

Family Engagement

Learning in Relationship is one of our core values at Hilltop, which highlights the value we place on the social emotional development of children and our partnerships with families. We aim to create a healthy environment of communication. Here are some ways to help grow a strong, professional relationship with your child's educator:

Communicate directly with educators. If you have feedback, a question, or a concern about your child's classroom or for one of the educators, please talk directly to the educator(s). If you are unable to resolve the issue, please contact the Program Supervisor.

Share relevant information about you or your family. We love knowing about your family, especially as it is relevant to your child's experience. It is helpful for educators to know about big life changes, such as if there is a baby on the way, an ill relative, a move, a separation, etc. And, we appreciate a heads up about day-to-day occurrences that impact your child's life, such as your child not sleeping well the night before, your child's dance recital, visitors from out of town, or an argument your child had with a sibling.

Be thoughtful around classroom etiquette. We love hellos, good-byes and quick small talk at drop-off and pick-up. If we can step to the side of the classroom, we try to share a snippet from your child's day with you. However, our primary responsibility when we are in the classroom is to be attentive to the children. If you need to communicate more intentionally, please use that quick moment with the teacher in the classroom to set up a different time to talk over the phone, by email, or in person. We want to be sure we can fully honor and absorb what you have to say.

Assume positive intent. We come from a place of having the best intentions for your child and family and know that you do too. If you are wondering why we do something, just ask us. We appreciate your feedback and collaboration, both of which make our classrooms and community stronger.

Be as involved as you can. We will offer many opportunities for your input on pedagogical documentation, on our observations of your child at center, on the curriculum being generated in the classroom, etc. We love to hear from you and will incorporate your ideas, feedback, and perspective into your child's experience here.

Speak up! If you are interested in helping with the center, becoming more involved, or getting to know more about your child's experience, let educators know and they will help guide you toward the activity that would be the most rewarding for you.

We look forward to getting to know your child and you. Thank you for learning in relationship with us!

Family Communication

At Hilltop, we strive for clear and open communication between families, faculty, and children. Please communicate directly with educators if you have a question regarding the classroom or your child. If you would like extra support in communication, please loop the Program Supervisor into your discussion.

It is the family's responsibility to read all written communications from the educators and the Hilltop administration, including BrightWheel messages, posted signs, newsletters, emails, and personal communications, and to respond when necessary. The following paragraphs detail our forms of communication. Additionally, families should notify Hilltop, in writing, of any important changes or information regarding their child's health, attendance, schedule, etc.

BrightWheel and email is used as a regular form of communication between Hilltop and families. Please provide Hilltop with your preferred email address(es) and keep us updated with any changes. Each class has an email list from which faculty can email families. As email is our primary form of communication with families, please be sure to read what you receive from Hilltop. If you do not have access to email, please let the Enrollment Coordinator know.

Each classroom has a system for communications between families and educators, which might include a bulletin board where important information is posted, a blog, a notebook, or regular emails. There are also systems in place in each classroom for families to leave written messages for teachers.

Other forms of communication are intended to offer families a view into their child's daily life and ongoing work in the classroom. This may include an evolving curriculum/documentation board posted within each classroom that gives an overview of current in-depth curriculum investigations and/or of the daily life of the children in the group. Each child also has a journal of her/his artwork and documentation. We encourage families to read this journal regularly and to respond to the questions and comments included in the documentation.

Documentation - Faculty members are in regular communication with families about their child's pursuits, interests, strengths, and struggles. This year we are introducing a new platform called Educa that will help support documentation. Families are encouraged to download the program so that educators can share learning stories and anecdotes with families. Classroom educators are available during their planning time to talk with families via phone or virtual calls about their child's development. These conversations are an ideal time for families and educators to follow-up with each other on any issue a child may be having at home or at the center. In addition, educators highlight children's learning and development through documentation posted on curriculum bulletin boards, in individual children's journals, and in the group's archive of written documentation. You are encouraged to take your child's journal home and add your own reflections!!

Conferences - Educators meet with families in the fall in informal, half-hour conferences, to learn more about their hopes and wishes for their child. We meet again in the winter to discuss each child; with families and educators both preparing notes about the child's strengths and growth across key developmental areas: personal, physical, language, logical, and creative. Families receive a written summary of that meeting, as well as a follow up letter in the spring. All in-person meetings are not recommended at this time due to COVID safety restrictions.

