



NATURE STORY
MONTESSORI

Staff Handbook

Revised 3/20/23

THE PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

This Nature Story Montessori Employee Handbook establishes policies, procedures, and working conditions that will be followed by all Nature Story Montessori (NSM) employees as a condition of their employment at the school. The Standards of Conduct describe the expected actions and behaviors of employees while conducting school business. NSM values the talents and abilities of our employees and seeks an open, cooperative, and dynamic environment in which employees and the children alike can thrive.

Our school provides an Open Door Policy under which employees are encouraged to take problems to the next level of management if they are unable to resolve a situation with their coworker.

Nature Story Montessori will make every effort to notify employees when an official change in policy or procedure has been made but you, the employee, are responsible for your own up-to-date knowledge about school policies, procedures, and working conditions.

NSM is an equal opportunity employer. Religion, age, gender, national origin, race, or identity does not affect hiring, promotion, development opportunities, pay, or benefits. Nature Story Montessori provides fair treatment of employees based on merit.

This school complies with all applicable federal, state, and local labor laws and statutes. Please review the policies, procedures, and working conditions described in this handbook.

You will be asked to affirm that you have read, understand, agree to abide by, and acknowledge your receipt of this employee handbook and employee Standards of Conduct.

This Employee Handbook is not a contract of employment nor is it intended to create contractual obligations for the school of any kind.

Regards,

NSM Administration

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER/NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

Nature Story Montessori is an Equal Opportunity Employer. All employment activities will be conducted in a manner to assure equal opportunity for all and will be based solely on the individual merit and fitness of applicants, candidates, and/or employees without regard to race, color, religion, creed, sex, gender, age, national origin, sexual orientation, pregnancy, or disability. Employees hired for positions where the primary responsibility is direct child care must be eighteen (18) years of age.

EMPLOYMENT AT THE CENTER

Once an applicant has been offered a position at Nature Story Montessori, there are a number of additional criteria which must be met by the applicant within a prescribed time period in order to be employed at the center. These include an application from child licensing, along with other required documentation which must be submitted and completed during the application process or within a predetermined span of time upon being hired.

POLICIES

This Employment Handbook information has been designed as a reference to give you a summary of most policies, procedures and programs. It is a guide, which helps you to understand the employer and its purpose and your role in meeting its purpose. **THIS STATEMENT OF POLICY IS NOT INTENDED TO CREATE AND SHALL NOT BE CONSTRUED TO CREATE CONTRACT BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYER. EITHER EXPRESS OR IMPLIED POLICIES MAY BE CHANGED AT THE DISCRETION OF EMPLOYER WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE TO OR APPROVAL BY EMPLOYEES.** These policies cannot be changed by oral representation.

Modifications must be in writing and approved in writing by the Director or Administrator of the employer only. No other individual is authorized to modify the terms of these policies either verbally or in writing. This handbook repeals and replaces all prior handbooks and prior written or verbal personnel policies.

Employees are responsible for reading and being acquainted with all personnel policies contained in this Handbook. Employees should maintain an updated copy of this handbook and all policies available. Any additions, deletions or modifications shall be distributed to the employee for inclusion in this Handbook.

AT-WILL EMPLOYMENT

Employment at Nature Story Montessori is on an “at will” basis, which means THAT EITHER THE EMPLOYEE OR EMPLOYER MAY TERMINATE THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP AT ANY TIME WITH OR WITHOUT CAUSE. A “cause” for termination need not be stated or proven by either you, or employer. The policies and procedures outlined in this handbook will be applied at the discretion of Nature Story Montessori. Nature Story Montessori reserves the right to deviate from the policies, procedures, and working conditions described in this handbook. Furthermore, the school reserves the right to withdraw or change the policies, procedures, and working conditions described in this handbook at any time, for any reason, and without prior notice.

The list below is merely provided as a guideline of conduct that is unacceptable. THE LIST IS NOT ALL INCLUSIVE AND IT DOES NOT IN ANY WAY AFFECT employer’s right to terminate employment for reasons not listed, or for no reason. Use common sense and good judgment to perform the job assigned in a manner which is in the best interests of the employer.

NON-COMPETE

Throughout the duration of employment, the Employee shall not, in any manner, represent, provide services, or engage in any aspects of business that would be deemed similar in nature to the business of Nature Story Montessori without the written consent of Nature Story Montessori. During employment, the Employee must not compete with Nature Story at a working childcare facility within a fifty mile radius of our facilities.

Grounds for Dismissal

Unacceptable conduct includes, but is not limited to:

a. Insubordination.

b. Disloyalty to employer that may be harmful to employer's relationship with clients, customers, or the public in general.

c. Agitation against employer or other employees that is or may be harmful to morale or work performance.

We do, however, strive to provide a work environment which will encourage you to remain with our program. Likewise, the employer may terminate the relationship at any time, with or without cause and with or without notice.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Due to the sensitive nature of information that you will know as a teacher of young children, it is imperative that you keep sensitive information confidential. Any information about children or their families must be shared on a "Need to Know" basis only. Thus, be very sensitive about discussing children's developmental needs and family information in public places. This does not exclude off premise discussions and/or conversations. Follow the Code of Ethical Conduct and questions of major concerns should be forwarded to the Director. Protection of the interests of each child and family is vital in maintaining a standard of professionalism, privacy, and courtesy.

Also strive to be supportive of center efforts by avoiding negative or malicious discussions about center issues. Together we can achieve great child care and education for our parents and children. Stay positive and focus on the needs of the children in your care.

CONFIDENTIALITY RELATED TO PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

NSM has developed unique techniques, curricula, and tools for evaluation which make our program more competitive in the industry and are not to be revealed to sources outside of the company. Anything which the company designs, produces, implements, and markets is treated as proprietary information. This includes, but is not limited to, the Center's family list, employee list, curriculum, philosophy, mission statement, personnel policies, and employee/parent handbooks.

