

This brief guide for parents contains information regarding philosophy, logistics, and other things you may want to know about Simplicity Learning and our Parent-Tot playgroups! We hope that your experience with us will be both positive and enriching. If you are ever wondering about our rhythm, the activities, or how child guidance is being modeled by the co-teachers and volunteers, please do not hesitate to ask questions!

*If you love to read, this guide will be helpful as an orientation in preparation for the class. If you don't love to read, **please at least peruse this guide and pay special attention to items in bold!***

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OVERVIEW

RHYTHM OF THE MORNING

- 9:30 a.m. Arrival
Change from outdoor shoes/boots to indoor slippers or socks
Hang up coats and stow bags
Wash hands
Children join creative free play
Parents join adult conversation
- 10:05 a.m. Clean up song
Teachers model cleaning up playthings and crafting items without talking
Children imitate clean up or guided by prompts from co-teachers
Parents wrap up conversations
Everyone takes turn washing hands
- 10:15 a.m. Seated at snack table
Candle lighting song
Napkins in laps
Snack served
- Each child excused by co-teacher from snack
Wipe hands and face
Children back to creative free play, stories, baby doll circle time, finger rhymes
Parents remain at table for discussion with co-teacher
- 10:45 a.m. Sometime over next half hour is the best time for children to use bathroom
- 11:25 a.m. Goodbye circle
Put on outdoor shoes/boots and coats
- 11:30 a.m. Group walking out to parking lot together
Children hold hands with adult in parking lot
Farewells to each car

HOW TO GET HERE

LOCATION

Simplicity Parent-Tot Playgroups are hosted out of a private office space in the **Northup North Office Park**. When you enter the parking lot from 130th, notice the monument directory displaying the location of our **Building E** at the southeast corner of the property. Parking surrounds our building and you can find our **Suite 140** in the main floor lobby. Directions: [LINK](#).

PARKING

There is generally parking available near to our building, however, you may use any unmarked parking space in the entire office park. It is always a good idea to watch for traffic as you walk carefully to and from our building. If your child has fallen asleep when you arrive and you wish to allow a bit of a longer nap past start time, please **call or text 425.638.2716** to let us know that you have arrived, but are delayed!

ABSENCES

If you need to miss Parent-Tot, please **email info@SimplicityLearning.org** or **text 425.638.2716**.

SNOW-ICE DAY CLOSURES

Very rarely, we will cancel class on days when our neighborhood has been deemed hazardous for driving by the Department of Transportation. We will email and telephone all families asap on days that Simplicity Learning is closed for icy driving conditions.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE YOUR FIRST CLASS

The following guidelines are intended to help parents to approach our playgroups in a relaxed manner and to settle any fears or concerns!

RECOMMENDED READING

Parents are encouraged to read the book, [Simplicity Parenting](#), by Kim John Payne and Lisa M. Ross and [The Soul of Discipline](#) by Kim John Payne. These texts are not required reading for Parent-Tot, but if you enjoy reading, you may find that they provide many answers to questions that arise regarding “why” and “how” we guide parents and children in Parent-Tot. (Otherwise, we recommend very few “parenting” books!)

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THE CORE CONCEPTS

Throughout our mornings together, our conversations will reference major themes: “Filtering Out the Adult World / Adult Topics,” “De-cluttering / Too Much Stuff / Environmental Overwhelm,” “Fostering Helpful Rhythms and Rituals at Home,” “Disorientation/Re-orientation,” and “Managing Sustainable Schedules / Saying No to ‘Too Much.’” The short-form references for these themes are “**Filtering Out**,” “**Environment**,” “**Rhythm**,” “**Pinging**,” and “**Schedules**.”

As our discussions deepen, you may expect to build habits for observing your family life and identifying when and where you are applying your family's true values in each area. When we discover dissatisfactions in our parenting, there are always opportunities for small, do-able changes to help us better match values and goals to habits and practices!

TRANSITIONS

Peaceful and well-planned transitions are a major focus of Simplicity Parent-Tot! We expect that certain transitions will be most difficult for some of the children, some of the time, especially: clean-up, sitting at snack long enough to eat well, waiting / taking turns, goodbye circle. Each week we have a chance to practice transitions and then try them again next week!

ARRIVAL

Please help us to co-create a relaxing mood for Simplicity Parent-Tot by silencing cell phones in the car, walking slowly, and softening your voice as you approach the building from the parking lot. Children may be excited, running, even squealing as they enter and this is just fine ~ the adults help to shepherd initial exuberance into engrossing play by responding to noisiness with quiet gestures and smiles! Arriving a few minutes early will greatly help the entire group to start together on time and settle in smoothly each week.

