



# PEOPLEPLACE

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## Cooperative Preschool

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# COOPERATIVE HANDBOOK

Updated Fall 2019

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Introduction	pg 3
Philosophy and the Classroom	pg 3
Classroom parent helper and snack	pg 4
Routine Tasks	pg 6
Participation on a Committee	pg 7
General Responsibilities	pg 7
Addendum: Working in The Classroom	pg 8
Checklist	pg 13
When you participate in the cooperative you...	pg 14

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Peopleplace! This handbook introduces and clarifies the cooperative nature of our school, which is fundamental to the way we approach learning and teaching. It is best understood as two different, interrelated, components: the philosophical and the functional. The philosophical reasons are more conceptual, and therefore can be harder to perceive and to communicate. However, recognizing the intention behind the philosophy of the cooperative is crucial to getting the most out of what Peopleplace has to offer. Our goal is to explain this philosophy, as well as the functional realities, that connects us all as Peopleplace families.

## PHILOSOPHY AND THE CLASSROOM

For all the excellent facilities and phenomenal teachers that we are privileged to have, what makes this place special and sets it apart from other programs is our families. Parental involvement, along with play-based learning, has always been the bedrock of Peopleplace's philosophy and functioning.

Peopleplace Cooperative Preschool was founded in 1983 by a group of parents looking to introduce their children to the wider world, together. There were several fundamental reasons for this. One was the logistical and financial benefit of pooling resources and sharing responsibilities. For the first number of years there were no, and then only one, paid full-time teacher, as each family rotated in and out of the classroom, allowing the others to work and otherwise do all the things that still need to get done. But just as important was the inherent support it provided for the parents themselves in navigating a time, as a group, that is thrilling, terrifying, frustrating, mystifying, overwhelming, enlightening and always novel. These were mostly first-time parents who realized that it would be easier to figure out this thing called parenthood together. And finally, there was the recognition that the children, themselves, would benefit from a collective approach to teaching. Every parent would bring their own skills, personalities and interests to the class, thereby exposing the kids to a wider range of communication and experiences. This diversity provides a more stimulating learning environment. But the cooperative approach would also implicitly teach the children about the value of community. A social foundation rooted in the cooperation and support of the community would be instilled and nurtured at precisely the time when children's worlds begin to expand beyond themselves and their parents. Everybody's parent is a teacher and everybody's family works together to make this special place - often the first of significance outside the home.

## CLASSROOM PARENT HELPER AND SNACK:

We understand that this time requirement can be challenging, but having parents in the classroom is an integral part of our school and teaching philosophy. It is important to recognize what an incredible opportunity this is for us as parents. It is a fundamental difference of Peopleplace from other preschools. What you and your child see and work on in the classroom is often so different than what is typical at home and has the potential to influence the learning and behavior that takes place there. It allows for a continuity of language, values and customs (i.e. manners, social skills, cleaning up, songs, etc) between the classroom and the home.

Working with your child and their friends alongside our exceptionally experienced teachers is an invaluable learning opportunity. Appreciate that these are highly trained professionals who specialize in communicating, connecting with, and teaching this unique age group whose behaviors can be so baffling, confusing or frustrating to the rest of us. It is a chance to observe and learn skills that can have so much impact back at home and throughout these crucial early years of development.

We encourage parents to communication with teachers and the director to find a schedule that works for all.

Parent helper sign-up for the Downstairs classroom is located by the toddler cubbies within the classroom. The Upstairs classroom parent helper sign-up sheet is located on the landing of the back stairway.

There are slight differences in parent helper involvement between the Upstairs and Downstairs classroom. Depending on classroom size, each family will be responsible for providing snack/classroom helper approximately once a month during the school year.

In the Downstairs classroom, parents are asked to bring a wholesome snack for the class. When snack time approaches, one of the teachers will prepare the snack while the parent helper participates in circle time with their child. After snack is enjoyed by all, the parent helper is asked to bring the dishes into the kitchen for a quick clean and then join the classroom again for more play time and preparation to go outside.

Involvement in the Upstairs classroom includes the preparation of a simple wholesome snack for the class (you may use the kitchen), joining the students at snack time, cleaning up the dishes and table followed by interacting with the students (i.e. reading a book, joining in small-group work, outside play).

