SOUTH SEATTLE COLLEGE

FAMILY HANDBOOK

SSC Co-op Preschools 2026/2027

www.westseattlepreschools.org

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SSC Co-op Preschools: An Introduction

Mission

Where children and parents learn together.

Values/Vision

Community

We are committed to cultivating supportive communities within and outside the classroom. We work to build stronger families, resilient children, and lifelong social networks.

Parent Education

Although we are educators and parents/caregivers, we are constantly learning and we are invested in that process. Professional educators provide parents/caregivers with concrete, research-based tools for parenting in ways that are constructive and developmentally appropriate. We strive to create safe and supportive atmospheres in which parents/caregivers can build empathetic relationships and learn from one another.

Play-Based Learning

We believe in cultivating a lifelong love of learning using a play-based curriculum that validates and expands children's experiences and interests. Our teachers build open and intentional spaces for developmentally appropriate play and children's exploration, encouraging problem solving, empathy, and shared responsibility.

Developing Social and Emotional Skills

We are committed to fostering the development of the whole child and believe that social and emotional skills are the foundation for school-readiness. We offer children a safe environment to learn new skills, navigate their emotions, build empathy, and cultivate meaningful relationships.

A Commitment to Inclusion, Equity, and Anti-Bias Education

Our goal is to educate every child equitably by supporting each child according to their individual needs. We strive to remove barriers and create a nurturing environment for all families. We see strength in our differences including those of race, ethnicity, gender identity and expression, family makeup, cognitive and physical ability, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and others. We are committed to anti-bias education through nurturing empathy, developing positive self-identities, recognizing bias and unfairness, and standing up for oneself and others in the face of bias.

The Truth About Co-op Preschool

Co-op preschool is an investment … of your **time**, **talents**, and **trust**.

To be good investors, one must ask: ***'What is the return on investment?'***

'What will my family gain by the investment we put in as members of co-op preschool?'

FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Co-op children are not perfect. They do not behave like angels.
Co-op offers a safe place to test limits and be encouraged to try out new ways.

Co-op teachers will not drill children on ABCs or coloring in the lines.
Co-op will instill excitement, curiosity, and the fun of learning.
Co-op kids will learn pre-academic skills the way brain science tells us works best.

Co-op children are not guaranteed entrance into Ivy League colleges.
At co-op, children can practice the experiences that will prepare them for creative expression, decision making, compassion, interdependence, problem solving, self-confidence, curiosity, and innovation.

FOR YOURSELF

Co-op does not espouse "one right way" to "parent".
Co-op will encourage you to choose a parenting course that fits your family values and ultimate goals.

Co-op does not promise to make you the perfect or even a great parent/caregiver.
Co-op offers you a safe place to learn about and try new parenting skills.

Co-op does not promise to make parenting easy.
Your co-op community will be there as you face inevitable parenting challenges together.

FOR YOUR CHILDREN'S TEACHERS/INSTRUCTORS

Co-op does not expect "perfection"
Your co-op teachers feel privileged to be part of your parenting journey.

Welcome to YOUR Co-op Preschool and Parenting Education Program!

Our mission: Build stronger and healthier families through adult and child learning environments.
***OPEP**: Organization of Parenting Education Preschool Programs*

YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Your child's preschool is a fun, nurturing and supportive community of children, their parents/caregivers, skilled teachers, and parenting educators.
- Children learn the joy of discovery through facilitated play and guided learning where they: build social skills, develop empathy, practice creative thinking, learn problem solving, make friends.
- **Your preschool teacher provides a carefully planned, rich environment full of learning activities that are just right for the developmental stage of your child.**
- **The SSC Co-op Preschool curriculum is aligned with WaKIDS Washington State Kindergarten Entrance Guidelines and supports:** family connection, whole child assessment for individualized learning, supporting smooth transition into Kindergarten

