

# EXPLORE

## MONTESSORI • ACADEMY

### Parent Handbook

**School Year 2025/26**

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**Unlocking each child's genius through kindness, community, and delight.**

## Welcome to Explore Montessori & Academy

Parenting today is both rewarding and complex. Between work, home, and community responsibilities, modern families seek a school that not only provides exceptional care but also becomes a true partner in their child's growth. At Explore, we combine the time-tested Montessori philosophy with modern tools and supports designed for today's families. From flexible scheduling options to real-time communication through Brightwheel, we ensure you stay connected and confident in your child's daily experience.

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## Discrimination & Inclusion Policy

Explore Montessori & Academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin in hiring, promotion, or training of employees, nor in the admissions, rights, privileges, programs, or activities of its students. We are committed to fostering **diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging**. Every family structure, culture, and background is honored.

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## Core Values

At Explore Montessori & Academy, we know that raising children today means more than preparing them academically—it's about nurturing their hearts, minds, and sense of purpose. Parents want a school that feels like an extension of home, where values are not only taught but lived each day. That's why our core values serve as guiding lights, shaping how children learn, grow, and connect with the world around them. They reflect the qualities we know modern families care deeply about and ensure that every child's experience is as meaningful as it is enriching.

**Kindness** — Building empathy, respect, and compassion.

**Community** — Creating belonging through family, teacher, and child partnership.

**Delight** — Inspiring joy and curiosity in a world often dominated by screens.

**Nature** — Offering unplugged experiences through gardens, trails, and outdoor classrooms.

**Art** — Encouraging creativity through music, movement, and visual expression.

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## Philosophy & Prepared Environment

At Explore Montessori & Academy, we believe every child is born with limitless potential—curious, capable, and ready to discover the world in their own unique way. Every child carries within themselves the person they will become. As parents, you want more than a classroom for your child; you want an environment that feels thoughtful, inspiring, and designed to support their whole development. To fully develop physically, intellectually, and emotionally, children need freedom to explore, balanced with structure, guidance, and care. That's why our approach is grounded in Montessori philosophy and brought to life through carefully prepared spaces that nurture independence, creativity, and a love of learning. Classrooms feature Montessori materials, natural light, and open-ended discovery while our use of outdoor spaces—gardens, play areas, and trails—support physical and emotional wellbeing.

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## Enrollment & Financial Information

Clarity and transparency are essential in building strong partnerships with families. We know that choosing the right school is both an emotional and financial investment, and we want parents to feel fully informed and supported every step of the way. The following information outlines our tuition policies and related fees, designed to ensure consistency and fairness while allowing us to provide the high-quality education and nurturing environment your child deserves.

**Admission** — Enrollment requires forms, fees, and tuition. \$50 application fee secures waitlist placement.

**Tuition** — Due the 25th of the prior month; late after the 1st (\$50 fee). Unless arrangements have been made in advance.

**Sibling Discount** — 5% for older siblings (excludes summer camp).

**Deposits** — One month's tuition deposit (applied to last month in final year upon contract completion)

**Annual Fee** — \$400 annual fee.

**Forms of Payment** — Payments are directly made through Brightwheel by credit card or bank account. Checks are also accepted.

**Returned Checks or Brightwheel reversal** — \$30 fee.

**Late Pick-Up at Close** — \$1/min first time (under 30 min); \$3/min thereafter. Five late incidents/year may result in removal. After 30 minutes, if Explore has not been able to make contact with a parent or authorized pickup the police will be contacted for next steps.

**Refunds** — Refunds and credits are not given for absences, school holidays, or vacations.

**Enrollment Cancellation** — 30 days written notice required. For unforeseen circumstances a minimum of 40-days written notice is required. Notice must be given before the 21st of the month prior to withdrawal or tuition will still be due. Tuition will be due for the month of withdrawal if notice is not received in time.

**Schedule Changes** — Written requests before the 15th will apply to the current month.

**Planned Closures** — Major holidays and up to 10 professional development days. These are found on the Parent Calendar through our website.

