



# Birchwood

## Early Learning Program

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### **Mission Statement**

Curiosity thrives alongside joy, offering children the freedom to pursue their interests and delve into their environment. Our inviting classroom brims with enriching experiences crafted to immerse students in interactive learning opportunities. Nestled within a picturesque nature space, children split their time evenly between indoor exploration and outdoor adventures. Our program cultivates a diverse environment tailored to each child's holistic growth, fostering wonder, artistic expression, musical exploration, language and vocabulary, early math concepts, scientific inquiry, motor skill refinement, social-emotional development, and large blocks of unstructured play.

### **Vision Statement**

Our vision is to create a nurturing and inclusive environment where every child is empowered to explore, discover, and develop a lifelong love for learning. Through a play-based, child-centered approach, we aim to inspire creativity, build confidence, and lay a strong foundation for future success. Our commitment is to partner with families and the community to create a safe, joyful, and enriching early childhood experience that aligns with the Reggio Emilia approach.

### **Guiding Beliefs**

- In our journey, we recognize three teachers: the child, the environment, and the educators; together, we walk as equals.
- We prioritize childhood as a magical period for nurturing wonder, creativity, and exploration through playful experiences.
- Mother Earth is a wonderful teacher. We learn to honour her and respect her and nurture a sense of community in children, where they feel deeply connected and anchored.
- Children learn best when driven by intrinsic motivation in a play-based environment. We advocate for allowing children to learn at their own pace, always respecting their individuality and meeting each child at their level.
- Our commitment involves offering children abundant opportunities, time, space, and exposure to beauty, including art, music, and nature, to foster their imaginations and instill a sense of wonder.
- Our path extends beyond childhood, inspiring a lifelong love of learning in every child.

### **Our Educators**

At Birchwood, we strongly believe that educators should be lifelong learners, constantly seeking to expand their knowledge and refine their skills to better serve our children. Our dedicated team embraces a culture of professional development. They engage in pedagogical workshops, participate in collaborative learning opportunities, and even travel to Reggio Emilia, Italy for training. With a deep commitment to excellence, our educators are passionate about fostering a love for learning in both themselves and the children they nurture.

We inspire our young learners to embrace a lifelong journey of discovery, curiosity, and wonder, through their own curiosity and dedication to personal growth, we are true co-learners.

### **Holistic Program Design**

**Our Image of the Child:** Embracing a robust or intricate 'Image of the Child' entails viewing each child as inherently capable and competent, recognizing that their potential knows no bounds.

From the earliest stages of development, infants' brains are primed for learning, language acquisition, and forming bonds with caregivers. Every child is distinct, with individual preferences and interests

evident from the outset of their journey. They possess an innate curiosity and drive to comprehend the world around them.

Our aim is to encourage every child to express their learning through diverse means (100-languages), acknowledging and actively engaging with their inherent competencies.

**Environment as the Third Teacher:** The items utilized in the program—be it materials, objects, books, or equipment—must serve a purpose and carry significance in their placement, with clear intent behind their selection. Integrating them into the program meaningfully enables children to unconsciously forge connections with their surroundings and environment. Our environment is planned to ensure all children can actively participate.

Establishing an inclusive environment fosters a sense of safety, connection, and comfort among children, educators, families, and visitors alike, encouraging active engagement from all involved parties.

**Emergent curriculum:** We create a play-based program and build on the interests of the children, through observation, conversation, and engagement, teachers create open-ended learning experiences that spark curiosity, extend learning opportunities, and encourages children to take chances and test their theories.

**Projects:** Children are co-creators who explore concepts, ideas, and interests through imagination and intrinsic motivation. Children discover and express learning through many ways such as art, language, movement, constructing, outdoor and nature exploration, and so much more. Children develop social-emotional skills, early literacy skills, math, and science concepts, and develop language and communication skills through interest-led experiences.

**Collaboration:** Children are co-constructors and are encouraged to problem-solve, reason, and express their thoughts and ideas. Children develop social emotional skills through collaborating in peer groups, helping one another, and developing empathy. Educators model healthy interactions and conflict resolution skills, and they respect the diversity and uniqueness of each child. Every child is a valued member of our community, and their families are respected partners in education whose traditions, culture, ideas, and skills are an asset to our classroom.

**Observation and Documentation:** Teachers observe and document learning through photos, videos, and written word to better understand children, to extend learning opportunities and to make learning visible for themselves, for families, and for the community.

**Rooted in Nature:** Surrounded by a beautiful outdoor space, our program encourages children to learn and connect with the natural world. Our experienced educators are passionate about environmental stewardship and lead students on journeys where they can learn about the wonders of flora and fauna. Through hands-on activities such as gardening, nature walks, and wildlife observation, children develop a deeper appreciation for nature and cultivate empathy and environmental consciousness. Our preschool provides a unique opportunity for children to learn and grow in a natural environment. At Birchwood, we believe that every day is an adventure, where children can explore the boundless wonders of the natural world and develop a lifelong love for nature.