YOUR OWN LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

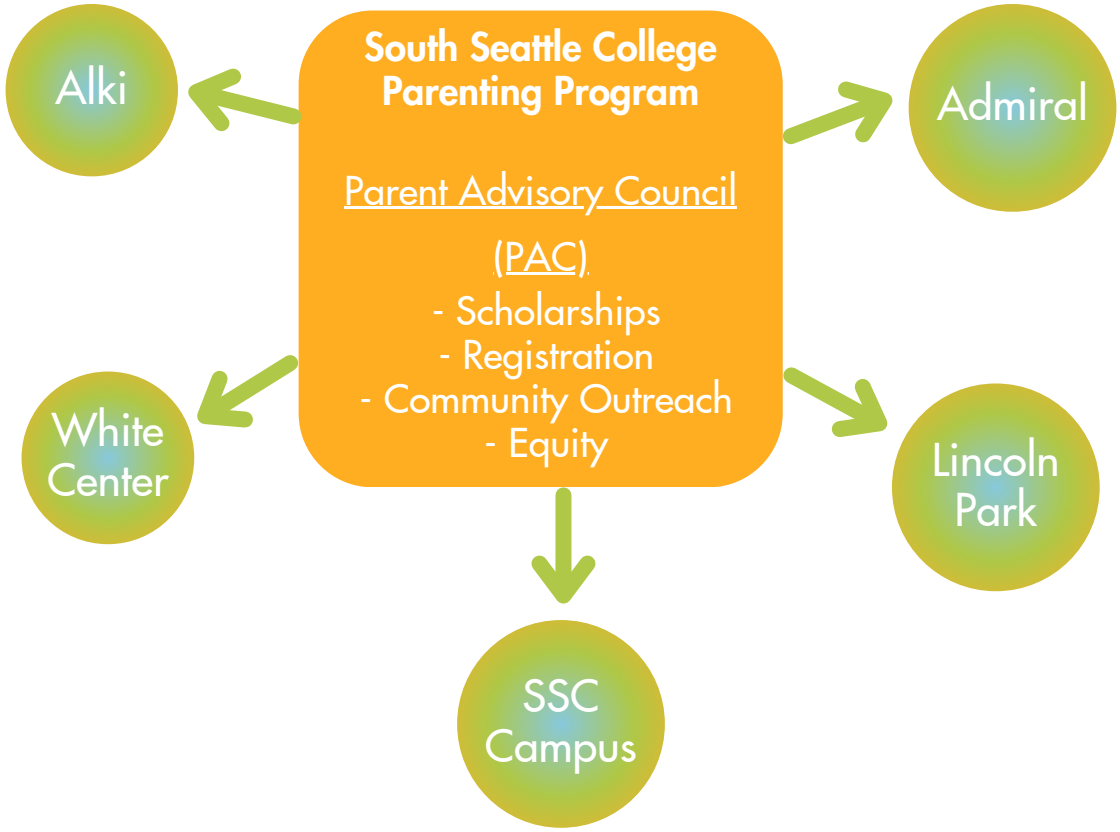
- You can develop a community of friendships that will sustain and enrich your family and your children throughout their lives.
- As assistant teacher, you are directly involved in your child's education as you work in the classroom observing Teachers who model positive guidance and learning through play. You will practice positive interaction with your own and all the children–at school and at home.
- Your parent educator, provided through South Seattle College, supports your personal parenting journey and helps you blend the latest in child development and positive discipline guidance with your family values and goals.