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## **General Policies & Procedures**

At Explore Montessori & Academy, we believe children thrive when there is consistency, trust, and a strong partnership between home and school. Our general policies and procedures are designed with your child's safety, well-being, and learning experience in mind. We share these guidelines so that families feel informed, supported, and connected as part of our school community.

**Arrival & Departure** — School day drop-offs scheduled between 7:30–8:30am; pick-up 3:30pm. After-care available. Drive slowly and supervise children closely.

**Aftercare** — Available 3:30–5:30pm with advance sign-up. Message in Brightwheel for occasional needs.

**Late Pick-Up at Close** — Fees Apply. Five late incidents/year may result in removal. After 30 minutes, if Explore has not been able to make contact with a parent or authorized pickup the police will be contacted for next steps.

**Authorized Pick-Up** — Written authorization and ID required; release refused if safety is in question.

**Visiting the Classroom** — Observations by appointment from October–May.

**Playground Safety** — Staff maintain active supervision and allow children to challenge themselves.

**Toys from Home** — Personal toys should remain home unless requested by staff.

**Parent Conferences** — October and April, plus as needed.

**Newsletters** — Shared via Brightwheel with curriculum and events.

**Student Achievement** — Children progress at their own pace, and each child is different. Staff foster the development of each child's self-esteem and love of learning.

**Dismissal** — Explore strives to give every child the opportunity for a successful experience. However, dismissal may become necessary. Dismissal is only considered after ongoing communication with parents, documentation and exploration of multiple strategies. Each situation and circumstance is addressed in partnership with parents and handled with respect and confidentiality.

**Review & Revision** — These policies will be reviewed periodically to ensure effectiveness, and may be revised as needed to better address the needs of the children and families.

**Under no circumstances are weapons, toy weapons, or violent play allowed at school.**

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## Health & Safety

We know that as parents, you place deep trust in us each day, and we honor that responsibility by maintaining the highest standards of care and prevention – nothing matters more than the health and safety of your child. From proactive safety practices and ongoing staff training, to thoughtful policies around medication, illness, and emergencies, our goal is to create a secure environment where children can thrive—and where parents can feel peace of mind knowing their little ones are well cared for.

**Wellness & Prevention** — Clean classrooms, fresh air, outdoor play, and hygiene routines.

**Medication** — Written authorization is required and medications labeled in original containers given directly to the classroom teacher. Inhalers and epi-pens must be accessible.

**Illness** — All licensed child care providers must follow exclusion guidelines under MT Law. If your child becomes ill at school, you will be contacted to pick them up promptly. Children must be excluded until symptoms have resolved, adequate treatment has been received, or a health care provider states that the person is noninfectious. Most instances will require children to be symptom-free for 24 hours without medication.

**Immunizations** — Religious and medical exemptions are accepted and we maintain a respectful environment.

**Emergencies** — All staff are trained in CPR/first aid as well as emergency procedures. In the event of an emergency parents are contacted immediately. It is imperative that emergency contacts are kept up to date.

**Tobacco, Drugs & Alcohol** — Explore Montessori and Academy Campus is substance-free.

**Emotional Safety** — Positive discipline, conflict resolution, and support for self-regulation.

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### Illness Quick Guide - from Montana ARM 37.96.505

Childcare Licensing requires that children and staff must be excluded from all child care facilities, and a health care provider must evaluate the conditions to ensure the person's return will not harm that person or the other people, when a child or staff:

- (a) has symptoms of severe illness, such as fever with behavior change, lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, breathing difficulty or wheezing, stiff neck, irritability, persistent crying, poor food or fluid intake, progressive rash with any other symptoms, or a seizure; or
- (b) has persistent abdominal pain for two or more hours, or intermittent abdominal pain associated with fever, dehydration, or other signs or symptoms of illness.

Common symptoms or illnesses that require exclusion:

- \* Fever of 100.4 F that is accompanied by behavior change or other symptoms
- \* Diarrhea
- \* Vomiting more than two times in the previous 24 hours
- \* Mouth sores with drooling, if unable to contain drool, unless a health care provider states that it is a noninfectious condition
- \* Rash with fever or behavioral change or a rash that is quickly spreading, unless a health care provider states that it is a noninfectious condition
- \* If the child is unable to participate in activities or needs care from staff that compromises the health or safety of other children.