A more detailed guide for the Upstairs classroom snack preparation and your time as the parent helper in the classroom can be found posted in the school kitchen. Additionally, please check in with teachers, veteran parents or reference the Working in the Classroom handbook (see addendum).

## ROUTINE TASKS (New for 2019):

Families (kids can participate too) help take care of the necessary upkeep of the school and grounds. Please reference the school wide sign up board (displayed by month/week) and it is expected each family will complete a task every month.

These include:

- Clean the kitchen area

- Sweep front porch

- Sweep back porch

- Weed and tend garden

- Water garden

- Shovel/sand/salt walkways

- Bring recycling to transfer station

- Collect/consolidate and place compost on front porch for pick-up

(Fridays)

- Bring home and wash classroom laundry \*

\*The Downstairs classroom has posted their sign-ups for Laundry and Playdough beside the Parent helper sign-ups.

Outside yurt group families are asked to join in additional support for the program including:

- Raking

- Clearing paths/woods

- Sweeping

- Interior yurt cleaning

## PARTICIPATION ON A COMMITTEE

Each family is asked to join either the Building and Grounds committee or the Fundraising committee. These committees meet the more global needs of the school and are **a great way to meet and make connections with other families.**

The Building and Grounds committee is responsible for the maintenance of school facilities (building, playground, surrounding woods) and for organizing and participating in the all-school work days. There are 3 work days per year with outdoor work sessions in the fall and spring which include raking leaves, light construction/building repair, playground clean-up and improvements. There is one indoor session in the winter, which is a “deep clean” of each classroom and necessary painting.

The Fundraising Committee is responsible for coordinating 3-4 events a year to support the Scholarship Fund. Once organized, the events (i.e. auction, selling holiday wreaths, raffle tickets) become a school wide campaign to meet the fundraising goal.

## GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

To maintain a high level of communication and support, all families are asked to attend relevant meetings (all-school, classroom specific, committee specific) during the school year. These are marked on the school calendar and reminders are placed within the weekly emails. It is critical to read the weekly emails. Each year there will also be an anonymous survey in regards to programming and general feedback. In addition, please reach out to any board of director member, director or teacher during the school year.

A Cooperative Coordinator, who is selected from the Peopleplace board of directors, will be the first point of contact for parents and staff who have questions and concerns regarding the cooperative tasks. The Cooperative Coordinator will be in charge of updating and reviewing this Cooperative Handbook yearly. They will also periodically check that parents are participating and if not, check in with those families to find out why and offer support.

Lastly, please see the checklist provided at the end of this booklet to help guide each family’s involvement within the cooperative structure.

# Working in the Classroom: A Handbook for Peopleplace Parents (Revised 2019)

## WORKING IN THE CLASSROOM AT PEOPLEPLACE

Possibly the area of greatest concern when a family enrolls at Peopleplace is the concern about working in the classroom. Like many fears, it turns out to be more difficult in your mind's eye than in reality. Here are some guidelines to help you get started and feel more at ease.

## SNACK

When it's your turn to provide snack, please choose a wholesome snack (a fruit/veggie, a grain and a protein), for all the children in your child's class, as well as some for the teachers. Some perennial favorites include: crackers, cheese, fruit, goldfish, cut veggies, bagels and cream cheese.

Downstairs classroom - please bring the snack into the classroom and the teachers will finish any preparation needed.

Upstairs classroom - please feel free to use the kitchen to finish preparing your snack and gather the necessary plates/cups. Please reference the laminated instructions posted in the kitchen with more details on snack set-up in the classroom. Due to licensing regulations, only your child may assist you in the kitchen with snack preparation. Of note, other children may assist with snack/dish set-up once in the classroom.

## FOOD ALLERGIES

Due to increasing peanut and nut allergies in children, Peopleplace is a nut free campus. Please do not provide snacks that include any nuts in the ingredients. A list of classroom food allergies is posted on the refrigerator in the kitchen. Please check with teachers if further clarification is needed.

\*Due to choking hazards, please no popcorn, hotdogs, raisins or hard pretzels. Grapes and carrots need to be cut in half.

