

# The Kindergarten Programme

Taraleigh Steiner Kindergarten and Playgroup

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This document is available on our website and  
copies are on display at the Kindergarten.

## **Introduction**

Our kindergarten has been established since 1987 and has developed a strong reputation for being child centred, nurturing and encouraging parent participation. The program and the environment promote the child's natural development through play and exploration.

Our program is based on teachings and indications given by Rudolf Steiner, an influential teacher and philosopher.

The kindergarten provides a range of enriching experiences for both children and parents and serves as an introduction to Steiner education methods for interested families. Its focus, however, is on the development of the child, and in particular the development of important skills and understandings of the world around them.

The kindergarten is the bridge between home and school, and so it uses the model of family life as the underlying element of the program, enhanced by more formal activities such as movement and artistic pursuits (including painting, drawing and modelling). There is a home-like atmosphere where food is prepared and cooked, the garden is tended, and the animals are fed and looked after. Within this warm and secure environment, the children play freely according to their developmental stage, helping with these tasks when they wish to, or when it is appropriate.

## **A Steiner Kindergarten**

The Steiner philosophy on education for the child from birth to seven years old aims to ensure that the child is nurtured - physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Free, creative play - the very lifeblood of childhood - is considered the best preparation for self-realising adult life. The Steiner kindergarten strives to provide guidance for the young child in an environment where children are free to play and free to be children. The Steiner educator endeavours to create an environment that gives children *time* to play where they develop their imagination and learn to form ideas from within themselves.

At this age, children are discovering how to relate socially with a peer group and take part in fundamental life tasks. They are not ready for more formal classes. For those aged four to six years, play is the 'work' of the child. Great care is therefore taken to create a protected play-space where the child learns by doing. Simple, homely tasks and artistic activities to both do and see are balanced with storytelling, singing games and generous play times.

Because the young child (up to seven years) lives very much in his 'will', she likes to be doing and moving. At times, outdoor activities and play predominate with the children negotiating the climbing frame and wooden planks, swinging, watering plants, digging and waterplay play in the sandpit, making mudbricks, building cubbies and tepees, loading and unloading our outdoor carts, galloping with horse reins. During quieter times children need the space and time to watch the clouds, observe the beetles, worms, bees, caterpillars and butterflies or cut pretty flowers for a vase that will be placed on the morning tea table.

A rich supply of natural, open-ended materials provides scope for imagination in play, which refined toys purchased in toy shops often deny. Steiner education seeks to nurture the senses through artistic work, play, movement, watercolour painting, singing, drawing and modelling, playing in nature and caring for the environment.

The young child is also nurtured by daily kindergarten rhythms of play and imitating adults working at simple tasks around them. There is daily nourishment in the form of simple nature stories and fairy tales, and from

rhythmic circle games, finger plays and songs. Seasonal rhythms are also followed, with an end of term celebration and a festival or event to celebrate the changing season.

Adults are a *presence* in the kindergarten but leave children free to 'meet' each other. In this 'meeting' and playing creatively together, children learn vital interpersonal skills. The kindergarten teacher plays an important role in this, enabling relationships between children to strengthen through play.

*'Receive the child in reverence  
Educate him with love  
Let him go forth in freedom'  
(Rudolf Steiner)*

### **The Kindergarten Routine**

On arrival, parents and children enter the kindergarten, place a piece of fruit in the basket ready for cutting up, hang up bags and coats on the child's own wooden peg and shoes are removed if we are playing indoors and placed on the shelf under the child's peg. Slippers on and wash hands. Parents then leave. Any child who is having difficulty separating from the parent is taken to the teacher or an assistant. Children may play either inside or out, freely, or participate in an activity such as drawing, painting or cooking.

After play time we gather for a morning Circle of songs and games, and then wash our hands before sharing morning tea. We eat quite formally, with tables set using plates and glasses which we treat with care. Before we eat, we say or sing a blessing together and enjoy the conversation and togetherness throughout the meal. After clearing their own dishes, the children play again either outdoors or indoors, or may choose to busy themselves with the cleaning up.

Outside the children are busy. They help set up and prepare the outside environment. The animals are fed and watered, and often petted. The garden is watered and maintained. Cubby houses and constructions are made, trees are climbed, children swing, and many are drawn to the sand-pit for digging, cooking and making rivers. After another interval of play the children gather together for a story, told in the traditional verbal fashion. Stories may be told with or without small props and puppets and are repeated for the duration of at least a week. After saying goodbye to the little ones, the older children either help with setting the table for lunch or resume playing either in or outdoors.