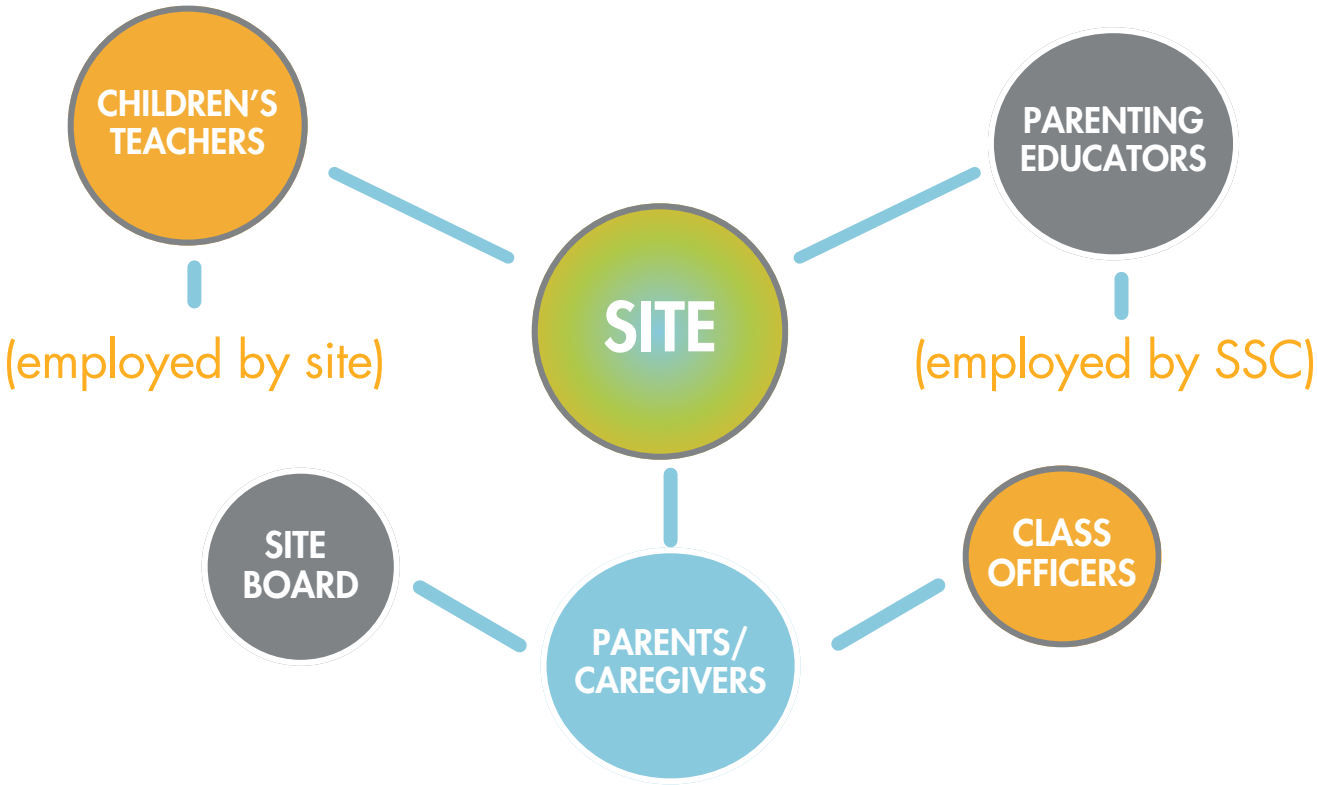
THE ADULT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Your neighborhood preschool is a non-profit small business organized so that there is a role for each parent/caregiver. You will be building skills like leadership, teamwork, budgeting, and personnel management–all qualities that build your personal resume!
- As your children grow out of preschool you will take those skills into the world–personally and professionally– and become a valuable resource in the community.

Locally known as "The co-ops", we take pride in helping to raise the current and next generation of Seattle families–and we have fun doing it! We are glad you are joining!

Big Picture: Affiliation with South Seattle College





Preschool Membership

To truly be a Co-op, each member plays an important role.

Member Roles

- Choose one job that best fits your time, talent, or learning interests.
- Every member actively participates in fundraising
  - Fundraising Chair or Class Fundraising Representative
  - Participate in Preschool fundraising activities
  - Support PAC (scholarship) fundraising activities
- Every member votes - at All School Business Meeting
  - Elect Site and Class Board Members
  - Hire Children's Teachers
  - Approve Operating Budget
  - Approve Affiliation w/ SSC

Attend Class Meeting

- Once each month - put all dates on your calendar now!
- 7-9pm **without children**
- Co-op business and teacher announcements
- Parenting discussion w/ Parent Educator

Assist in Preschool Class

- **Assist as assistant teacher one session per week**
- Observe modeling by children's teacher and parent educator
- Practice guidance skills with children in class and at home
- Talk individually or in small groups with your parent educator.

Choose Quarterly Seminars

- **Attend a MINIMUM of one seminar per quarter (there is no maximum!)**
- Choose topics from the quarterly calendar that are relevant to your family
- Bring partners, nannies, or other adult family members.

Provide healthy children's snack on a rotating basis

See the "It's My Snack Day!" section of this handbook for more guidelines for what (and what not) to bring.

Financial Policies

The total tuition for the entire year is divided into nine equal payments no matter how many weeks there are or how many times you go to class each month.

Your SSC parent education tuition is determined by SSC and is included in the monthly tuition amount.