We do not go outside if the temperature falls below -20 degrees C in the winter, or during air advisories/extreme heat in the summer. The Lead Teacher will use their discretion about allowing children to go outdoors during high winds, rain, or snowy conditions.

## Our Programs & Fees

We offer 2-day, 3-day, and 5-day program options with core and extended hours allowing for flexibility and choice in care.

Program fees are charged as a flat monthly rate from September 2024 – June 2025.

The monthly fee with applicable grant is illustrated below.

The following fees do **NOT** include eligible subsidies.

Core Hours	9:00 am-2:00 pm	2-days	\$450.00	*\$450.00 (no grant)	3-days	\$690.00	*\$465.00 (with grant)
Extended Hours	8:00 am-4:30 pm	2-days	\$500.00	*\$275.00 (with grant)	3-days	\$765.00	*\$217.50-\$540.00 (with grant)

Core Hours	9:00 am-2:00 pm	5-days	\$1,125.00	*499.00 (with grant)
Extended Hours	8:00 am-4:30 pm	5-days	\$1175.00	*549.00 (with grant)

\*The Affordability Grant is represented in the above fee **but is dependent on minimum program hours attended and could change.**

Required Hours	Available Grant
50-99 Hours/Month	Up to \$225.00/Month
100+ Hours/Month	Up to \$626.00/Month

Additional subsidy is available for eligible families with an annual household income of less than \$180,000.00. Eligible and approved families receive a monthly subsidy toward their child's fees. Applications for this subsidy will open in August and it is the responsibility of families to apply. <https://www.alberta.ca/child-care-subsidy>

Should the grant or subsidy be discontinued or change, families are responsible for the full program fee amount.

## Program Calendar & Closures

### Calendar

Birchwood Preschool operates from September 4, 2024 – June 27, 2025.

### Closure Dates

Birchwood observes all statutory holidays (10) and will be closed for 2 Professional Development days on November 22, 2024, and March 21, 2025.

Christmas Break: December 23, 2024 – January 3, 2025.

### Unscheduled Closures

In the event of natural disaster, power failure, water main break, etc. the program will contact families and give as much notice as possible of an emergency closure.



## **Registration and Enrollment**

### **Eligibility**

Children must be 3 years of age by September 1st of the registration year.

### **Openings**

We will take registrations based on available spaces. When spaces are full, we will start a waitlist. A non-refundable registration fee of \$80.00 is taken at the time of registration. When openings occur, parents of registered children are contacted for enrollment based on a first-come basis for the time slot and the date of registration.

### **Enrollment**

Parents need to complete the online registration and ensure all sections are fully completed. Registration is not considered complete until the following criteria have been met:

1. All online registration forms are complete.
2. An \$80.00 registration fee. This fee is to be paid by E-transfer or Cheque with registration.
3. A deposit in the total of 1 month's program fee less grant eligibility (up to \$549.00) which will be credited toward the last month of preschool.
4. A completed PAD agreement for monthly payments or cash payment on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.

### **Enrollment Forms**

Parents will complete the online registration forms. For the safety of your child, Birchwood asks all information to be kept current. The parent or guardian must provide updated information to the Director regarding any changes.

Birchwood Early Learning Program will commence on **September 4, 2024**, unless unforeseen circumstances prevent this. If the program cannot start on the expected date, parents will be notified as soon as possible. September 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> will be staggered entry dates allowing children to have the best start.

### **Termination/Suspension of Services**

We reserve the right to suspend or terminate services for the following reasons:

- Failure to pay monthly fees.
- Consistent late pick up.
- After all resources have been exhausted, it is determined our program cannot meet the needs of the child.
- Upon termination, the deposit of last month's fee will be credited toward the last month's fees and all outstanding balances must be paid.
- Parents have the right to withdraw their child from the program with 30 days' notice. The program deposit fee will be credited toward the last month fees and any outstanding fees are to be paid.
- Registration fees are non-refundable.
- There will be no refunds or suspension of fees for family/personal vacation or illness.
- A \$45.00 NSF fee will be charged for all returned payments and must be paid prior to your child returning to the program.

**Absences**

If your child will not be attending the Program because of scheduled appointments, vacations, or other absences, please notify the Lead Teacher.

**Sign-in/Out & Parking Policy**

Parents are asked to park their vehicle and pick up or drop off their child at the preschool door, which is located on the north side of the building, by the playground. Please do not use the De Winton Community Association doors.