When lunch is ready, a song calls the children in to wash their hands and find their place at the table. The same routine is repeated for lunch and afterwards we offer a short rest time for all the children. This time provides the children with the opportunity to stop the activity from within and begin to digest their kindergarten day. After rest there is time for a short play and/or a game, to pack away the indoor and outdoor environment, share afternoon tea and a drink. Together we sing good-bye, gather all our belongings and greet the parents at the gate.

*'Our highest endeavour must be to develop free  
human beings, who are able of themselves to  
impart purpose and direction in their lives.'  
(Rudolf Steiner)*

### **Child Development**

Our Kindergarten Program recognises that each child who enters the kindergarten has a unique destiny to fulfil and it is the task of the kindergarten to create the best circumstances possible to help each child unfold in the

healthiest and most appropriate way possible. It is also fundamentally important to enable them to take the developmental steps toward their future roles as free and creative individuals.

The kindergarten meets the child in the first seven-year phase of life in which the young child builds up a healthy physical body. In these years the children also make the most extensive progress that will be made in a whole lifetime of development in a number of important areas. These are physical growth, motor development, language, cognitive and social development.

Based on Steiner's indication of the human developmental phases in childhood, the kindergarten curriculum focuses on several essential processes in which the child is engaged, addressing the child's developmental needs as a being of will, of the senses, of imitation and of imagination.

### ***The child as a being of will***

The young child lives in the world of processes, in the world of continuous activity. Unconscious forces within the child drive them to connect with the environment into which they have been born, and from these experiences a healthy human being will emerge.

These forces impel the child towards humanness - to walk upright, to develop speech and thought. In direct contrast to the adult, when meeting a new experience, young children respond firstly in their will. They then digest it through re-enactment (play) and from there can develop concepts.

Each child has these will-forces in abundance, and they need nurturing in a healthy environment, so they may become healthy self-directed forces in adulthood.

### ***The child as a sense being***

The little child's senses are wide open, allowing the developing human being to take in all that surrounds them without discrimination. Everything has an influence, for the child. This is the time of life when children are at their most vulnerable, for whatever is experienced goes deeply into the body.

### ***The child as a being of imitation***

*The whole life of the child up to his seventh year is a continuous imitation of what takes place in his environment. And the moment a child perceives something, whether a movement or a sound, there arises in him the impulse or an inward gesture to re-live what has been perceived, with the whole intensity of his inner nature.*

*(Steiner, The Spiritual Ground of Education, Oxford 1922)*

Small children enter into every experience they meet with deep empathy. For example, having watched their mother cut the vegetables for dinner, children will, given the opportunity imitate her physical movements and gestures as well as her inner attitude to the task.

The educational implications in the kindergarten program are to recognise the importance of imitation as a learning art. The child will learn much from imitation and example, more so than from merely being *told* things.

As the desire in children to imitate is so strong, that which they can receive and learn through imitation will live within them.

### ***The child as a being of imagination***

*You can make a doll for a child by folding up an old napkin, making two corners into legs, the other two corners into arms, a knot for the head and painting eyes, nose and mouth with blots of ink. Or else you can buy the child what they call a pretty doll with real hair and painted cheeks ... if the child has before him the folded napkin, he must fill in from his own imagination all that is needed to make it real and human. This work of the imagination moulds and builds the forms of the brain. The brain unfolds as the muscles of the hand unfold when they do the work for which they are gifted. Give the child the so called 'pretty doll' and the brain has nothing more to do.*

*(Steiner, The Education of the Child)*

In the third year of life the child's play emerges into the world of fantasy, where the child can imbue, say, a piece of wood with qualities and in his/her play, call it a car or (even a minute later) a rolling pin!

The child's imagination works in a very fluid way with whatever presents itself in the environment. This gradually changes until, by the age of five, the child moves into the taking of roles, playing out human relationships and the professions. Now the play begins to have a sense of planning as the child can plan ahead. The imagination is more internalised, and the child is then able to play without needing external props on which to project their fantasy.

### **The Kindergarten Environment**

The environment with which a child and his senses interact is of primary importance. The kindergarten environment aims to nurture the senses, but not overwhelm them by providing warm, nurturing and inviting surroundings. Great care is taken in choosing colours and materials. For example, the colour of the walls or curtains may be a gentle pink, chosen for its warm and life enhancing qualities. Natural materials are used wherever possible. The furniture and equipment used is often made by hand, with attention to beauty and practicality of design.

Playthings are often objects collected from the natural environment, sea shells, nuts, pine cones, logs and other more conventionally shaped blocks. There are also cloths in plain, beautiful colours, and hand carved wooden animals or houses. The outside play area is also very important. It should be effectively a children's garden where they play alongside plants, flowers and trees and experience the natural elements of earth, water, air and fire.