No employee should discuss proprietary information with other employees in any public place where such information could be overheard. Employees should also not provide others with any documents relating to this proprietary information. Employees must understand that it is not only their duty to protect Nature Story Montessori's proprietary information during their term of employment, but that this legal obligation continues even after separation from employment. Employees are required to return any and all documentation that contains proprietary information

at the time of separation. This obligation may be enforced through court action, if necessary.

VIOLATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Any employee/volunteer who violates the Confidentiality Policy will be subject to disciplinary action including termination. In addition to job-related consequences, the employee/volunteer may face possible civil liability for their actions.

PERSONNEL POLICIES

Nature Story Montessori strives to employ people who are the best qualified to meet the needs of the center and the children under our care. Employment shall be on the basis of proven competence or potential ability as indicated by academic achievements, personal attitude, and prior work experience in accordance with the necessary qualifications and essential duties listed on the job description. The employment of all persons shall be contingent upon the approval of the Director.

Nature Story Montessori is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for its employees, the children under our care, and for those who visit our facility. The following health and safety checks must be completed prior to employment:

Dress Code

Staff is required to maintain semi-professional attire at all times. Cropped shirts, exposed backs and stomachs, low-cut clothing, and open-toed shoes are not permitted. Appropriate shoes must be worn at all times. Wedge heels, high heels, and platforms are not permitted. Shorts and skirts must reach a length that provides coverage even when staff is low to the ground. Shirt straps must be at least an inch thick.

Images and phrases on clothing and skin must be appropriate for children. Vulgar images and words are not permitted. If tattoos do not meet this standard, they must be covered while staff is around parents and children.

Clothing, tattoos, and makeup should create an overall image that is conversative and inviting to families.

Staff must be prepared for meetings with parents and families at all times.

CPR/FIRST AID/AED CERTIFICATION

MUST be completed within 30 days of your start date of employment. This is required by the child licensing for the state of Montana.

- CPR/First Aid/AED

Courses to be completed within 90 days of hire:

- Infant Safety Essentials (Formerly Safe Sleep & Shaken Baby Syndrome/Abusive Head Trauma)
- Together We Grow
- Early Childhood Essentials
- New Staff Health & Safety Orientation

****Note:** It is the responsibility of each employee (full or part-time) to pay for any costs that may result from these trainings. **

In some situations, additional health appraisals may be required to provide documentation for reasonable accommodations of an employee's disability or to determine eligibility for leave. If health changes occur during employment which may impact the ability of a staff member to perform the requisite duties of the position, or which may endanger or otherwise adversely affect others at the center, an outside expert may be consulted to determine a staff member's condition and its potential impact on children at the Center.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

State law mandates that all new employees have current clearances. State law and licensing regulations stipulate that the clearances show the employee has no open accusations or convictions of child abuse or neglect or of a felony violation of any law intended to control the illegal possession or distribution of any substance classified as a controlled substance.

While prior violations of the law will not immediately disqualify a prospective applicant from being offered employment at NSM, some misdemeanor and most felony convictions will prohibit the center from employing such an individual, as per the Montana state child care licensing rules and regulations.

NSM, at its sole discretion, may require additional criminal checks during the course of an employee's tenure at the center, if circumstances suggest this is necessary. These items are all in accordance with state licensing guidelines. Prospective employees who fail to meet these guidelines or who refuse to comply with any of the items listed above will be disqualified from employment consideration. Please see also the policies later in this section addressing potential criminal violations, drug abuse, and alcohol abuse which occurs after employment has begun.

OTHER REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

Federal and state law require that Nature Story Montessori have other documentation on file or recorded to ensure that you are eligible to work in the United States and that you are properly qualified for the position. These items can include:

- Proof of eligibility to work (Driver's license or other state-issued identification; Social Security card)
- Fingerprinting
- Education Transcripts
- Immunization Records (specifically TDaP & MMR)

Please note that the above list is not all-inclusive of items which may be required for a new hire to begin work at the Center. The orientation process will require additional documentation, and this will be explained before or during that time.

EMPLOYEE CLASSIFICATIONS

Every employee, at the time of hire, will be classified as FULL-TIME or PART-TIME, as well as EXEMPT or NON-EXEMPT. These classifications are not intended as job descriptions; they are used solely to determine benefits and overtime eligibility. In addition, new hires are considered PROVISIONAL employees for the first part of their employment, as described below.

- **Full-Time Employee:** A person who is regularly scheduled for at least thirty-two (32) or MORE hours per week. Full-time employees are eligible for full-time benefits described later in this section.
- **Part-Time Employee:** A person who is regularly scheduled for LESS THAN thirty-five (35) hours per week. Part-time employees are eligible for part-time benefits described later in this section.
- **Exempt (salary):** Employees not eligible to receive overtime pay, whose salary covers all hours worked, regardless of the number of hours required to accomplish all duties of the job as outlined in the job description. However, employees may be changed from salaried to hourly at the discretion of the owner or Director.
- **Non-Exempt (hourly):** Hourly employees eligible to receive overtime pay pursuant to Fair Labor Standards Act. Non-exempt employees are paid for the specific number of hours worked to complete their job as outlined in the job description.

PROVISIONAL STATUS

All employees will be considered provisional for up to 180 calendar days of employment when

initially hired or placed in a new position. During the Provisional Period, Nature Story Montessori will evaluate the provisional employee's performance to determine if she or he meets the standards set by NSM as outlined by both the job description and this handbook.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY

All use or possession of any alcoholic or illegal substance on school grounds or at a Nature Story Montessori event or reporting to work while under the influence of intoxicants or drugs will not be tolerated. Use or possession is grounds for immediate dismissal. Any observed use or possession is to be reported directly and immediately to the Director. Failure to do so can be cause for immediate termination.