Children are only released to a parent/guardian as indicated on the enrollment form. Children will be allowed to leave with persons other than the parent only if written permission has been given to the Lead Teacher on the enrollment form or in writing by the parent in advance. For any exceptions, written permission is needed, and identification will be required prior to releasing a child.

**Late pickups**

Parents are to pick up their children on-time and communicate any issues with the Lead Teacher.

**Visitors and Students**

Guests from the community may be invited to participate in our program during special events and activities. At no time will a visitor be left unsupervised with children and current criminal reference checks will be required by all volunteers.

Our program is proud to collaborate with local Colleges and Universities to accept students who are working in the Early Learning field.

- A student will have a valid criminal reference check – current within 6 months.
- A student will not have unsupervised access to children.
- A student will not count in ratio.
- A student must agree to Birchwood's Policies and Procedures before attending.

Additionally, we aim to create partnerships with Early Childhood Service providers and this will be an optional resource for families. All ECS providers will have the same criteria as above and parents will need to give their permission and complete screening forms to access services, if not already in place.

## **Health & Safety Policies**

If your child has a known medical condition (asthma, anaphylactic allergies, diabetes, seizure disorder, etc.) please complete the program's emergency plan.

In case of accident or illness, the following steps will be taken:

- If minor, trained staff will administer First Aid as needed, complete an incident report form, and inform the parent(s) or guardian at pick-up.
- If serious, trained staff will administer First Aid and contact a parent or guardian. If a parent or guardian is not available, the emergency contact will be contacted.
- In case of emergency, 911 will be called. If warranted, an ambulance will be called, and an adult will accompany the child to a local hospital until a parent/guardian can arrive.
- All serious incidents require an incident report form, an AB critical incident report form, and the incident reported to Child Care Licensing within 24 hours as per the Child Care Licensing Act.

Any protocols or procedures deemed necessary by Alberta Health Services, Alberta Children's Services, and/or Health Canada will be strictly followed by Birchwood Early Learning Program.

## **Medication**

We only accept lifesaving, emergency medication. If a child is to be given emergency medication, the parent must provide the Lead Teacher with a completed, signed medication authorization form and emergency plan. The medication must be provided in the original container and will be administered as prescribed, or if changed, must be accompanied by the doctor's directions.

If medication is to be kept at the program for treatment of a chronic condition, no more than a one-week supply should remain at the program at any time. Medication will be kept in the emergency backpack and out of reach of children.

## **Child Illness**

Our Program requires that children with the following symptoms are kept home to rest and recover for 24 hours. We recognize some opinions may differ, but this is a policy that ensures the health of the children and educators.

If your child is sick, they must not attend preschool. If your child arrives with or develops any symptoms as listed below, a parent will be notified to pick their child immediately and the child will be kept away from other children in the dedicated rest area, with supervision. If a parent cannot be reached, the emergency contact will be contacted.

- Fever greater than 100.4°F
- Severe Cough
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Green or yellow nasal discharge
- Discharge from eyes
- Head lice
- Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye)
- Any communicable disease
- Unexplainable rash or severe cough
- Any illness that prevents a child from fully participating in the program



**Fire Drills**

Birchwood preschool program will practice monthly fire drills. The drills will be carried out in a developmentally appropriate manner, keeping the children's health and safety as priority. Before a drill, we will read books and talk about our fire drill, so children understand what to expect. Parents will be notified ahead of time of monthly fire drills.

**Emergency Policy**

During an emergency, our first concern is the safety and well-being of the children. Staff are trained in emergency protocols and will follow our evacuation policies.

In the event of an evacuation where it is unsafe to remain on the premise, our emergency shelter is St. Andrews United Church, located minutes to the West of the preschool at 304 Macleod Trail West, De Winton AB. Educators will walk the children to the church on the grass or soft shoulder area, 5 buildings West to the Church. Children will always remain in supervision.

Parents/guardians will be contacted once children are safe and the emergency has been resolved. If the primary contact is unreachable, the emergency contact will be contacted.

The evacuation plan and emergency number are posted on the program window.

### **Child Guidance Policy**

We provide an environment that provides children with choices to minimize power struggles. Our goal is to support children with positive guidance techniques that encourages the development of pro-social behavior. Educators will model, discuss, and practice class rules and routines, taking into consideration the developmental level of each child.