### **Adults in the Kindergarten Environment**

The teacher in a Steiner Kindergarten understands that the children learn best by imitation and example.

*The joy of the child in, and with, her environment must be reckoned among the forces that build and mould the physical organs. She needs people around her with happy looks and manners, and above all, with an honest unaffected love. A love which fills the physical environment of the child with warmth may literally be said to 'hatch out' the forms of the physical organs. The child who lives in such an atmosphere of love and warmth and who has around him good examples to imitate is living in his right element. One should therefore strictly guard against anything being done in the child's presence that she must not imitate.*

*(Steiner, The Education of the Child)*

The adults need to be engaged in real work around the children, doing the tasks of everyday life. Through their inner attitude towards this work and in their clear gestures, the interest of the children will be well engaged. This in turn may then be expressed in good play and in the way that children will later take up these tasks themselves.

Through the adults' attitude towards them and the world around them, come attitudes of wonder, respect and reverence in the children. This can be shown in the way a child who has hurt themselves is looked after, the way in which animals are cared for in the kindergarten, or to the spider that is taken outside to find his way home.

## **Learning Experiences**

In an interesting natural environment filled with 'open ended' play materials, children have unlimited opportunities for learning. In free play, children are forever problem solving, whether in the social realm (*Who will play with me?*), the physical realm (*How do I get this big stick to stand upright?*) or the psychological realm (*What does it feel like to be boss?*).

In the garden the children experience the seasonal cycles, including the weather. They experience the elements of earth, water, fire and air. They learn the care of animals and experience with wonder the life cycles. They watch the growth of plants and watch with excitement the germination and the growth of the seeds they plant.

More formally, the children gain a range of knowledge and manual skills. They engage in the cutting, grating, weighing and measuring of food. They experience cooking and the changes that occur, such as the rising of bread. In handwork, they develop skills and dexterity as well as eye-hand co-ordination.

Social skills are learnt through group experiences, such as sitting down and eating with others, sharing story time and through facilitated free play.

## **Play**

By the time the children enter the kindergarten they have developed fantasy and often use this as a tool to create, manipulate, understand, and to learn. It is through such tools that they learn to integrate experiences into their lives. Children need to play, to express themselves outwardly, just as adults need to play with thoughts and ideas to solve problems and to be creative.

The kindergarten is set up to allow for self-directed play. The children may use most of the materials in the room, including the tables and chairs. Baskets containing 'open ended' materials offer many possibilities, rather than a single fixed idea. Many of these materials are from the natural world, some are handmade, but all are for the stimulation of the imagination.

Children are given ample time indoors and outdoors to allow them time to create and develop their play. The content of the morning circles and stories offer the children opportunities for stimulating play. The teachers offer encouragement to the children with the development of these themes in their play.

Through play, the children:

- Explore and manipulate their environment
- Imitate what they experience, to integrate these experiences internally
- Practice and develop physical skills
- Create opportunities to deal with emotions, such as fear, happiness and anger
- Role play
- Gain a range of social skills

Given the opportunity for plenty of free play, children can integrate their life experiences more fully and exercise their imaginative faculties, which can transform into creative thinking forces. This helps them relate well to others and have the measure of their own abilities.

### **Children's Circle**

Young children are always in movement, and it seems only natural if one is presenting songs and poems to them that movement should accompany the voice. All the children come together and sing songs, rhymes, verses and nursery rhymes, usually linked together in some way, perhaps from a story. A nature story may be used as the basis for the Children's Circle, and the songs and rhymes created or found for it.

Care is taken in choosing the language or the music for the circle. The circle needs to fit the mood of the story or season, and attention is given to variety in movement (vigorous movement/quieter movement) and to the use of the space (up, down, in, out). All the movement should be graceful and ensouled and truly complement the content.

An adult leads the Circle, and the Children are not instructed as such, but delight in imitating the movements. Although the circle always begins as a circle, once the children begin to move, they are often unable to hold the form, and so it is no longer required of them to do so. We may run, skip, hop, walk or fly like birds. We may curl up as very small seeds and unfold into beautiful tall plants.

It is very rare that morning circle is accompanied by an instrument. Music is usually sung. Towards the end of the year more traditional circle games may be included. These have come to us over hundreds of years and embody history, legends and truths about human being and destiny. They also teach cultural and social behaviours.