## TALK TO THE TEACHERS

The teachers can let you know what they need and will answer any questions that you may have. If you have something special you would like to share with or read to the class, please discuss prior to that morning – including birthday celebrations. Check with the teachers periodically throughout the

morning about timing for snack, where your support can be most helpful and how you can join in with the activities.

### **PREPARE YOUR CHILD**

Talking with your child before you come to work in the classroom can alleviate some potential problems. Make sure your child knows that you will be helping set up snack, helping other children put on jackets and may be in/out of the classroom for cleanup. Let them know that at times you can be with them and at times you'll need to help others. At the end of the morning, your child should know if you'll be going home together or if you are leaving and they are staying for the afternoon. If your child is clinging to you and upset, please remember that you are there as a parent first. Your child's comfort certainly comes first.

### **PREPARE YOURSELF**

The challenge your child may feel when you are the working parent may reflect itself in the challenge you feel when your child starts acting out! It is unfortunately true that children are often at their worst when their own parents are at school. Sharing you can be tough. Perhaps sharing "their" school with you is tough. In either case, let it roll off your back. All the teachers have seen it before and they know how wonderful your child usually is!

### **BE INFORMED**

The school's Ground Rules are listed in this booklet; please familiarize yourself with them and with the basic tenets of the school. Learn where things are: closets are labeled based on their contents and a "map" of the school, as well as a diagram for fire drill procedures, are posted in each room.

### **BE YOURSELF**

Talking in a friendly way (i.e. not baby talk or forced enthusiasm) at the child's level will start you off on the right foot with most of the children in the classroom.

### **OBSERVE**

Take advantage of the opportunity to watch how children learn about the world around them. It's not necessary that you are busy every moment nor always engaged in play. In general, it is best to let them come to you and let the child guide the play. Taking an unobtrusive position such as busying

yourself with a task, sitting on the floor ready to read a book, or assisting in writing someone's name on a painting is perfect.

## CLEAN UP

Notice the way the teachers have the room laid out in the morning before everyone arrives. Please help return it to that condition to the best of your ability. Good hygiene is of interest to us all, so please give it your best effort.

Classroom examples:

- Toys and materials returned to proper places
- Furniture and equipment wiped and straightened
- Children's gear in baskets, on hooks, in bags, etc.
- Floor swept under snack tables
- Kitchen/cooking projects cleaned up
- Dishes loaded in dishwasher
- Counters wiped
- Paint brushes washed
- Compost left over food scraps

Playground examples:

- Toys returned to proper areas
- Broken toys reported and/or removed
- Decks swept, if necessary

Please ask a teacher if you're not sure what needs to be done and thank you!

## GROUND RULES AT PEOPLEPLACE

It is important that children understand their boundaries at Peopleplace. The teachers will help them to formulate their own version of these basic rules.

This is written so parents will know the same things. Communication between adults and children is of the utmost importance at Peopleplace.

Please take the time to observe the interactions between the teachers and children; listen to volume, tone, words and notice the body language. Your job, as the classroom parent helper, is to enhance, enable, and support these interactions and to experience the pleasures of your own.

Inside Peopleplace we:

- Speak and listen respectfully
- Let only adults open doors
- Wear shoes at all times
- Use "inside voices" (quiet)
- Walk inside

Never leave the building without an adult

Leave toys home unless they are for everyone to use or for sharing time

Use tools, toys, blocks in a safe manner, in the appropriate places.

Respect people's feelings and bodies

Use words to find acceptable solutions (remember that your adult sense of fair is not the governing agent)

Climb on outside climbers/swing sets - not the furniture

All help to clean up

Outside Peopleplace we:

Let adults open gates

Throw only items meant for throwing

Wear shoes at all times

Use tools safely: shovels and rakes used "working end" down

Keep sand in the sand pile, gravel in gravel areas

Bikes are for riding not ramming

Use an inside bathroom (after telling an adult).

## HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

To the greatest degree possible, remember that situations are difficult; actions are bad, not children. Make your disapproval be clearly of the deed, not the doer. When there is "acting out" or inappropriate behavior, we use positive methods of guidance including: logical or natural consequences, redirection, encouragement of appropriate and pro-social behavior (talking to solve problems, taking turns, cooperating.) We attempt to allow the children to work through their own situations with as little intervention as possible. We encourage appropriate expression of feelings including anger or fear:

Keep them from hurting themselves or another

Listen to their words

Respond with words that let them know you hear their concern.

