matter. The feelings saved one day may be your child's.

Class Information Lists

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.

Skill Assessments / Conferences

Skill assessment will take place throughout the school year and will be given to parents in written form in early November and late April encompassing the following areas: Large Motor, Fine Motor, Interpersonal, Work Habits, Self Help, Language/Listening, and Readiness Skills. Parent/Teacher Conferences will be held in November, and by request at any other time during the school year. The first months of school are a period of adjustment and are our opportunity to get to know the children.

Emergency Closings

While we take the local school district decisions into consideration, the Gurnee Park District will make our own decision regarding the cancellation of Growing Tree Preschool. Adventure Club is tied to the before/after school CARE program. There is a possibility that Adventure Club's hours may be modified or cancelled.

Notice will be posted to Class Dojo if Preschool and/or Adventure Club are cancelled by 6:00a.

Payment Policy and Procedures

Participants will pay a \$75 non-refundable registration fee at the time of registration. On July 15th the first tuition payment will be automatically withdrawn from a bank account or credit card that you have provided. If registering after July 15th, 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 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.



Growing Tree Preschool

AT GURNEE PARK DISTRICT

2026-2027 School Calendar 3 & 4 Year Classes

No School Days

September 7	No School - Labor Day
October 9	No School
October 12	No School - Indigenous Peoples Day
November 3	No School - Election Day
November 19	No School – Tu/Th classes only Parent/Teacher conferences *
November 20	No School – all classes Parent/Teacher conferences **
November 23-27	No School - Thanksgiving Break
December 21-January 4	No School - Winter Break (school resumes on 1/5/27)
January 18	No School - Martin Luther King Day
February 12	No School
February 15	No School - Presidents Day
March 19	No School
March 22-March 26	No School - Spring Break

* Tu/Th classes only no school

**Monday-Friday classes and M/WF classes no school

Important Activity Dates

August 18	Parent Orientation Meeting for all classes
August 19	Meet the Teachers for all classes
September 23	Back to School Night for all 3 & 4 year old classes
September 23-24	Field Trip to Krolls Farm for Hunt Club classes*
September 30	Field Trip to Krolls Farm for Viking Park classes
February 6	Winter Concert for All Classes 1:00 - 3:30p
March 10	Picture Day for Viking Park classes
March 11-12	Picture Days for Hunt Club classes*
May 11	Last Day of School for Tu/Th classes
May 12	Last Day of School for M/W/F & M-F classes
May 12	Moving Up Ceremonies for 3 year old classes**
May 13	Graduation for Hunt Club 4 year old classes**
May 14	Graduation for Viking Park classes**
May 15	End of Year Event – 11:30a-1:00p

*Exact date for each class to be finalized later

** Moving Up Ceremonies/Graduation times will be in the evening between 5:00-7:45p. Exact times for each class will be finalized later