NON-SMOKING/TOBACCO FREE POLICY

We believe in the right of all people to breathe clean air. To help protect the health of our learners, families, staff and our global community, we are a Tobacco Free Campus. Smoking is not permitted on the school premises or at school events.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT POLICY

All employees of Nature Story Montessori will be held to professional standards when on the premises. Conversations must be kept professional, especially around the students and their parents. Negative speech such as hate speech, bashing, or profanity are grounds for reprimand. We accept all religions and political views, but do not allow conversations of thus on school grounds. Please leave these conversations at the door so we can provide a positive, care-free, and unbiased education for our students.

CARE OF THE BUILDING

There is a lot of work that goes into keeping our building and grounds a pleasing environment. We ask for your help with the following:

- Turn off all lights when exiting a room
- Turn off water faucets, where applicable, and flush all toilets
- Check all windows and exterior doors to make sure they are tightly closed and locked
- Open flame candles are not permitted to burn in the school building
- Only approved picture hangers are to be used to hang materials on the walls

- Should something break and need repair please email the director

SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY OUTLINE

Sexual harassment in employment violates the provisions of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Any employee who is aware of any instance of sexual harassment should report the alleged act immediately to the Director.

All complaints will be investigated promptly, impartially and discreetly and, upon completion of the investigation, the appropriate parties will be notified immediately of the findings. NSM will not tolerate any forms of discrimination and harassment by anyone. Any employee who harasses another will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

No words, acts or symbols of racial or gender discrimination will be allowed. Proven harassment because of an individual's race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability or sexual orientation will not be tolerated and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts can arise between employees, employees and families, and the like. In the event that two or more parties find themselves in a situation where conflict is inevitable or has already occurred, has affected or will affect the center and its operation, and can be potentially resolved through the actions of the center.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

The mission of Nature Story Montessori is to nurture all children entrusted to our care in a warm and loving environment. In keeping with that purpose, this policy seeks to assure that our center is continually working toward providing an environment safe from physical and sexual abuse for those participating in receiving and providing childcare services.

Nature Story has zero tolerance for abuse. This includes grooming: the process used by an abuser to select a child, win the child's trust (and the trust of the child's parent or 'gatekeeper'), manipulate the child into sexual activity and keep the child from disclosing the abuse. Because sexual abusers 'groom' children for abuse, it is possible a staff member or volunteer may witness behavior intended to 'groom' a child for sexual abuse. Staff members and volunteers are asked to report all 'grooming' behavior, any policy violations, or any suspicious behaviors to

a supervisor. Reports can also be made to DCF, Child Protective Services, or other appropriate agencies. Nature Story will also provide contact information of local counseling services for victims of abuse.

Any action or discipline which is humiliating, shaming, frightening, or otherwise damaging to the child is strictly prohibited and is considered maltreatment. Physical discipline, including spanking of other forms of corporal punishment, are strictly prohibited in Nature Story child care facilities. Acceptable disciplinary interactions include positive guidance, redirection, and setting clear limits that foster the child's ability to become self-disciplined.

One-on-one interactions between Nature Story staff and a child shall not include touching a child's genital area, verbally illuding to sexual acts, speaking of sexual acts or items of sexual nature, physical or verbal threats, or conversations in which words are used to humiliate, shame, frighten, or otherwise damage the child.

All employees are required to complete the Infant Safety Essentials course through Montana Early Childhood Project. This course includes guidelines for defining and reporting abuse. A criminal background check will be run on each employee per state mandates.

All employees shall seek to provide open lines of communication with parents. We will operate with an open door policy allowing parent access to programs at any time. If those who are employed at Nature Story Montessori engage in any and all kind types of child abuse, sexual exploitation, or sexual harassment, they violate the terms of their employment, obviously. Such employees will be let go effective immediately and will be reported. We are required by the State of Montana, and morale, to report any suspected abuse.

Failure to follow the procedures listed above in regard to child abuse will result in employment termination.

Child Abuse Hotline is 1-866-820-5437

REPORTING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

ALL employees must report all actual or suspected child abuse of any child attending the Center as soon as possible to the Director. Montana law requires caregivers to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Montana Department of Protective Services of law enforcement. Call 1-866-820-5437 to make confidential reports. Failure to report suspected abuse or neglect is a crime.

Note: Employers are prohibited from retaliating against caregivers who make reports in good faith.

GROSS MISCONDUCT

Some offenses are so serious that they can result in termination without previous warnings. The following examples are listed for the guidance of all. This list is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all prohibited activities.

The following actions may result in immediate termination:

- Inappropriate behavior toward parents. (All staff is expected to be professional and courteous at all times. If a parent is rude to you, please allow the director to handle the situation.)
- Neglect or physical abuse of a child.
- Withholding of food, nap, or other comfort from a child.
- Failure to report to work three consecutive workdays without proper notification.
- Falsification of center records (i.e. employment application, time clock, and your records)
- Working under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs
- Smoking.
- Conviction of a felony for any offense committed while employed at the center.
- Threatening violence, or boisterous or disruptive activity in the workplace.
- Leaving a child unattended (inside or outside).
- Allowing a child to leave the center with an unauthorized person.

- Sleeping while supervising children.
- Habitual absenteeism or tardiness without notice, or unauthorized absences from workstation during the workday.
- Sexual or other unlawful or welcome harassment.
- Negligence or improper conduct leading to damage of employer-owned or customer-owned property.
- Unauthorized use of telephones, mail systems, or other employer-owned equipment. No cell phones allowed in the classroom unless authorized by the Director.
- Possession, distribution, sale, transfer, or use of alcohol or illegal drugs in the workplace, while on duty, or while operating employer-owned vehicles or equipment.
- Unsatisfactory performance or conduct.
- Sharing confidential information about the center or any of its employees.
- Promoting and sharing rumors or negative information about Nature Story Montessori.

There will be repercussions to any violation of the above rules. Depending on the severity of the offense and the Director's discretion, violations may be followed by a warning, a two-day suspension, and/or termination of employment.

PHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

Personal cell phone use is strictly prohibited during the instructional day. While the employee is charged with supervising students, the staff should refrain from using any form of technology for personal use that is not directly related to the classroom instruction.

INTERNET USE

Two specific policies address the increasing influence of online interactions:

Social Media: The posting of confidential and identifying information about the children,

parents, or staff at the center on social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, MySpace, Twitter, etc.) is strictly prohibited. In no way does Nature Story Montessori wish to abridge the rights of its employees to engage in critical commentary and observations that may relate to the center and its operations; however, when such commentary and observations occur within a public forum and contain confidential information, it may result in disciplinary action for the employee. The posting of non-confidential information (promotional materials and the like) shall be restricted to official channels of communication (the NSM website/Facebook page, etc.) unless prior written approval from the director has been obtained.

Pictures: As with the use of social media, the publication of photos from the center, whether online or otherwise, is generally prohibited without prior approval from the Director. In general, approval will usually be granted for pictures which advance the center's mission, demonstrate the educational achievements of the center or the children in our care, or which otherwise portray the center's positive contributions to the community. Staff may take pictures of the activities in their classrooms to share with the families of the children in our care, as appropriate (to document a child's progress, etc.).

As mentioned previously, some families have chosen to restrict photograph permissions, and it is expected that all employees will abide by those wishes. These restrictions will be noted in the classroom binder.

SCHOOL WIDE EMAIL

Each employee has been provided with a school email address. It is the responsibility of each employee to check this email address daily for updates from staff and administration. Any computer at the school may be used to check this email address.

PAYROLL

NSM pay days fall on the 5th and 20th of the month. In the event these days fall on a holiday or weekend day payroll will be done on the business day before. All payroll will be processed through Direct Deposit unless otherwise arranged. Pay stubs are available online only.

STAFF ATTENDANCE

- Attendance is a crucial part of the consistency and well-being of the school, and, more specifically, the child
- All staff should be on time and work according to their contract/schedule. Tardiness will

be addressed by the director on an individual basis.

- Attendance is required at all school wide functions including but not limited to: Open House, Parent Orientation.
- All teachers are required to attend all class level meetings.
- Attendance is required at all staff meetings at a date/time TBD
- Absence from a staff meeting must be submitted in writing to the Director at least 1 week (7 days) prior to the staff meeting.

Staff children should only be present for these staff meetings in emergency situations. Please make arrangements for them to remain in your classroom with appropriate activities.

ILLNESS

If you are ill, please contact the Director at least 4 hours prior to your scheduled shift to ensure that we are able to provide adequate coverage to meet state ratio requirements. If you are scheduled to clock in prior to 9 a.m. please notify the Director the night before by 7 p.m. In general, staff that provides adequate notice will not be required to provide documentation (doctor's note, etc.) for the first day of absence. Providing less than 4 hours' notice or inadequate notice as an opener, or having an illness which lasts more than a day, may require official documentation in order to validate the absence and permit the employee to return to work.

PROCEDURES FOR CALLING IN SICK

- Refer to schedule. Call a sub to cover your absence.
- Once a sub is confirmed, text the Director and Administrator with details of what arrangements have been made and accompanying sub plans.
- For same-day absence, confirm your absence and your coverage with the Director and Administrator at least four hours prior to your scheduled shift. If you are calling out the day prior to your shift, notify the Director and Administrator before 7 p.m.
- If you are unable to confirm a substitute, communicate that information with the Director and Administrator.

COVID-19 POLICY & PROCEDURES

- If a staff member has been informed by health officials that they have had *direct* exposure to a COVID-19 POSITIVE individual, they should follow the direction of the Health Department in quarantining procedures. The Director must be immediately notified in this instance.
- If there is a confirmed COVID-19 POSITIVE individual *within* the school, we will follow the direction of the health department.
- Any staff member exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 should stay home until symptom-free for 24 hours or until advised okay to return by a physician. If exposure to students or staff members was likely, the symptomatic individual should seek advice from local health officials to determine if testing is necessary.

LEAVE REQUESTS

- The Director must approve all personal leave in writing.
- Exception: Oral permission from the Director by phone or in person is acceptable for emergencies only.
- We have limited substitutes. Therefore, leave will be determined by severity of need.
- It is your responsibility to confirm a substitute for your absence. A substitute for planned absences must be confirmed within one week of your absence.

FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

The following family and medical leave policy is designed to comply with the provisions of the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA). Employees who have been employed for at least 1 year and for at least 1,250 hours during the preceding 12-month period are eligible for family and medical leave. For employees not eligible for family and medical leave, TBCC will review business considerations and the individual circumstances involved. Upon return from Family Medical Leave, the employee will return to the same or to an equivalent position. Family or medical leave will be unpaid leave. Please refer to the Appendix of this handbook for the specific conditions and guidelines governing FMLA.

OTHER TYPES OF LEAVE

Employee's work schedules have been established giving consideration to the student/teacher ratio, workloads, and coverage requirements. Employee absences have a detrimental effect on these conditions.

While absence for illness and emergency situations may happen from time to time, employees will not be granted leave beyond their accrued vacation, sick, and personal leave as a standard practice. In addition, other situations may occur where an employee needs to request time off from work. Some of these are described below.

Requests for leave other than those detailed below shall be referred to the Director, who may grant or withhold approval of such leave. All such absences shall generally be considered without pay or other compensation for the employee. Please submit requests in advance for approval, whenever possible.

Leave without pay must be approved in advance of the requested start date of the leave by the Director. Requests must be submitted in writing. Employees will receive written notice of the approval/denial for a requested leave of absence. Leave without pay which has not been approved by the director will be considered a voluntary termination. Emergency circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

JURY/WITNESS DUTY

When leave of absence must be taken for jury duty or to answer a subpoena in court, Nature Story Montessori will recognize this leave WITHOUT pay. Employees must notify the Director as soon as possible after they receive notice they are called for jury, or witness duty.