Payment is due at the beginning of each month. Our aim is to have any/all checks deposited shortly after the 15th of each month. Your late payment can hold up deposits for the whole class. Payment options:

- Online through your Jovial portal (you can check your payment status here, too!)
- Bring a check to the class meeting or put it in the file labeled Class Treasurer. They track the payments and give checks to the site treasurer, who deposits them.
- **Other payment options will be explained by your site treasurer.**

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance is available from the Mary E. Phillips Scholarship Fund and the Wendi Hirshberg Memorial Fund through our Parent Advisory Council (PAC). Contact your parent educator for the form. Complete and return it before the deadline for that quarter. Scholarships may be granted for up to half of your monthly tuition. Applications are reviewed by a small confidential committee. Because that process takes a while, applicants need to make arrangements with their Class Treasurer for the tuition payment until it is granted. If the applicant clearly fits the guidelines, they arrange to pay half. Adjustments can be made later, if needed. For bookkeeping purposes, the people aware of the scholarship grant are: Parent Educator, Class Treasurer, Site Treasurer, scholarship committee. **You must re-apply each quarter where you have the need.**

To give us adequate startup funds, members pay first and last month's (September and May) installments up front. The last month's payment is applied in May or as your last month, in the case of early withdrawal.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PROGRAM

If you must withdraw from preschool before the end of the year, give a 30-day notice to your parent educator AND board president/treasurer. Your last month's prepaid tuition can then be applied to your last month of attendance.

We understand that financial situations can change. If you have financial concerns, please talk with your parent educator.

Missing Obligations

MISSING A CLASS MEETING

Attendance is an important part of membership, and of building community. Informal sharing and connections are invaluable and difficult to replicate outside of this setting.

If you MUST make an exception and miss a meeting:

- **Notify parent educator**
- Ask a friend to **gather handouts (or turn in completed forms)**. Alternatively, check your file/cubby later.
- **Update yourself about important announcements** by reading meeting minutes. If minutes are not ready before the next class, ask a friend right away for key points.
- To make up for the **missed parent education** portion, find an alternate format and report to your parent educator on the activities. Ideas include:
  - Attend an extra quarterly seminar
  - Read a parenting book or article
  - Attend a parenting lecture
- All members are welcome to attend site board meetings (held once a month) any time and attendance could also be in lieu of a missed class meeting.
- Remember to pay your **monthly tuition**.

MISSING A CLASS WORK DAY

If you must miss your work day in the classroom, it is vital that you get a sub, as we need adult coverage. Without proper coverage, some rooms or stations will be unable to run.

If you must miss a work day due to a **planned absence or suspected illness:**

- Contact the parents/caregivers who work on days opposite from you to find a substitute(s) who can work your day(s) off. If group platforms aren't working, individual requests can often be necessary and more effective.
- Work out to trade days or offer something equally appealing and fair (e.g. childcare at another time, gift card, etc.)
- Notify the teacher of your pending absence and who will sub for you.

If you must miss a work day due to an **emergency or illness:**

If your class has an emergency sub system:

- Call the e-sub person (noted on your class schedule) ASAP
- Do not email. The e-sub will want to get on with their day if not needed
- Thank them profusely!

If your class doesn't have an emergency sub system:

- Contact the parents/caregivers who work on days opposite from you and ask them to sub
- Do not email. Phone or text to find a solution
- Work out a trade to work at school for them. If that is not possible, offer something equally valuable.

I Have a Question!

My question is about...	Who might know
My workstation or rotation	Work schedule/parent coordinator
My snack day	Work schedule/parent coordinator
Snack duty	Teacher or experienced adults
Tuition	Treasurer or Jovial portal (online)
Needing financial assistance	Parent educator
Curriculum	Teacher
Classroom safety	Teacher
My co-op job	Teacher
Handling situations in class	Teacher or parent educator
Guidance/discipline at home or school	Parent educator
Family circumstances	Parent educator
Fundraising	PAC rep or fundraising coordinator

It's Drop-Off Day!

1 Before I Leave Home

- **Check the work schedule to make sure today is NOT my workday!**
- Help my child be ready to play and learn by:
  - Dressing my child for messy play, comfort, safe climbing, and learning independent self-care. Boots and sandals are not easy or safe to run or climb in.
  - Going over the curriculum notes; talking together about the fun things planned; gathering and bringing things requested by the teacher.
  - Addressing predicted separation issues with the children's teacher and your parenting educator–they will help you make a plan!

2 At Arrival Time

- Arrive on time so my child can be personally greeted by the teacher.
  - **TIP:** It's easier for children to enter play when they are first or entering *with* their friends. It can be hard to enter when everyone else is already playing.
- Sign in. Encourage my child and others to take care of hanging their own coats, washing hands, and finding nametags.
- Make sure there is at least one working adult there with the teacher before I leave.