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## Behavior Guidance & Policies

At Explore Montessori & Academy, we know that challenges—like testing boundaries or expressing big emotions—are a natural part of development, and we approach them with patience, understanding, and respect. Young children are still learning how to communicate their needs and manage big emotions, and that behaviors such as biting, hitting, or spitting can sometimes occur, especially in toddlers, and while they can be difficult, they are also a normal part of development. Our behavior guidance policies are built on the principles of compassion, positive reinforcement, and partnership with families that enable us to respond with care and consistency—always prioritizing safety, while guiding children toward healthier ways of expressing themselves. By setting clear, consistent expectations while nurturing kindness and self-control, we help children learn to make positive choices, respect others, and feel secure in their environment.

**Positive Guidance** — Clear expectations, redirection, and natural consequences. Staff are trained to use positive terminology to help the child know what is expected.

**Toddler Behaviors** — Biting/hitting/spitting addressed with prevention and immediate intervention.

**Progressive Steps** — Parent conference after repeated incidents; temporary breaks if behaviors persist; outside support may be requested.

**Dismissal Policy** — Used only if safety is at risk, tuition unpaid, or needs cannot be met despite collaboration.

**Prevention** — Staff and Families are informed with Education and Awareness in mind regarding challenging behaviors. Active supervision is maintained to reduce opportunities for incidents. Teaching alternatives and the use of positive guidance strategies in the classrooms help encourage children to express themselves in safe ways.

**Response** — Immediate intervention by staff will occur and care for the child affected. Each incident is documented and the parents of all children involved will be informed of the incident. Staff will continue to observe and offer support by developing strategies with parental input to prevent recurrence.

**Progressive Steps** — Children will be given the expected behavior in a positive framework. When the behavior continues your child will be given a choice to correct the behavior or change activities on their own or with help from their teacher, and this will be followed through every time. The teacher will coach the child through the incident and will document the behavior and notify parents when necessary. In the case of continued challenging unsafe behaviors a conference with the parents will be held to discuss behavior modifications and goals. Upon continued behavior the child will be asked to take a temporary break. Outside behavior supports may be requested to help foster emotional regulation and support for the child(ren) involved.

**BITING — Parent Conference, Temporary Break, Dismissal**

- \* If a child inflicts 2 incidents of biting in one week (5 school days) resulting in broken skin or bruising, a meeting will be held with the parents to discuss strategies and possible behavior supports.
- \* If the same behavior occurs again (2 incidents in one week with broken skin or significant marks), the child will be asked to take a 3-day break from school. During this time, parents are encouraged to consult their pediatrician or specialists to explore underlying causes.
- \* If the behavior continues (2 additional incidents in a one-week period with broken skin or significant marks), parents will be asked to make alternative childcare arrangements within 30 days.

**Confidentiality** — All information regarding behavior incidents will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and shared only with staff members.

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**Parent Code of Conduct**

At Explore Montessori & Academy, we deeply value the partnership we share with families. When parents and educators work together with mutual respect and understanding, children benefit most—feeling secure, supported, and ready to thrive. To ensure that our school remains a safe, welcoming, respectful, positive space for every child, staff member, and parent, we require respect and kindness from all adults who enter our schools. These guidelines are not only meant to protect our community but also to strengthen the spirit of collaboration that lies at the heart of Explore. This is only possible if every adult entering our school plays a role in modeling positive behavior for children. Our goal is a culture of trust and partnership with every family and by upholding these shared standards, we create the best possible environment for your child's growth and learning.

**Expectations**

- \* Respectful Language should be used at all times, and respectful communication is essential. Aggressive or disrespectful behavior is not permitted.
- \* Conflicts should be handled calmly and adults are expected to remain in control of their own behavior at all times. Threats, confrontations, and shouting are not acceptable.
- \* Social media grievances should not be posted, and concerns must be brought directly to staff or the Director so they can be addressed quickly and fairly.
- \* Repeated violations may result in enrollment being ended.