A copy of the official request to serve or subpoena should be provided to the director upon receipt of such notification.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

When the death of a member of an employee's family necessitates her or his absence from work, the Director may grant up to seven (7) days of leave, WITHOUT pay.

In addition, anyone who permanently resides in the employee's household may be considered a family member for purposes of bereavement leave, at the Director's discretion.

Employees may be required to provide proof of the relationship between themselves and the deceased individual, and a copy of either the obituary or some other evidence of when burial/funeral services are to be held. Bereavement leave for other family members or non family members is subject to the discretion and approval of the Director.

Employees must request Bereavement Leave as soon as possible in advance of the leave.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

All staff should notify the Office immediately of any changes in address, phone number or any pertinent life changes, such as marriage or birth of a child.

PERSONNEL POLICIES

Provisional employees who have been placed in a new position at the center are not eligible to use any form of accrued paid absence during the provisional period (paid sick leave, vacation time, personal time), excluding designated holidays. The provisional period may be extended up to 30 days, by approval of the Director and only where it is deemed necessary and appropriate. In all cases of requests to extend an employee's provisional period, the Director will provide a performance appraisal and the reason for extension, and the length of extension that is recommended. Requests for extension cannot be submitted after the provisional period concludes. Upon successful completion of the provisional period, the Director will recommend whether the provisional employee should be retained. The recommendation will be accompanied by a completed final provisional performance appraisal. Upon approval, the employee will enter regular employment status and thereby will be deemed eligible for those benefits provided to regular employees of the same classification. Should the provisional employee not be recommended for regular status, the employee will be terminated no later than the last day of the provisional period, or any extension thereof. Employment may be terminated at any time during the provisional period with or without cause.

ROOM, SCHOOL KEYS, AND BUILDING SECURITY

- All lead and assistant lead teaching staff will be issued a key to the building.
- Even for a short period of time, YOU MUST NEVER LOAN KEYS TO ANYONE, especially students and including your own family members.

- Report all lost or stolen keys to the Director immediately to ensure security.
- Building security is your responsibility. Lock your doors when leaving for the day.
- Teachers should not collect cash for any reason
- Do not store valuables in your classroom. The school does not carry insurance on your personal things.
- When you enter or leave the building outside of working hours, make sure the door shuts and locks behind you.

PAY SCHEDULE/RECORDING HOURS

Our work week begins on Sunday at 12:00 am and ends on Saturday 11:59pm. Employees must clock in and out to accurately record the actual hours worked. If you forget to clock in or out, notify the Director immediately so it can be fixed. Employees who falsely represent the number of hours worked or those who fail to clock in and out correctly may have their paycheck delayed and may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. When a payday falls on a holiday, paychecks will be issued on the next business day after the holiday.

OVERTIME

Employees will be notified at the time of hire as to whether they are classified as “exempt” or “non-exempt” as determined by the Fair Labor Standards Act. The overtime policy addresses payment for overtime for Non-Exempt employees only. Definitions of Exempt and Nonexempt Employees can be found in the Employee Classification section of this document.

The nature of the duties and responsibilities of some non-exempt employees may require overtime work from time to time. Overtime work should be considered an exceptional situation.

The Director must approve all overtime prior to the employee working the overtime hours. In cases when obtaining prior approval is not possible, such as situations involving the late pick-up of children by their parents, the employee must inform the Director of the situation as soon as possible following the overtime hours. Employees who do not seek prior approval for working overtime will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

If circumstances dictate the need for overtime, the Director may inform an employee of the need to work overtime with little or no notice. If a non-exempt employee is required to work overtime hours, the employee will receive monetary compensation for the additional hours worked as

mandated by federal and state laws.

WORK SCHEDULE

Nature Story Montessori is open Monday through Friday from 7am until 5:30 pm. Work schedules are prepared by the Director each week and will be posted by Friday, with hours set for the following week. The schedule will include work days, work hours, and days off.

Temporary and permanent schedule changes may be necessary to effectively meet the needs of the program. In the event that a parent is late in picking up a child (after 5:30 pm), the employee must remain with the child until an approved adult arrives to take the child home. Employees will be paid for any such time beyond their normal work hours.

Hours of attendance have been carefully planned and employees are required to work the hours and days for which they have been scheduled. If you are unable to report to work for any reason, you must notify the Director at least 4 hours prior to your scheduled starting time. In the case that the employee will be opening the center, the employee must notify the Director by 7 p.m. the previous day. Failure to provide notice in a timely manner will be considered unexcused absence and may result in disciplinary action. Employees will not be permitted to use available leave time for an unexcused absence. Employees who fail to notify the Director at all may be considered to have abandoned their position, which will result in termination.

HOLIDAYS AND OTHER CLOSING

From time to time, the center may be closed for a holiday observance or because of an emergency situation. Non-exempt (hourly) staff are not paid for their regularly scheduled hours during holidays or emergency closings. In situations where the center closes after opening for the day, non-exempt employees will be paid only for the hours they actually work. Holidays Nature Story Montessori closes for the following holidays:

New Year's Day
Martin Luther King
Day President's Day
Memorial Day
Independence Day
Labor Day
Thanksgiving Break
Christmas Break

Generally, when one of the listed holidays fall on a Sunday, it will be observed the following Monday. Likewise, if the holiday falls on a Saturday, it will be observed the preceding Friday.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURES

Evacuation routes are posted in each room, noting the specific exits for that room in case of an emergency that requires staff and children to leave the center. While an emergency situation can be quite chaotic, you need to maintain a calm and level head, regardless of the situation.

EMERGENCY (Leaving the Center)

In the event of an emergency which requires leaving the Center (during a fire, for instance), you should:

- Gather up the classroom binder and emergency backpack
- Take the children to the sidewalk in front of the Four Georgians Gym, or the designated Safe Area
- Take attendance and report any missing children or staff to the director immediately This procedure should be followed in the event of any real or perceived emergency, even if the event is a scheduled drill.