3 At the End of Class

- Keep adult conversations quiet or outside the music circle so that kids continue taking part in music. Or I can join in with them!
- Help my child learn to take care of coats and things that go home
- Sign out. **Help the gatekeeper ensure no child leaves without their adult.**

4 After School

- My child (and the children in my care) are my responsibility once they leave class.
- Even though this is my time to talk with friends, I know that tired, wound-up children need extra supervision.
- I will limit outside play to ten minutes
  - **TIP:** It's easier for kids to stop playing if all working adults agree to leave at the same time.
- I won't leave a child unattended in my care while I "run in". A co-op solution is to ask another adult to watch my child who is in the car.
- Expect a tired or wired child. Learning at preschool is hard work!

It's My Work Day!

1 Before I Leave Home

- **Check the work schedule to see which station I will be working.**
  - **ART:** dress myself for a mess. **SNACK:** Bring snacks that follow the *snack guidelines*.
- **Review the curriculum from the teacher so I can:**
  - Think about the "theme" of the week and how children will play at my station
  - Think about how I might facilitate their play and extend their learning
  - Review what I've learned about guiding children and facilitating problem-solving.

2 At Arrival Time

- After **arriving on time**, go to my station. Open the area. Children will be ready to play.
- Explain to my child which station I will be working at and that it is my "job" to stay and take care of my area and other children. Ask the teacher if I need help with my child.
- After greeting all children, the teacher will give me instructions or answer my questions.

3 As Children Come to My Station

- Greeting each child welcomes them into play
- To be available, I will stay on the children's level (not sitting on furniture/standing up)
- Since the room gets busy/noisy, I will keep my voice low and *go to* kids to talk to them.
- The optimal number of children in my area is determined by the number of chairs, space, or play supplies. I can limit the number according to what I am comfortable with.
- If children are old enough, I can start a waiting list. Waiting for what they want is an important skill to practice, and they learn the power of the written word.
- Expect disputes. Consider this a prime opportunity for social learning. Try not to "fix it" but help them negotiate. Their solutions are often creative and successful!

4 At Clean-Up Time

- Even though it would be faster if I cleaned up, it's still an important learning time. My job is to work alongside but direct, giving each child specific tasks until it is all done.

5 At Snack Time

- Double-check I have my whole color team before going to wash hands and before leaving the bathroom to walk together back to their snack table.
- Encourage children to build independent skills/polite social habits with me/each other.

6 At Music/Story Times

- Since the teacher is leading, I support her by helping individual children who need it.

It's My Snack Day!

Keep it simple to prepare.

For health code reasons, all foods for children must arrive at school in original sealed packages. Snack needs to be prepped at school. Fruits and vegetables must be washed and cut at school. Baked foods must be cooked at school.

Keep it safe and easy to eat.

- Bite-sized finger foods
- Safe, child-sized portions
- Chewable and non-chokeable
  - Avoid raw carrots, whole grapes, etc. for toddlers. Pirate Booty and rice cakes can become chokeable with wiggly toddlers, too.
- Avoid common allergens like all nuts and nut butters. Respect class protocol for specific allergies.
- Surprisingly sweet things to hold off on: sweetened yogurt, fruit snacks, raisins, graham crackers

Include ~2 items.

It's snack, not lunch. For example:

- Cheese and buttered whole grain bread strips
- Mandarin oranges and whole grain crackers
- Sliced grapes and canned beans
- Unfrozen peas and cheese cubes
- Cantaloupe and string cheese

Start with one serving.

Children can ask for and be given seconds if time allows. We always serve/encourage drinking water.

Kids don't like variety.

Feel free to bring the same snack each time it is your turn if it was "a hit". Snack duty is not a competition!

Kids can surprise you.

Kids can find snack time a good time to try new things. Don't be surprised (and don't make a big deal out of it!) if your child eats things at school they haven't eaten before, or if they refuse a favorite. Just offer and accept their choice.

If a child chooses not to eat, they may not be hungry (it's ok–the next meal comes soon enough), they may be upset that play time has ended, or they may not be used to sitting with so many other kids. For safety while eating or drinking, encourage kids to sit at the table by giving attention for doing so, chat about pictures on place mats or what they played with at school today.