In-Depth Investigations - In addition to our ongoing emergent work with children, we intend for every child to be engaged in at least one "In-Depth Investigation" every year. This in-depth work may be carried out by small or large groups, over a period of weeks or months, around a topic of deeper interest to those children. This in-depth work is facilitated and documented by the classroom educators. Once these investigations are well under way or nearing conclusion, families of the children involved are invited for a small group "Collaborative Conference." At these conferences, educators and families come together to study and reflect on children's in-depth investigation work. Together, we read transcriptions of children's conversations, and study photos, video footage, and examples of children's work, looking for the underlying meanings of their work and the questions they're pursuing. Teachers and families think together about how to support and deepen the children's investigation.

In addition to all the regular and ongoing observation, documentation, and communication from faculty to families, we also strive to identify and support children who may be of concern in our program. These concerns may be behavioral or developmental, and may come to light before a child enrolls, or in the course of a child's time at Hilltop.

Observing and Supporting Children

At Hilltop, we use protocols such as the Thinking Lens (c), Considering a Moment, and the Developmental Observation Tool as integral parts of our teaching practice, to design curriculum, track children's development, and make pedagogical decisions. Part of our role as educators is to use these protocols to reflect on those observations and turn them into next steps for the classroom in curriculum development, social-emotional skill-building, and in-depth project planning. In addition, we use those observations to learn about individual children: Where are they succeeding with peers? Where do they need extra support in transitions? Is their behavior lining up with developmental expectations?

At Hilltop, we see teachers as researchers whose work is to understand, analyze, challenge, and support children in their social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development. We know children succeed and need extra support at different times. Some children might be struggling with transitions from lunch to nap, while for others that transition might be easy, but they are having difficulty holding a marker. Others might have trouble joining in games with their friends, but are skilled at building towers.

When we observe that a child is experiencing a particular challenge, we approach that question through a lens of curiosity and inquiry informed by our knowledge, education, and experience in child development theory and science. At Hilltop, we see ourselves as researchers in the classroom. A large part of this role includes a continual cycle of observation of children and the reflection and analysis of our observations. Based on those observations, we might make different choices in the classroom to support each child.

For example, we may observe that a child is suddenly having difficulty with transitions. The teaching team will research why that might be happening for themselves, which might include:

- Asking a child's family for more information about the child's life and transitions outside of the program
- Compiling notes and observations about those challenging transitions times for the child
- Inviting someone into the classroom specifically to observe the child during those times (a mentor educator, program supervisor, etc.).

We want to understand what is happening for this child, in order to plan how to best support them through this challenge so that they can be more successful.

Often enough, we notice that a child's behavior does not line up with typical developmental expectations, despite continued support from family and educators. Something seems to be getting in the way of a child's ability to be successful in the classroom, whether socially, physically, academically, or in some other way.

When that is the case, the following process, enhanced by the Developmental Observation Tool, helps deepen and guide our understanding of that child and how to best support him/her:

- Gather data in the form of written observation and notes to better understand the child and evaluate what factors may be impacting their behavior.
- Meet with family to discuss our observations.
- Work with family to bring in a specialist (such as an occupational therapist, speech therapist, psychologist, etc.) to offer more consultation and expertise to the child and family regarding the specific area of challenge.
- Work in partnership with families and specialists to support the child to thrive in the classroom setting.

It is our job, as highly qualified and experienced early childhood educators, to support children in their successful development as thinkers, learners, and citizens in a group setting. To ensure the success of every child, we will guide families to outside resources when the child's need for support extends beyond our expertise in child development, or when the support needed by the child can't reasonably be offered through regular classroom activities. We are committed to offering an inclusive environment that supports all children and their families to the best of our ability and as resources allow.

If it is determined by educators, mentor educators or specialists that a child needs more individualized support, we will work closely with the child's family to consider what that might look like. Possibilities included adjustments or enhancements to the program or routines of the classrooms, particular efforts and interactions by the family and the educators, and consultation with outside specialists. We rely on the family's full engagement in this process: responding to communications, attending meetings, sharing information about changes at home, and including educators in ongoing support plans.