EMERGENCY (Remaining at the Center)

For emergencies where leaving the center would be, you should:

- Gather up the classroom binder and emergency backpack
- Go to the designated Safe Area listed for the particular emergency
- Take attendance and report any missing children or staff to the Director immediately Please note that parents are prohibited from picking up their children during this kind of emergency! While the parent is permitted to join the child in the designated Safe Area, you may not release the child into the parent's custody until after the emergency situation is no longer a threat. This procedure should be followed in the event of any real or perceived emergency, even if the event is a scheduled drill.

EMERGENCY CLOSINGS

In the event of a pandemic, building closure, unforeseen closure, or weather, Nature Story Montessori may close. In this case, working from home is not available and time will be without pay. Emergency closing is at the discretion of the Director.

SEVERE WEATHER CONDITIONS

In the event of severe weather conditions, NSM will generally follow the local school district in determining whether or not to close the Center. Employees are instructed to listen to local radio and television stations for emergency closing information in these circumstances. Employees are also instructed to contact the Director or Administrator for further instructions. Employees are instructed to contact the Director or Administrator by 6am and again at 8am for further instructions.

OTHER EMERGENCIES

While no policy can cover every contingency, you are expected to follow all rules from CPR and First Aid training, in any emergency which may necessitate the use of such training. When blood or other bodily fluids are involved, you are expected to use gloves in handling the situation. If immediate medical attention is needed for a child or another staff member, call 911 before administering assistance, then call the Director whenever possible. Other situations, including but not limited to electrical power failure, lack of water, lack of heat or air conditioning, hazardous road conditions, or other situations which could endanger the safety or health of children and employees, may result in NSM being closed at the sole discretion of the Director. Employees will be advised of their obligations in these situations.

In the event of an emergency closing in the middle of the day, the Director will instruct employees during the emergency. Employees are required to remain at the center as long as there are children present. In rare instances, this may require employees to remain after normal closing hours.

Employees must be mindful that compliance with Licensing Regulations must be maintained even in emergency situations (ratios, general policies, and the like). The Director will inform employees when they are able to go home. Employees who refuse to cooperate during an emergency closing situation may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

BEHAVIORAL INCIDENTS

Behavioral incidents between children may also occur where one child hurts or attempts to hurt another child at the center, and the incident leaves a mark. While some of these are relatively mild, all such incidents should be documented as noted:

- **Behavioral Incident (General):** This kind of incident usually involves two or more children engaging in behavior against one another which would not be considered acceptable - e.g., Child "A" throws a toy at Child "B", leaving a mark. The incident must be documented for both children. Identifying information for each child involved should only be placed on that child's form - in the example above, the name of Child "A" (who threw the toy) would only go on Child "A" form. The

name of Child “B” would only go on Child “B” form. Under no circumstances are employees allowed to acknowledge which child hurt another in writing, verbally, or nonverbally (pointing, nodding one’s head, etc.).

- **Biting Incident:** This particular kind of incident is documented separately for children 3 and under. All other ages should use the Behavioral Incident form instead. As with the previous form, the Biting Incident must be documented for both children, withholding the identifying information as noted above. If the bite draws blood, the Director needs to be notified immediately, regardless of the age of the children involved.

HEALTH

Your health is important to us! Not only does your health affect your own ability to perform your duties effectively, but your health can also affect others - the children under your care, parents, and other staff. As such, staff should follow similar guidelines to those laid out for sending children home (temperature exceeding 101 °F, vomiting, etc.) as indicators as to when staff should also remain at home instead of reporting to work, or when a staff member should be sent home from work.

HAZARDS

During the course of your employment, you have the potential to be exposed to bodily fluids, blood-borne pathogens, and chemicals. Please review the appropriate policies in the General Duties section for more information on how to correctly deal with situations where these hazards might be present.

WEAPONS AND OTHER SAFETY HAZARDS

Possession or use of any type of weapon, dangerous object, or explosive device while on center property is prohibited, and will result in immediate termination. This does not include items which might reasonably be expected to be used during the normal course of an employee’s duties.

ILLNESS OF CHILDREN

Illnesses don’t just affect the child who is ill; anyone who comes into contact with the child may also contract the illness. As such, employees must be aware of how to recognize the signs and symptoms of possible illness, and how to address those situations when they occur. If a child shows signs of illness, those symptoms should be reported immediately to the director. In some cases, the child will be sent home until the illness has passed.

Recognizing a child who shows any sign of the following should be reported to the Director for observation:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Rash (other than heat or diaper)
- Diarrhea
- Infectious mucus (green)
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- Breathing difficulties

This is not an all-inclusive list.

PROCEDURES FOR SICK CHILDREN

Once a sick child's symptoms have been reported to the Director, the determination will be made as to whether the child should be sent home. Staff should not make the initial determination. If the child is determined to be sick, the parent(s) of the child will be contacted to make arrangements to pick the child up from the center.

The child will remain separated from the other children at the center until he/she is picked up. If a sick child is sent home, the child will not be allowed to return until either the child no longer has the symptoms, begins a course of treatment for the illness, or otherwise appears to be well enough to attend the Center.

A child sent home after 12 pm will generally not be allowed to return the following day.

ADMINISTRATION OF CHILDREN'S MEDICATION

Prescription Medication

We will allow the parents to come in to administer prescription medication that is in the original container with an attached label which includes the child's full name, instructions for administration, and the date the prescription was filled or the expiration date.

Epi-Pens And Inhalers

From the moment of registration, we must have a signed doctor's note, along with detailed instructions on how to administer the medication, on hand for Epi-Pens and inhalers. Epi-Pens and inhalers are not allowed to be kept in the student's backpack. If such medication is transported that way, please inform one of our staff so that we may store it safely in our medical area.