**Violations**

- \* A meeting with the parent and Center Director to seek resolution will be held.
  - \* A meeting with the parent, Director and Owner will be held to seek resolution.
  - \* Continued inappropriate behavior may result in the child's enrollment being placed on hold or a formal request for withdrawal.
  - \* If the incident is deemed severe by the Director and Owner, Explore reserves the right to terminate enrollment immediately, including forfeiture of prepaid tuition and deposits.
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## Communication

At Explore Montessori & Academy, we believe that open, consistent communication between home and school is key to each child's growth and well-being. We want parents to feel informed, supported, and connected to their child's daily experiences, whether it's learning milestones, nap routines, meals, or social interactions. Our policies around communication are designed to make transitions smooth, foster independence, and ensure that every child thrives in a safe, nurturing environment. By working together, families and staff create a strong foundation for learning, exploration, and confidence.

**Brightwheel Updates** — Daily notes, naps, meals, photos, and activities.

**Two-Way Messaging** — Quick updates between parents and teachers.

**Incident Reports** — Documented in Brightwheel

**Phone Calls** — Parents will be contacted if your child is distressed and unable to be comforted, injured or ill and may need to go home, in need of medical attention, and if struggling with behavior or having a difficult adjustment day.

**News & Events** — Announcements and reminders in Brightwheel.

**Parent Support** — Optional workshops and resources

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## Family Engagement Opportunities

Learning is a shared journey between children, teachers, and families. When parents and grandparents participate in the classroom or support school projects, it enriches the children's experience and strengthens our school community. Your time, talents, and insights help create a vibrant, collaborative environment where every child feels valued and inspired. Your involvement brings joy, connection, and meaningful learning opportunities to all. Please reach out if you would like to connect in any of the following ways!

**Volunteer & Skill-Share:** Classroom help, special projects, garden work, or sharing career/culture/hobbies.

**Fundraising & Gifts:** Optional contributions, never required.

**Community Connections:** Workshops and gatherings to build lasting parent networks.

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## **Pre-Primary Program (Infants, Toddlers, Twos)**

The earliest years are a time of incredible growth, discovery, and learning for children. Our Pre-Primary program is designed to provide a nurturing environment where infants, toddlers, and two-year-olds can develop independence, self-confidence, and a love of learning at their own pace. With careful attention to daily routines, individualized care, and developmentally appropriate Montessori activities, we support each child in building the skills they need—socially, emotionally, and physically—while fostering a sense of security and joy. By partnering closely with families, we ensure that every child feels supported, engaged, and ready to explore the world around them.

**Arrivals & Separation** — Drop-offs should be brief and avoid sneaking out.

**Daily Schedule** — Outdoor play, Montessori work, circle, lunch, naps, and snacks.

**Primary Caregivers** — Assigned to each child for consistency and communication.

**Parent Updates** — Brightwheel logs meals, naps, and bathroom routines.

**Meals & Snacks** — Parents provide nutritious food; no candy or soda. Morning snack, Lunch and Afternoon snack should all be packed into one lunchbox. We do not refrigerate lunchboxes, or warm up meals. Water bottles may be left and are cleaned on Fridays if left at school at the end of each week.

**Clothing** — Please keep your child's cubby stocked with labeled, seasonally appropriate items. 1 pair of indoor shoes, 2 extra sets of clothing, sunscreen, sweater/jacket, rain suit for muddy play, snowsuit/boots/waterproof mittens/hat for winter.

**Potty Training** — Supported gently and builds consistently with home routines. Clothing should be easy for children to manage independently, please avoid onesies and clothing with complicated snaps. Must be fully trained to enter Primary.

**Naps** — Safe sleep practices are implemented and used. Children will need a fitted crib sheet and small blanket for comfort. Sleep sacks for infants that do not retrain the arms are allowed. Bedding will be sent home weekly for washing.