Educators and families will work together with the support of a mentor educator to support each child's needs while maintaining a sustainable classroom environment for all. If a family chooses not to move forward with a recommendation from educators to bring in the perspective of a specialist, the next step will be for the Program Supervisor and Senior Manager of Family Engagement to meet with the family to better understand their perspective and observations about their child. In the case that a child requires specialized attention beyond our ability, with or without the support of a specialist, the child's enrollment at Hilltop may be terminated. Every attempt will be made to partner with families to find programs and resources that are more suitable to the child's particular needs if Hilltop does not make the most sense for a child's success.

Research shows that in general, the earlier the intervention with children experiencing a developmental delay or challenge, the more successful children can be in the long run. We have seen considerable success in our classroom and beyond Hilltop when a specialist is engaged to work with children, families, and educators around a specific challenge a child is experiencing. We look forward to partnering with your family around your child's development, successes, and challenges.

Family Participation

As part of being a state licensed early-learning provider, Hilltop is expected to communicate with families to identify individual children's developmental goals. As an early learning provider, we must attempt to obtain information from each child's family about that child's developmental, behavioral, health, linguistic, cultural, social, and other relevant information. Hilltop must learn this information upon that child's enrollment and continue to do so annually thereafter.

As an early learning provider Hilltop will determine how the program can best accommodate each child's individual characteristics, strengths, and needs. Hilltop will utilize the information and seek input from family members and staff familiar with a child's behavior, developmental, and learning patterns.

Hilltop will:

- a) discuss with family information including, but not limited to:
 - i. A child's strength in areas of development, health issues, special needs, and other concerns;
 - ii. Family routines or events, approaches to parenting, family beliefs, culture, language, and child rearing practices;
 - iii. Internal transitions within the early learning program and transitions to external services or programs, as necessary;
 - iv. Collaboration between the provider and the family in behavior management; and
 - v. A child's progress, at least two times per year.
- b) Communicate the importance of regular attendance for the child;
- c) Give family contact information for questions or concerns;
- d) Give family opportunities to share their language and culture in the early learning program;
- e) Arrange a confidential time and space for individual conversations regarding children, as needed;
- f) Allow family access to their child during normal hours of operation, except as excluded by a court order; and
- g) Communicate verbally or in writing:
 - i. Changes in drop-off and pickup arrangements as needed; and
 - ii. Daily activities.

Family members are welcomed and encouraged to form partnerships with faculty in supporting their child's growth and development while at Hilltop. In addition, we welcome each family as part of the classroom and overall organization-wide community. There will be many opportunities to participate in potlucks and celebrations and we hope you will join in these events. In addition, you are welcome to spend time at Hilltop or join your child for lunch when your schedule permits. There are a number of ways that families can volunteer, most of which fall into one of the following categories: faculty support (field trip attendance, washing, sewing and mending, helping maintain the environment etc.), center maintenance (gardening, painting, carpentry, repairs, etc.), fund-raising (auctions, parties, special events, grant writing, etc.), or oversight committees (Board of Directors, Fundraising Committee, etc.). We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from families. Please complete the *Family Partnership Form* in the enrollment packet or ask the Enrollment Coordinator for a copy.

If you have a skill that you would like to share with the center or classroom, please let your child's teacher know. Maybe you can arrange a field trip to your place of work for a group of children or bring in something that relates to what the children are studying. The possibilities are endless, and your contribution of time and energy helps bring you and your child closer as you become part of their world in the center. Please ask your child's teacher if you would like ideas for ways to become more involved.

Family Observations and Visits (Not during COVID-19 protocols)

Typically, Families have access to all areas of the center used by the children anytime their children are in attendance, although currently this is not the case as COVID safety guidelines are to be followed. You are welcome to drop in and observe whenever you like, but advanced notice is helpful for both you and the teacher. The class may be out of the building at the time you decide to drop by, or they may be involved in planned activities that could be disrupted by the unexpected visitor. Children get excited to see their family members, and this wonderful surprise can disrupt a child's focus or interrupt their social play. By the same token, if you do make arrangements to visit, please try to attend as planned, or inform the classroom educator if there is a change.