Emergency Care of a Child

- In the event of a medical emergency requiring a trip to the doctor, NSM staff member will first try to notify the parent/guardian so that they can transport the child.
- If the parent/guardian cannot be reached, an authorized emergency person will be contacted.
- If the parent/guardian or authorized person cannot be contacted, a NSM staff person will accompany the child to seek medical treatment.
- The parent/guardian or a person listed on the child's Emergency Medical Authorization Form will be called to meet the staff person and child at the medical facility.
- 911 will be called to transport the child to a medical facility if the situation requires immediate medical attention.
- Agency policy does not allow staff to transport children in their personal vehicles.

Emergency Medical Authorization Form

- Parents/Guardians will be required to complete an Emergency Medical Authorization Form at the time of enrollment.
- The Emergency Medical Authorization Form will accompany the child in a medical emergency.
- Parents will be asked to submit a copy of their health insurance card at the time of enrollment to be kept in their child's file.

SAFE SLEEP POLICY

Nature Story Montessori follows all safe sleep practices as provided by Montana DPHHS. Staff are required to take sleep safety courses.

DISCIPLINE POLICY (CHILDREN)

The staff at Nature Story Montessori does not use corporal punishment. Discipline is designed to help the child develop inner control and respect for the rights of self and others. Our goal is the development of self-discipline. In general, a child may not harm another person (or self), disturb another person's work, misuse a piece of equipment, or violate the rights of the group.

Disciplinary Measures

- Careful preparation of the staff and classroom environment to aid in the child's daily success and independence
- Clear descriptions and modeling of safe rules, social etiquette, and daily routine
- The following describes the procedure used for conflict resolution:
The particular situation may be resolved at any point along the following sequence:

1. Teacher observes interaction or may simply go near the child involved and watch (non-verbal)
2. Teacher may make non-directive, descriptive statements if indicated (“Yes, Tommy took the paintbrush you were using”)
3. Teacher may ask a “what” question to assist the children in building conflict resolution skills (i.e. “What can you do/say to get your paintbrush back?”)
4. Teacher may make a directive statement and help the child find the necessary words
5. Physical intervention- the teacher repeats what is required (i.e. “Tommy, it is time to give back the paintbrush), and then “I’m going to take the paintbrush and give it back to Amy, she was painting with it. Let’s find something that you and I can do together.”
6. The child may require some “quiet time/watching time” to regain composure. This can be a spot anywhere in the classroom that is safe and appropriate.

ACCIDENTS

Accidents and injuries on the job, while rare, can happen. In order to protect your claim for compensation and/or minimize liability for Nature Story Montessori and its employees, all injuries or accidents to an employee occurring during the employee’s scheduled hours at the center, no matter how minor, must be reported to the Director immediately.

All employees are covered by Workers’ Compensation insurance and must seek treatment for accidents and injuries as required by the plan. Employees will be required to provide information regarding the accident or injury to the director within one day of the accident. Employees who are placed on Workers’ Compensation will be notified in writing of the status of the position, status of health insurance benefits, and their responsibilities while on Workers’ Compensation. Accidents involving children, parents, or visitors to the center are covered in the General Duties section of this handbook.

NON-SOLICITATION

Employees of Nature Story Montessori are strictly prohibited from solicitation of any kind while on any NSM property without written permission of the Director.

This includes:

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES: During hours of employment, while on center property, or with the use of center funds or equipment, employees of NSM are prohibited from engaging in commercial solicitations for their own personal gain. In the event that the activity may instead benefit the community, the center, a charitable organization, or similar entity, the director may give prior approval for the activity, subject to limitations determined by the director as necessary.

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES: During hours of employment, while on center property, or with the use of center funds or equipment, employees of NSM are prohibited from the following:

- Participation in any partisan or non-partisan political activity or any other political activity associated with a candidate, or contending faction or group, for an election for public or party office.
- Participation in any activity to provide voters or prospective voters with transportation to the polls or similar assistance in connection with any such election.
- Participation in any voter registration activity.

DISCIPLINARY PROCESS (STAFF)

In the event that an employee is found to be in violation of one or more policies outlined in this handbook, the disciplinary process may be initiated. While this is generally a process of escalating actions, certain violations may be more egregious in their severity, frequency of occurrence, and/or scope, and thus could warrant a disciplinary action higher on the list, up to and including termination of duties. The determination of the specific disciplinary action to be undertaken is at the discretion of the director, and will be appropriate to the nature of the offense.

REPRIMAND

A reprimand may be given to any employee when a minor violation of center policies or procedures has occurred. A reprimand may be either verbal or written. Verbal reprimands will be documented by the director, and the documentation will be placed in the employee's personnel file. Written reprimands will include brief documentation of the incident and the date on which it occurred. Written reprimands require that a copy of the written reprimand be given to the employee, and a copy of the reprimand signed by the employee to acknowledge receipt of the document must be placed in the employee's file.

WRITTEN WARNING

For more serious violations of policies and procedures, or repeated minor violations, an employee may be given a written warning. The written warning will clearly describe the deficiency in the performance or conduct, and will cite the policy, licensing regulation, or procedure violated. The written warning will contain a corrective action plan, outlining the necessary action(s) to correct the deficiency and a timetable in which the corrective action must occur.

A copy of the written warning and the corrective action plan will be given to the employee. Employees are required to sign a copy of the written warning, acknowledging its receipt, which will then be placed in the employee's personnel file. Signing the written warning does not indicate that the employee agrees with the contents; it simply indicates receipt of a copy of the written warning. Failure or refusal

to sign the written warning will be considered insubordination and will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Copies of all documentation regarding corrective action plans will be retained by the Director. Investigatory Suspension for suspected severe, but unconfirmed allegations of policy and procedure violations, the director may initiate an investigatory suspension of the employee.

During this time, the employee is suspended without pay. The outcome of an investigatory suspension is generally either full reinstatement (if the employee is found not to be in violation of the policies) or further disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Examples of situations which would warrant use of Investigatory suspension include, but are not limited to:

- Charges of driving while intoxicated
- Report of child abuse or neglect
- Accusations of theft
- Violation of the Substance Abuse Policy
- Other similar situations Investigatory suspension may not exceed 10 working days without the approval of the Director.