Follow the Guidelines at your preschool to sanitize tables (before and after) and placemats; clean utensils, plates, and glasses. Dispose of uneaten, served food and garbage. Recycle recyclables.

Health and Safety Policies

We care about kids and make all efforts to have a healthy and safe preschool. We want parents/caregivers to feel confident that preschool will be a good experience for them and their children. We will work together to limit illness and injury as much as possible.

Arrival/Departure

When you arrive at school, a teacher and at least one working adult must be present before you leave. At the end of the day, at least two adults must remain at school until all children have left. One may be the teacher.

Siblings are not covered by insurance except for special events. Activities are ready for preschool children to explore and are not appropriate or safe for siblings. Try not to linger too long with little ones. If you must leave another child in the car, ask a fellow adult to supervise while you bring your child in to school.

Toileting/Diaper Changing

At least two adults need to support diaper changing and children visiting the bathroom unless they are supported by their parent/caregiver. Older children (4-5yo) can use the bathrooms themselves if facilities allow. Dress children in clothes that make bathroom trips easy. We have extra clothes in case of accidents, but changing into their own can be helpful for a child.

We teach handwashing habits by washing our hands *with* the children after diapering and using the toilet. There is a bleach solution and paper liners to use on the changing table. Please take soiled/wet diapers.

Disease Control

Children in group situations do get sick. We have procedures to keep our site clean before, during, and after class:

- Disinfecting solutions are kept locked until used by adults. Kids should not help with this.
- Food prep areas and children's tables are disinfected before and after snack time.
- Toys and other objects that have been in a child's mouth are cleaned and air-dried.
- Dishes are cleaned in a four-part system: hot soapy wash, hot rinse, bleach rinse, air dry.

We ask all children and adults to wash hands as they enter school, before snack, and after toileting. We recommend washing hands when you leave school, especially if family immunity seems down or during illness-prone seasons.

All families complete immunization records or a statement of exemption.

Weapons and Adult Items

Weapons, concealed or not, are not allowed in Preschool classrooms, areas used by the Preschool or when working with the Preschool Class in a remote location, i.e., Outdoor Class at a local park or on a field trip. Weapons are defined by our Risk Management Manual as:

A weapon means any firearm, explosive, knife, club, or other object that has been designed with the intent to harm another person or property (or replica of such a firearm or object) or an object used to inflict harm to another person or property.

Additionally, other items legal for adult use but potentially dangerous or unhealthy for children including but not limited to; marijuana and associated paraphernalia, prescription or other drugs, mace, adult literature, etc. should be left at home. If you find yourself accidentally at preschool with anything that might be considered dangerous or unhealthy for children, please notify your teacherr and/or parent educator so they can assist you in storing the item(s) in a secure location.

Attention to Climbing/Large Motor Activities

Stay within arm's reach. Keep arms and hands free. Do not leave the area unattended. Instruct/monitor children on safe procedures.

Proactive Approach to Health

Besides washing hands, the most proactive thing we can do is to stay home when sick. Deciding when to return is also a judgment call. We often see children relapse if their reserves are not strong enough to return.

★ Members should follow the latest/most up-to-date health and safety guidelines for the program as presented by their parent educator during the school year.

When to Stay Home:

- Fever, anything over 100°F underarm within the past 24 hours (not medicated)
- Severe, phlegm-producing cough
- Nasal secretions that require frequent attention
- Sore throat with fever or swollen glands
- Within 24 hours of beginning antibiotic treatment
- Three or more watery stools in 24 hours
- Vomiting within 24 hours
- Body rash, especially with a fever
- While chicken pox sores are still infected
- While cold sore is wet or not covered
- Redness, thick mucus, or pus draining from the eye
- While any evidence of lice remains

Allergies

Parents/caregivers will notify the class coordinator and children's teacher of allergies that need special attention. Food allergies will be noted on the child's placemat. Other working adults will be notified and instructed about snack preparation. Parents/caregivers of the allergic child can bring safe foods to have available.

Medications

Asthma inhalers and epi-pens require written instructions and must be clearly labeled with the child and doctor's name. Parents/caregivers will also supply verbal instructions for their use.

Injury

All preschool teachers and parent educators hold valid First Aid/CPR cards. In case of teacher absence, an adult on the premises must hold a valid First Aid/CPR card.