Your presence in the classroom is exciting to your child, and she or he will probably try to engage you in play or act differently than usual because you are in the room. If you'd like to get a chance to observe what your child's day is like when you are not present, you can try finding a place to sit that will help you remain as unobtrusive as possible. Your child may get engrossed in social play, and you will get a chance to see what his or her day is like when you are not present. Please do not bring food or treats to the center (unless requested by a teacher) or engage in loud or boisterous play. Families are also welcomed to come visit to play, work, or have lunch with the children.

Family Behavior

If Hilltop has reasonable cause to suspect that any person picking a child up is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or is physically or emotionally impaired in any way and may endanger the child, we may refuse to release the child to that person. If this occurs, we will request that another adult (family member or someone listed on the Child Release form) pick up the child or we will call the police to prevent potential harm to your child. This will be done for the protection of your child.

Grievance Policy

In any community, and in the routine and regular process of daily living, there are inevitable situations or conflicts that are potentially negative for individuals or for the community. It is critical that long before conflict arises, an environment already exists that fosters mutual respect, tolerance, and clear, honest communication. The emotional health of a center is determined not by the absence of conflict, but by its quick and intelligent resolution. Hilltop is committed to responding to all family grievances within a 24-hour period and to resolving those grievances as quickly as possible. Concerns and grievances are most effectively addressed within the center directly. If a specific classroom concern arises, you should discuss the issue with the appropriate educator and/mentor educator. We encourage you to discuss more general center concerns with program supervisor, who will involve staff members as needed. If you feel that your problem is not yet resolved, you may then wish to speak with the Executive Director, Darline Guerrero, 206-283-3100, Darline.Guerrero@hilltopcc.org to pursue the matter forward.

Guidance and Conflict Resolution

At Hilltop Children's Center, we provide a responsive, safe environment where children can relax or be busy. It is a happy atmosphere in which children can feel secure. Positive reinforcement, redirection, natural consequences, and coaching around problem solving are used to encourage appropriate behavior. We believe that the best way to change behavior is to focus on the positive and give less attention to the undesirable behaviors.

We make the limits and rules clear and are consistent in enforcing them. Educators use clear, simple statements about acceptable behavior (i.e. sand is for digging or books are for reading) and offer choices whenever possible. When a child behaves in such a way that we must intervene, we calmly remind and redirect without embarrassing or humiliating them. If the misbehavior continues, the child is given the choice of discontinuing the inappropriate behavior or choosing a different activity. If they continue to act inappropriately, then the child is removed from the current situation and told that they can "return when they are ready." When the child decides and shows that they are ready to return, we greet them warmly and welcome them into the activity.

To reinforce natural consequences that help children to understand the results of their actions, we use "If, then" and "When, then" statements. For example, if a child is throwing sand we might say, "If you throw sand, then it might get in someone's eyes." If a child is having a hard time staying with the group while going for a walk, we might say, "If you run ahead of us, then I will have to hold your hand because I need to know that you are safe."

We encourage children to be active participants in solving their own conflicts and be responsible for the consequences of their actions. We coach children to express their needs and feelings verbally. For example, we might suggest that children let their friend know: "I don't like it when you push me" or ask their friend: "Can I have a turn with the truck when you're done?" Eventually, children will be advocate for their needs without an adult's intervention. In addition, children are taught to "check in" with a peer when conflict occurs to find a solution, show empathy, or apologize.

Discipline should not be equated with punishment. We design the environment and plan activities to fit the needs of the children in order to prevent unacceptable behavior. We carefully observe the children in order to anticipate problems and avoid them by offering positive suggestions or additional activities. We respect the child as a person and recognize and accept their individuality.

There is no corporal punishment by anyone at Hilltop Children's Center, including families, as this would be considered abuse under Washington State law. In the case that a child's behavior was to compromise the safety of the classroom, even after a series of interventions from educators, a plan developed with the family, and the support and guidance of specialists, Hilltop administration would need to terminate the child's enrollment at Hilltop. We will work with the family as best we can to find a different program that could better support the child.

At Hilltop Children's Center, our goal is to provide help and empathy as children develop their own controls, to learn to make decisions, and to solve problems non-violently. We recognize that all three of these skills are difficult and will continue to be refined throughout one's lifetime.