ALL STAFF MEMBERS WILL

1. Smile and be friendly to all staff, children, and visitors.
2. Recognize that offensive language is never appropriate and set an example to your co-workers and the children in your care by speaking appropriately.
3. Be in their class except for brief breaks when necessary and appropriate. Copying materials and preparing activities should only take place during class time in extreme situations.
4. Be kind.
5. Be aware of the safety of all children in and out of your care at all times.
6. Acknowledge and assist any visitors.
7. Recognize that safety and cleanliness is important at all times. Notify the office immediately of anything needing repair. We also want to encourage the children to keep our school environment beautiful.
 - a. **School wide** — pick up papers on the floor, properly clean up spills on carpets and floors, maintain outside areas (look from a family's eyes when they enter the building, and help our children to form good cleanliness practices).
 - b. **Office Areas** — Keep all areas dusted, vacuumed, and neatly organized. Keep all materials in their appropriate place.
 - c. **Classrooms** — Eliminate all clutter, keep all shelves dusted and neatly organized, and

keep all storage areas organized and accessible. Although empowerment and ownership are important for children in classroom maintenance, modeling and collaboration is paramount in maintaining the overall beauty of the classroom.

Morning — Prepare all materials, put down chairs, prepare all shelves, make adjustments in lesson plans, put together new materials, etc. Greet all children as they enter with a smile and conversation.

Lunch — Check/maintain work rugs, clean and sanitize snack area, check/maintain tile and carpet, check/maintain all shelves.

End of day — Clean/sanitize all work and snack areas, put up all chairs, re-roll rugs, recount and check for completed activities, sharpen pencils, check supplies, check/maintain folder storage, lunch box and slipper area, clean up any additional activities: outside, commons, teacher work space, storage rooms. Collect and empty trash into the dumpster.

UNIVERSAL PRECAUTIONS

All employees are required to strictly adhere to Universal Precautions Procedures to control exposure to Blood-borne Pathogens (discussed below) and other hazards, and to promote good hygiene.

To assist in this, Nature Story Montessori provides vinyl gloves and personal protective equipment for the use of the employees; these items are located in the first aid cabinet. Employees are required to have personal protective equipment in their immediate area at all times.

When traveling outside of the classroom area, employees are required to carry the First-Aid backpack at all times. Employees are required to use the personal protective equipment in each and every instance warranted by this and other policies and procedures, in the manner in which the personal protective equipment is intended for use. Failure to appropriately use personal protective equipment at any time will result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

BLOOD-BORNE PATHOGENS

During your employment at the Center you may, in the course of your daily activities, come into contact with potentially infectious materials. Those situations may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Providing assistance after an accident has occurred with children, employees, parents and/or volunteers.
- Assisting children during medical procedures, i.e., first-aid, nose bleeds, times of illness, administration of medication, etc.
- Cleaning up after a child has a toileting accident.

- Handling of contaminated items such as soiled clothing, tissues, and diapers.
- Cleaning up and handling broken glass and/or sharp objects.

While not all of the above situations are inherently dangerous, failure to follow universal precautions (using the appropriate protective gear) places the employee and others at risk.

Thus, for your own safety and the safety of others, all employees are required to treat all children and fellow employees as though they might be infected with a blood-borne pathogen, regardless of a known medical condition, how they look, or what is known about their lifestyle. Persons infected with blood-borne pathogens do not look a certain way, act in a particular fashion, are a certain age or lead particular lifestyles. Persons with a blood-borne pathogen disease are not required to disclose their illness to the employees or administration of Nature Story Montessori; as such information is confidential and protected by law. Common blood-borne pathogens include, but are not limited to: HIV, hepatitis, syphilis, and herpes. These and other blood-borne pathogens are transmitted primarily through human blood and other potentially infected materials (OPIMs), which include, but are not limited to: semen, vaginal secretions, feces, urine, or any other bodily fluid that may contain blood.

EXPOSURE AND INCIDENT REPORTING

Because of the nature of the job, routine contact with some OPIMs (Other Potentially Infectious Materials) will occur with some regularity.

EMPLOYEES MUST:

Always wear personal protective equipment (gloves) when changing diapers, cleaning up accidents, etc.

- Report any incident where the employee comes in direct contact with blood or OPIMs, either through unprotected skin contact or a breach in the protective gear (e.g., a torn or broken glove) Reporting an incident involves
- Notify the Director of the direct exposure to/contact with blood or OPIMs, as noted above
- Completion of an Exposure Control Incident Report

These actions should be completed within one (1) hour of the exposure incident. Failure to report an exposure incident and/or complete and turn in the Exposure Control Incident Report as outlined will result in disciplinary action, as noted elsewhere in this document.

Employees should be mindful of blood or OPIM on their clothing or personal items. Contaminated clothing and personal items must be cleaned and/or disposed of in a manner to ensure that further exposure does not occur. This may require that an employee's clothing be torn or cut off and/or thrown away. Nature Story Montessori is not responsible for clothing or General Duties 36 personal items ruined or destroyed as a result of contamination and/or removal as per this policy.

Nature Story Montessori

EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM

I, _____ have received and read the Nature Story Montessori Employee Policy and Procedures Handbook. I expect to be guided by the rules and policies contained therein. I further understand and agree that my employment with Nature Story Montessori is at will and may be terminated by the director of the Nature Story Montessori at any time for any reason or without reason. I understand that nothing in the Personnel Policies and Procedures handbook or in any oral statement or representation by any employee or representative of Nature Story Montessori shall be deemed to create a contract of employment or any other modification of the at-will employment relationship. I also understand that any or all of the provisions contained in the Employee Policy and Procedures Handbook may be modified, amended, or eliminated by Nature Story Montessori at any time with or without notice.

Employee Signature & Date

Nature Story Montessori Director Signature & Date