- We believe in being proactive and preventative. We build our foundation with attention and encouragement of pro-social behaviour.
- We instruct, practice, and model expectations and provide a predictable routine.
- We observe and mentor children during cooperative play and model problem-solving skills, language and communication skills, and strategies that are age appropriate.
- We help children develop social-emotional skills such as problem solving, empathy, emotional regulation, and calm-down techniques. We will regularly assist and encourage children to identify their emotions and those of others and provide a quiet space for children.
- When situations do arise and redirection of the behaviour hasn't been successful, staff will calmly help the child to feel regulated again. This may require the staff and child to move to a quiet and safe location and discuss a plan to return to the group. Staff will acknowledge the child's feelings and focus on the behaviour. Visuals and books will be available, and when the child is regulated, future strategies will be discussed with the child, which are age and developmentally appropriate.
- Parents/guardians will be notified of our strategies to create a home-preschool connection.
- After all the above measures have been attempted and implemented, if the behaviours become violent or chronically disruptive, our program may decide we are unable to serve the child's developmental needs.
- Chronically disruptive behavior is defined as verbal or physical actions which may include, but are not limited, to such behavior that inflicts physical or emotional harm on other children or abuses the staff or volunteers of the program. Staff will assist parents in locating local resources to best serve their family's needs.

Our program states that we will never use or allow the use of:

- Any form of physical punishment, or verbal or physical degradation.
- Any form of emotional deprivation.
- No staff or volunteer will deny or threaten to deny any necessity.
- No staff or volunteer shall use or permit the use of any physical restraint, either physical or isolation.

## **What to Bring**

- A regular sized backpack
- A pair of non-marking running shoes that your child can put on/take off independently that will stay at the school (Velcro or slip-on please – labelled)
- A healthy lunch, snacks, and a reusable water bottle.
- A 4 x6 printed family photo that will become part of our preschool family tree.
- A labelled change of clothing in a Ziploc bag (pants/shirt/socks/underwear that will be kept in their backpack.
- Hat and sunscreen when the weather is hot.
- Please wear play clothing – we are big advocates of messy play and exploration.

Please label all coats, clothing, school bags, etc., with your child's first and last name. We always help children and encourage building these skills, but our program cannot be responsible for lost or damaged personal property.

## **Lunch & Snacks**

Healthy, nut-free lunch and snacks are to be provided by the parent/guardian. We encourage you to pack a litter-free lunch and snack(s) and provide a reusable water bottle for your child that will go home daily to be sanitized.

## **Celebrations**

Shared food for special occasions and celebrations are allowed with the approval of the Lead Teacher to ensure there are no allergy or other concerns.

## **Field Trips**

From time to time during the year, the children may go on walking field trips in the community. Parents will be notified when we go on our walking adventures and must sign a permission form in the online registration package to allow their child(ren) to participate.

## **Parent Involvement**

All parents/guardians will be invited to be involved in the program. You are the biggest influence in your child's life, and we welcome your feedback and support! Parents who wish to volunteer in the program must be 18 years or older and have a current criminal record check.

Parents will be encouraged to participate in any of the following ways:

- Volunteering in the program
- Offering feedback on program decisions
- Collecting materials and loose parts
- Preparing materials
- Helping with walking field trips and/or being a guest visitor



### **Communication & Family Connection**

Parents are kept informed of what is happening in the Program in the following ways:

Class Dojo app, email, phone, in-person communication.

Bulletin Areas - display information, workshops, and documentation.

Day-to-day contact with staff during arrival and departure.

Interviews with Staff Members - parents can request a meeting at any time to discuss their child's progress or any concerns they may have.

Open door policy and commitment to home-preschool relationship.

Birchwood values our relationships with families and has an open-door policy. Parents/guardians are encouraged to communicate with the Program Staff.

Lead Teacher:

If, after speaking with the Lead Teacher, a parent still has a concern, they are encouraged to contact the Program Director.

Director: Sandra Wain

Email: [swain@birchwoodearlylearning.com](mailto:swain@birchwoodearlylearning.com)

Please note: This handbook is fluid and can be updated and changed based on AB Licensing guidelines, AB Health Services, or any updates and changes deemed necessary to improve processes and policies and best practices.

PARENT HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ the Parent/Guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ child(ren's) name confirm that I have received and read the 2024 Handbook and fully understand and agree to all policies and procedures, including the requirements regarding my child(ren).

\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian name(signature): _____	Parent/Guardian name(printed): _____
Parent/Guardian name(signature): _____	Parent/Guardian name(printed): _____
Date: _____	Date: _____

I, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, give consent to receive electronic messages from Birchwood Early Learning Program, including program updates, important information, emergency communications, etc.

Picture Consent Form (optional): We use documentation in our program to make learning visible for the children, our educators, our families, and our community. Documentation can be photos, videos, or written words of the children. Additionally, these photos may be used for slide shows, holidays, program activities and on our secure Class Dojo App for families of the program. Under NO circumstances will your child's picture be posted on any social media or website without your permission, and you may revoke your permission at any time in writing to [swain@birchwoodearlylearningprogram.com](mailto:swain@birchwoodearlylearningprogram.com)

I grant consent for my child's photo, video, or image to be used for the reasons stated above.

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_, 2024