### **Music**

Music is an integral part of the program. Children live in a musical element and respond easily and joyfully to the singing voice. They develop discrimination and the ability to follow a tune. Music, where possible, is given in the pentatonic scale- an early musical mode - with simple open qualities appropriate for this age group. More specifically, the music should revolve around the fifths from A down to D and up to E, with emphasis on the A. It is important that the adults sing with the children rather than use recorded songs and music, so they can imitate the human voice and not a mechanical device. Songs are sung to accompany activities, to announce special parts of the day and during transition times where the children move as a group.

Children may also do this among themselves. Songs are also used extensively in the morning circle and sometimes during a story. The pentatonic lyre may be played before a story.

### **Story Time**

Each day the children are told a story. The story may be taken from nature or may be a traditional fairy tale (like from the Brothers Grimm). The stories are not chosen purely for entertainment, but also for the genuine psychological and spiritual values they contain. Such stories bring to the children (in images) aspects of themselves, their lives and the road ahead of them. These stories can be told many times. Usually the same story is told every day for a week or two, in order that the themes and the rhythm are reinforced in other aspects of the day. No book is used but sometimes small puppets or other props are used to enact the story. The children develop good listening and memory skills and can respond freely in their own imaginations to the images in the stories.



## Science and Nature Study

Within the kindergarten environment young children have the opportunity to explore and learn through their contact with the natural world, experiencing for example the seasons through the changes that occur in the garden and through collection and manipulation of materials.

Experiences of the elements:

- Earth (sand, stone, path, and clay)
- Water (rain, hail, dew, frost, tap, pool, and hose, sandpit water play)
- Air (wind, stillness, moving clouds, flying kites)
- Fire (sunlight, candle flame, oven, special occasion fire i.e. festival)

Experiences with animal life:

- Pets and kindergarten (observing and caring for them)
- Insects in the garden
- Birds in the environment

Experience with plant life:

- Climbing trees
- Looking at and picking flowers
- Gardening, planting seeds, watching plants go to seed
- Harvesting fruits & vegetables and cooking/eating them
- Noticing the changing of the seasons
- Making compost

Experience with chemistry:

- Changes observed in the cooking process

Experience with physics:

- Water, earth, and sand play
- Building, stacking and constructing, rolling, pushing, pulling, loading, rocking in the rocking boats
- Using tools

## Mathematics

If a child is given the opportunity to really explore and manipulate his environment through play and take part in the everyday activities, concepts such as measurement and serialisation arise in them naturally. Activities include:

- During building in creative play children make patterns or sequences of objects
- During building, gardening and general play, concepts of measurement arise
- Packing away at the end of each session encourages classification
- Setting the table creates a need for one to one correspondence
- Cooking requires counting, measuring and weighing
- Putting out seats for story time uses spatial concepts and counting
- In drawing, children explore basic geometric shapes

## Language Development

Within the first seven years of life, the young child becomes a speaker. By the time the child reaches kindergarten age, he/she should be able to say 'I' and use fairly well constructed grammatical sentences and have a reasonable vocabulary. These will be refined through both informal and more formal language experiences.

Adults in the kindergarten environment should use clear grammatical language and a wide vocabulary. However, instead of always explaining the meaning of unfamiliar words when asked by the children, they may use it in a sentence where the meaning is implicit.

Meal times taken together promote conversation with others.

Morning circle contains many verses and rhymes which are done with movement to connect sound and rhythm.

Story time is a focussed time in the program when listening skills are encouraged as the story is told without a book, though sometimes with the aid of simple props. They are usually fairy stories or nature stories and may contain quite sophisticated language and complex sentences.

## The Daily Rhythm

The young child responds to the rhythm in his or her day and so the day is structured in a rhythmical way, allowing for extended periods of play (expansion) interspersed with more formal activities (contraction).

As well as the daily rhythm, other rhythms are maintained which further nurture the children and enable them to be free of confusion and disruption. The weekly rhythm sees the same food being prepared on the same day each week. Activities such as eurythmy, painting and drawing also occur on the same day each week.

The seasonal rhythm is also observed, seeing the songs, stories, verses and foods appropriate to the seasons being presented to the children. A seasonal festival is conducted at the end of each term. In completion, paintings and drawings done by the children are given out in folders at the end of the kindergarten year.

*Flaming light burn bright,  
Flaming light give your might,  
Make us strong and make us bold,  
Turn our words to living gold.*

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**Taraleigh Steiner Kindergarten and Playgroup acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we live and work and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.**

Taraleigh Steiner Kindergarten and Playgroup is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and their families. The safety and wellbeing of children from all backgrounds and cultures will always be our first priority; it is fundamental to their ability to learn and develop. We are committed to the Child Safe Standards and support our community to uphold these values.