DEPARTURES

Saying goodbye at the end of each playgroup and walking cooperatively back to the car happens most easily if each parent prepares before our last clean-up, having packed up before 11:30 a.m., visited restrooms after snack, and being generally ready to go. Typically, the co-teachers will lead the children in changing from slippers back into shoes at the end of our goodbye circle, and one co-teacher will walk out to the parking lot with all of the families to help send everyone off in their cars. It's always easiest for the children to make this transition if the whole group walks out to the parking lot at the same time!

RHYTHM OF THE MORNING

Please remember that consistency is extremely important for young children. Please try your best to attend every play group consistently (unless you or your child is ill), and please try to be on time. It is especially difficult for little ones to settle into the rhythm of the morning if they are not experiencing the whole two hours from the beginning. If you are a person who tends to run late, challenge yourself to arrive five minutes early. Regardless of what time you arrive, please practice walking in slowly and serenely from the parking lot!

Our mornings together begin with the children engaged in creative free play while the parents settle in, visit over tea, and start craft activities and conversation. Our desire is that over time, parents will be free to visit with one another and have the opportunity to observe their children's play led by one of our co-teachers, without parents intervening in play.

Parents may always choose to participate in handcrafts (or not) while the children play and our parenting conversations ensue. Some parents prefer simple household tasks like folding napkins over handwork – just let us know your preference. Please also feel free to bring your own knitting, crocheting, mending, etc. or simply enjoy the peace of sitting and chatting without feeling compelled to multi-task.

After about 40 minutes, we will clean up toys (the co-teachers model clean-up and we ask that parents not instruct children to put toys away – after a few weeks, children tend to imitate clean-up without verbal prompting), wash hands, and start our teatime snack. After snack, there will be time for the children to participate in a continuation of the morning play activities and circle time. Parents are encouraged to remain at the table and engage in the parenting discussion until it is time to leave.

Please note that some children may feel “done” with free play earlier in the morning, and some may wish to continue for the full time, depending upon age, temperament, the mood that day, what the other children are doing, and how comfortable everyone feels. Children always have direct access to their parents, and we encourage re-connection (like cuddling and lap time) whenever it's needed. We will also offer ways for children to engage in play, to help those who aren't initiating their own spontaneous play within the group.

SLIPPERS AND LAYERS

Please bring your child to our indoor playgroup each week dressed in layers that can be removed easily. Boots and rain gear may be stored in our entry cubby area. It is always easiest for the children to start directly into classroom activities if they are able to undress out of their outdoor gear quickly upon arrival, wash hands, and don't have to wait too long to enter into play.

There is dedicated space for parents to store their own wet outer gear, backpacks, diaper bags, and outdoor shoes. We will be working on preschool habits of taking off outdoor gear at the door, and putting on slippers or socks with non-skid soles before we enter the classroom. Slippers that hug the ankles and are secure to the foot are best, and parents will also feel more at home if they bring a pair to wear! You are welcome to leave slippers on our shoe rack between classes if that is easier than remembering to pack them each week. We have extra socks to share whenever slippers have been forgotten.

PARTICIPATION

Please do not despair if your child does not immediately join in group activities or warm to the other children or adults in the group!

Some children need to observe everyone else for several weeks, some seem to “jump right in,” and some will not join in completely over the course of a single quarter. Each child's unique timing is accepted, and it is important to know that even if a child is not directly involved, s/he is observing everything and taking in what will translate, later, into participation. Consistent attendance is the best recipe for building a child's sense of comfort and familiarity.

We will always invite all of the children to join group activities, but please do not feel any pressure if your child isn't ready or wanting to participate every step of the way. Sometimes one of the co-teachers will suggest an accommodation so that you may remain as close to the activity as is comfortable. And all of the adults help by modeling their own focus and attention to the activities brought by the co-teachers. You may hear later in the day or even on the car ride home your child singing a song or describing an activity that you thought s/he was ignoring!

REPETITION

Very young children delight in and are nurtured by familiarity and predictability. Knowing what to expect and what comes next gives them a healthy sense of security. For this reason, we repeat the same rhythm and activities for the entire quarter, including songs, rhymes and stories. While it may inspire boredom in adults, children under five rarely tire of a predictable sequence, over and over again, each week.

As we guide the group in learning songs and activities, each child will gain confidence in his or her participation. Every time the children practice a transition, it goes deeper and deeper. So please trust that the repetition you experience in class is coming out of a conscious desire to meet the needs of the children and is not due to the teachers' lack of repertoire!

HOLIDAYS, FESTIVALS AND BIRTHDAYS

Please note that we do not celebrate holidays, festivals, or birthdays in Parent-Tot as we have found that it can be overwhelming for child/ren to have the morning rhythm disrupted. During certain times of year, parents may even find Simplicity Learning a haven from holiday frenzy!