## **Primary Program (3–6 Years)**

Our Primary program for children ages 3 to 6 is designed to foster independence, curiosity, and a love of learning in a carefully prepared environment. This is a time when children are developing critical social, emotional, and academic skills, and our classrooms provide opportunities for exploration, hands-on learning, and meaningful engagement. By supporting each child in daily routines, self-care, and focused Montessori work, we help them build confidence, responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment. Partnering closely with families ensures that each child thrives and enjoys a joyful, well-rounded experience.

**Arrival & Schedule** — Outdoor play followed by Montessori work, circle, lunch, and afternoon lessons.

**Clothing** — Practical shoes, spare clothing, and weather-appropriate gear.

**Meals** — Parents provide nutritious lunches and snacks: no candy or soda. Morning snack and lunch should be packed into one lunchbox. An afternoon snack is provided. We do not refrigerate lunchboxes or warm up meals. Water bottles may be left and are cleaned on Fridays if left at school at the end of each week.

**Curriculum** — Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Math, plus geography, science, art, gardening, music, and PE.

**Clothing** — Please keep your child's cubby stocked with labeled, seasonally appropriate items. 1 pair of indoor shoes, 2 extra sets of clothing, sunscreen, sweater/jacket, rain suit for muddy play, snowsuit/boots/waterproof mittens/hat for winter.

**Birthdays** — Montessori "Walk Around the Sun" celebrated; treats must be simple and inclusive.

**Parent Nights** — Children proudly share their work in spring.

**Toys from Home** — Not permitted unless requested for lessons.

**Naps** — Offered for children who need them and they will need a fitted crib sheet and small blanket for comfort. Bedding is sent home weekly for washing.

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Thank you for trusting Explore Montessori & Academy with your child's early education. We are proud to be your partners in this journey. With **kindness, community, and delight** at the heart of all we do, we look forward to a joyful and enriching year ahead.

# Parent Tips

Helping your child have a happy and successful day starts with a little preparation at home.

## **Clothing & Essentials**

- Sunscreen (labeled and left at school)
- Indoor shoes that can be left at school.
- Two extra sets of labeled clothes to keep in their cubby.
- Weather appropriate gear
  - sweater/light jacket
  - rain suit for muddy play
  - winter gear: snow suit, boots, waterproof gloves, hat

## **Successful Meals**

- Morning snack, Lunch, Afternoon snack packed in one lunchbox
- Please pack nutritious options that your child can eat independently: fruit, carb, veggie, protein
- Lunches and snacks are not refrigerated or heated:
  - Use an ice pack to keep food cool and a thermos to keep food hot
- Do not send utensils - we have them on hand at school!
- A Water bottle to keep at school, and bring home on Fridays
- Snack Ideas
  - cheese and crackers, granola bars, nuts, veggie sticks, fresh or dried fruit, bagels & cream cheese, trail mix, cheese sticks, greek yogurt

## **Bottles**

- Please send premade bottles for your child, and they will be kept in the fridge in the infant room
- Bottles can be warmed using a bottle warmer
- Breast Milk can be kept in the freezer and needs to be labeled.
- Bottles must be labeled with the child's name

## **Nap Time (if your child naps)**

- Fitted Crib sheet
- Small blanket for comfort (must be at least 1yr old)
- Pacifier if needed
- Sleep Sack if needed
- Bedding goes home on Friday to be washed

## **Diapers/Potty Training**

- A labeled sleeve of diapers should be dropped off to keep on hand for your child
- Wipes are provided, but need to be provided by the parents if there is a specific brand requested to be used
- Teachers will message in Brightwheel when more supplies are needed
- Clothing that is easy for the child to take off and put on by themselves is important for successful potty training!
- Please switch to pull-ups once potty training
- Communication to keep the routines consistent so the child has success at home and school

## **Brightwheel**

- Download the app to your mobile device
- Parents and authorized pickups must be listed as contacts
- Parents are required to check their student in and out every day

✨ **Tip for busy mornings:** Pack everything the night before and keep a "school basket" by the door with shoes, outerwear, and snacks ready to go.