The teacher will administer first aid. Minor injuries will be treated with ice, band-aids, and hugs. Parents/caregivers will be informed. For serious or head injuries, parents/caregivers will be called immediately. 911 will be called as needed, and a designated adult will stay with the child if transport is required until the parent/caregiver arrives.

Emergencies

Classes regularly practice fire and earthquake drills with children and working adults. Teachers have a plan for lockdown or shelter-in-place situations. In a real emergency, teachers will follow the instructions of emergency responders and will stay with children until they are reconnected with their parents/caregivers.

Non-Typical Behaviors

As part of the SSC Cooperative Preschool experience, your teachers and instructors will help you become aware of the range of typical development. If developmental differences or non-typical behaviors are displayed by your child, instructors will share their observations and collaboratively develop a plan for how your child can be successful in class. If needed, they will provide referrals for assessment and services (eg. speech therapy or occupational therapy). The cooperative community is committed to serving all children, and we do expect that families will work with the teacher and parent educator in this process.

Communication

In order to be a co-p, our preschools rely on online class groups and email communication for quick and direct messages to an entire group or to one individual. Please be sensitive to proper use. Please check your email/Group before class and meetings for announcements.

Consideration	Explanation
Preschool business	Teachers, board members, etc. will expect email communication to be read before class and before meetings. We are saving paper and valuable time–and coming prepared will mean smoother meetings or preschool days.
Class groups	Class Groups will be the primary mode of communication. Assistance is available. Email tech support if you encounter issues.
Reply all	Be sensitive to the time and inboxes of others when emailing. *Use Reply All only when the entire group needs to be involved.* Keep discussions to a minimum by using polls (replied only to sender), etc.
School vs. preschool business	Social connections are an important part of co-op and often arranged electronically. Your class can decide if it is becoming overwhelming. **Remember that the roster is private and the list should not be given out or used for reasons other than for preschool.**
Communication to/from your teachers	Teachers and parent educators welcome questions and concerns–either about your child and family or about the running of preschool. Email is the preferable route–you can also alert your Teachers that you would like to schedule a time to talk at school or on the phone.
If you have a concern	Group email is not a place to air concerns or voice complaints. As we know, the emotional tone of email can easily be misunderstood. Begin with a private email (or phone call) with your child's teacher and/or parent educator and/or a board member. That person will help you decide the best route for problem-solving. In Co-op we teach children that problem solving is important and needs to happen between the people involved with the help of a neutral person who can facilitate. The same process works well for adults.
Stories about children	We all like to hear stories about kids–especially if they are heartwarming or funny, but not all stories should be shared. It takes a judgment call to determine whether to tell only the child/children's parents/caregivers or the whole group–better to share with the parent/caregiver first and ask permission to tell the group. Teachers prefer to work out situations between children at school. **If there is a difficult event or interaction during school time it is best relayed to working adults by the Teacher rather than another adult**. When children live in the present, we try hard to reach resolution between kids at school.
Reminders	Emails do get lost in the files....or the inbox gets so full that it takes a while to work through it. If you do not get a response, try again!

Calendar, Holidays, and Weather

Calendar

Preschool generally follows the **Seattle Public Schools vacation schedule** (Thanksgiving, Winter, Mid-Winter, Spring) and **holiday schedule** (Veterans Day, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Memorial Day). Anything different will be decided on by the group and announced. Click here to go to our calendar.

We hold school during teacher in-service, semester breaks, half-days, etc. If you have older children, you may need to plan ahead for childcare of siblings.

Whether class is held during SPS parent-teacher conference (Thanksgiving) week is up to the site board and depends on the chosen start and end dates to ensure there are 33 weeks of instruction.

At the end of the year, parents/caregivers attend one more week than children. Plan to clean up that week, child-free.

Holidays

Co-op preschools are generally holiday frenzy-free zones and are kept a place where routines are predictable. Decisions about celebrations will be made on a class-by-class basis with input from the teacher and parent educator. Talk with your children's teacher about birthdays and other personal events.

Weather

In case of snow…

- Morning class is cancelled if SPS kindergartens are closed/remote, cancelled, or two hours late. Listen for reports.
- Afternoon class is cancelled if Seattle Public Schools are closed/remote. Because our weather is hard to predict and roads can clear by afternoon, watch for email announcements to confirm. Evening classes and class meeting cancellations will depend on local driving conditions. Look for an email announcement.

If 2+ consecutive days are missed due to weather, the teacher can propose how to make up at least one.