TEATIME SNACK MENU

All ingredients are organic, vegan, and grown locally whenever possible. We serve a simple snack each week: lentil rice pilaf (with diced vegetables and apples), seeds, carrot and celery sticks, herbal tea and CustomPure filtered water. A note regarding food choices: a main principle of Simplicity Parenting is sparing young children from the stress of too many choices. Our family-style snack time will be a time to practice not asking children any questions about what they "want"! If this sounds daunting, please just follow the co-teachers' lead and we'll talk more about limiting choices and questioning around food over the quarter.

ALLERGIES AND SPECIAL DIETS

If your family eats a diet not compatible with the snack served, or if your child has food allergies that we can accommodate, please contact us to discuss the best approach: the group's menu can be revised within reason, or parents may choose to bring foods from home to eat at snack time. Let us know and we'll work together for the best solution. If you would like to bring a dish to share with the group, please check in with the co-teachers about that ahead of time so that we can cross-check any allergies or other food sensitivities in the group.

QUIET INSISTENCE

Snack time provides an opportunity to practice many golden manners including:

- waiting quietly (as we can) for the candle verse
- placing napkins in laps
- waiting patiently for food to be served
- trying small bites, even of not favorite foods

- taking a “few more bites” as prompted
- waiting to be excused from the table
- wiping hands and face before leaving the table.

Each week, the co-teachers will gently insist on one or more of these items until the children begin to remember them without prompting. Parents may rest assured that we will balance quiet insistence with “letting things go,” but parents are also often quite amazed by their children’s cooperation after many weeks of naming and modeling these behaviors, even if they vigorously objected in the early weeks!

ADULT CONVERSATION AND PURPOSEFUL WORK

Each week, we strive to co-create an atmosphere where adults are engaged in purposeful activities and mindful conversations, while each child explores the Parent-Tot environment. There will be many questions and topics that come up during our time together each week, and the teachers will do their best to engage the group in a way that is useful and helpful for everyone. The last thirty to forty-five minutes, following snack, is often the best time for parents to explore parenting questions more deeply.

We do ask parents to remember that young ears are always listening. So, we will tend to redirect child-inappropriate topics to more general terms. This, in itself, is a marvelous parenting exercise relating to “Filtering Out Adult Topics.” We will also practice celebrating our successes in parenting and redirecting negative “self-talk.” As we endeavor for parents to experience a very comfortable, relaxed and nourishing conversation, the co-teachers will be employing many intentional conversational techniques to build the communication skills of all of the adults in the room!

Play is our young children’s work, and the best indoor environment for encouraging the development of their imaginations is a calm room, humming with purposeful activity, and without adult conversation that is distracting to the children. We offer different “zones” for different activities. Children will gain practice in being redirected by co-teachers: “Oh, we cannot climb that shelf because it’s not safe, but I see that you need to climb. Let’s go over here and you can climb safely on the slide!”

SUPERVISION, SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE

For safety, children must remain within seeing or hearing distance of their parent at all times during each gathering, and parents are asked to remain aware of their own child/ren throughout the full two hours. Each parent is ultimately responsible for their child and his/her behavior and safety during Parent-Tot. That said, as all of the adults get to know one another through our weekly gatherings, a feeling of co-parenting emerges and children may begin to feel more comfortable taking cues or comfort from the other adults. If co-teachers notice that a child might need to use the bathroom, we will ask that the parent take the child to the washroom to try. (“You don’t have to go, but you do have to try.”)

PROGRAM GOALS

Our program is designed so that all of the co-parents in each group may nurture each child's developmental emergence into the world of playing and working and resolving conflicts. As we lovingly introduce the group to a collaborative preschool experience, it is helpful for parents and caregivers to understand our program's parent education and preschool readiness goals.

Most young children take years to learn some of the most basic social graces, and many will not be able to understand concepts of sharing or taking turns until after the age of four. Each child will learn in time, but what we do with and around this age group is much more important (and helpful to the children) than what we say. The co-teachers will adjust expectations to each unique child and check in with parents frequently.

Many of the modern trends that insist upon coaching children to "share" or "take turns" or "be nice" or "say you're sorry" are less helpful than two tried-and-true techniques: "distraction" and "redirection." These two approaches are definitely most effective in resolving conflicts between young children and we will practice them as an alternative to explaining abstract concepts to children who are not ready to understand them.

Together we can help each other learn and practice these techniques, including helping to make amends or support recovery when it is appropriate.

TAKING TURNS

When one child grabs a play thing from another child, our rule is that the toy is returned to the first child. The grabbing child will then be officially given the status of "next" to use it. Although that waiting can be difficult, especially for children who have not had much practice yet, young children learn over time:

- "Kim was playing with that, so we are giving it back to Kim."
- "When Kim is done, it will be Aisha's turn next."
- "We all take turns."

The adult's follow-through is important to ensure that the child doesn't have to wait too long and that the next turn is truly theirs.

NONVERBAL RESPONSE AND GUIDANCE

Over many weeks, we will learn to read one another's nonverbal cues and even begin to head off cranky moments before they intensify! One of the most important arts in parenting is learning to intervene in the lightest manner, using the fewest words. We'll be practicing this approach of "less is more" every week, together. Sometimes, just practicing the art of pausing uncovers moments when a nonverbal response to a child is enough or when we can avoid triggering a child into fight-flight-flock-freeze.

TRAINING COMPLIANCE

Many families come to us with habits of asking young children many questions and offering them many choices. Simplicity Parent-Tot prepares children for a group learning environment by moving parents away from asking questions and towards giving simple prompts. This practice is somewhat counter-culture to prevailing parenting advice, but is more developmentally appropriate than tasking children to make choices throughout the entire day. You might notice a co-teacher silently handing a child a bean bag to put away rather than asking, "Do you want to put away this bean bag?" Children may refuse when they need to, but you may notice that it tends to be easier for them to navigate transitions when not overwhelmed with questions.

WAITING TO SPEAK – DECLINING INTERRUPTIONS

Parent-Tot is a place for parents to enjoy adult conversation and for children to practice waiting their turn to speak. If this hasn't been practiced at home, it may feel a bit awkward at first. But bear with us, and you may grow to appreciate the benefits!

When children interrupt and it is not urgent, we will stop briefly and remind them that they must wait until we are done speaking. It may take several weeks, but children learn to trust that their time will come and that they can look forward to our attentions and appreciation for their waiting. Over time, a simple "thank you for waiting" or a polite hand gesture will cue your child to wait and we will be able to slowly increase the total waiting time with practice.

APPRECIATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT RATHER THAN PRAISE

Another practice that parents may find unusual is our work of expressing acknowledgment and appreciation to children, rather than praise. You may notice that our co-teachers offer specific feedback to children "Yes," "Just like that," "Thank you for wiping your face," "I see what you built!" rather than general praise like "Good job," "Good boy," "That is so pretty," "You are so smart." For more information about the negative effects of praise on children, see our "Parent How Dos" Resource page on our website.

TANTRUMS

If your child disrupts a group activity, or has a habit of "tantrum-ing" in response to being told "no," please know that you can relax with us. This is a normal form of toddler arguing and we will support you in firmly and lovingly, "holding the no." Remember that any adult who observes a problem can help with guidance and hand-offs can be effective in these situations. Please catch a co-teacher's eye if you need help deciding how, or if you would like to defer and observe a co-teacher handling a difficult moment!

Occasionally, it may be necessary to take a very upset child slightly away from the group for few minutes so that tension may be released without it becoming performative, and so that the co-teachers needn't interrupt the flow of activity in order to deal with the situation. If necessary, a co-teacher will take up the situation and cue a parent to walk a very upset child into another area of the room while everyone recovers. In other situations, the co-teacher will encourage the parent to

allow the child to express emotion, release tension even noisily, and not react beyond staying close. Every parent-child dynamic is different and we appreciate your cooperation and trust when conflicts or crying arise. These are all normal aspects of being in community.

PRESCHOOL PRACTICE

One of our principal goals at Simplicity Parent-Tot is to provide a gentle bridge from home to each child's "solo" schooling experience. Each morning, we provide opportunities to practice some of the same activities and interactions and transitions that will be part of the school experience: changing out of outdoor gear upon arrival, wearing indoor slippers or socks, using a bathroom that isn't the same as home, washing and drying hands, greeting others in class (and being greeted), following simple rules for table manners, playing within a group, forming a circle with friends, waiting turns, resolving conflicts over toys, changing into outdoor gear before departure, saying goodbye to others in class.

Each child will find some aspects more or less challenging, according to their level of experience and temperament. A child who is reluctant to join circle time will often transition slowly, from week to week, and one day delight their parent by joining with no fuss at all! Another child may resist not being allowed to go barefoot initially, and then a few weeks later be running immediately to the shoe shelf, donning slippers quickly, and dashing off into play. Being greeted by others may initially be a challenge for the more introverted children and then slowly become more comfortable week-to-week, with "hello" eventually returned.

One key approach in everything we do is not arguing or talking too much with children about what they need to do and instead modeling the behavior that is wanted, consistently, every week. Everything that we as adults practice at parent-tot is intended to ease the future transition into the next schooling experience with a larger group size and no parent present!

Thank you so much for reviewing this Guide! We look forward to seeing you at Simplicity Parent-Tot. If you have any questions regarding the program, please do not hesitate to contact us.