"Reflect" their words with words that describe their feelings to the best of your ability.

You may call upon a teacher if there is a situation you do not feel certain about. Or, if you feel uncomfortable about children doing something which they insist is "allowed," just tell them you're concerned and would prefer that they not do it until you've had a chance to confer with the teacher about it.

We try to anticipate problems before they occur. If you see something brewing, step in, (with a light step, if possible; humor-not sarcasm-works well), and encourage redirection. Intimidation of any sort is not okay. Even

the use of silly names can be very upsetting for some children. Peopleplace is a place where children feel safe and feel heard. If you're not sure what you're hearing, ask each child if they are happy to play the way they are playing. Remind them to check with each other. "Roughhousing" may be okay if both parties agree and they are in a large outside place where other's play will not be affected.

With all of that said, remember that it is not your job to discipline other children. Please direct any concerns to a teacher.

## FINALLY

Peopleplace is a place for the children. Every precaution needs to be taken to ensure their safety. If you see something that makes you feel uncomfortable, please talk with a teacher or someone in the office about it.

Children need to be supervised at all times. Upstairs classroom bathroom privacy is allowable as long as an adult is nearby and aware that a child is in the bathroom. Downstairs, toddlers will require more assistance of course. However, due to licensing regulations, the parent helper may only diaper his/her own child. Teachers will assist other children as needed.

If we are setting up the environment with care, we should be eliminating the need to say "no" to often. Peopleplace encourages exploration, self-expression, and many social skills, such as problem solving, cooperating, collaborating, and creative thinking.

Parent involvement is essential to the Peopleplace programs. Parents are an active part of their children's learning experience, and at the same time they can help ensure the safety of all the children in the program. Thank you for your commitment to the quality of our programs.

Enjoy your time in the classroom!

**CHECKLIST FOR COOPERATIVE PARTICIPATION 2019-2020**  
(This is for your family to keep track of what you've done throughout the year)

**Committee of choice:      Building and Grounds      or      Fundraising**

**Parent helper/snack (approx 1 x a month)**

<b>Sept</b> ____	<b>Feb</b> ____
<b>Oct</b> ____	<b>March</b> ____
<b>Nov</b> ____	<b>April</b> ____
<b>Dec</b> ____	<b>May</b> ____
<b>Jan</b> ____	<b>June</b> ____

**Classroom laundry (approx 3 x a year) 1. \_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_**

**Make playdough (downstairs only) (approx 3 x a year) 1. \_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_**

**Monthly Routine Tasks:**

<b>Sept</b> _____	<b>Feb</b> _____
<b>Oct</b> _____	<b>March</b> _____
<b>Nov</b> _____	<b>April</b> _____
<b>Dec</b> _____	<b>May</b> _____
<b>Jan</b> _____	<b>June</b> _____

**School wide work day (please attend at least 2 of 3):**

**Fall** \_\_\_\_  
**Winter** \_\_\_\_  
**Spring** \_\_\_\_

**Fundraising Events: Please assist with all fundraising events as all monies raised go to the Peopleplace Scholarship Fund.**

**There may be requests for specific tasks or items as the need arises. Helping out in the classroom to cover team meetings is one example. If you have particular interest or expertise in specific areas that would be helpful, please let us know.**

**If you have questions or concerns about the cooperative, please contact the Cooperative Coordinator. That person will be announced at the beginning of the year.**

**Thank you for your help!**

## **When you participate in the cooperative you:**

...establish the importance of education and develop a network of helpful connections with early childhood professionals, other parents, and children.

...learn to be an advocate for your child now and in the future.

...feel less anxious about school and informed of what's going on. You're more connected.

...know what your child is learning and who their friends are. With this information, you can ask questions relevant to your child's day and continue the learning at home. Getting together outside of school with those friends creates long-lasting relationships (for children AND parents!)

...ensure your child is on track developmentally and creates an opportunity to establish a support network if seeking help from other professionals.

...model for your children the reward of giving back to the greater good and the value of civic responsibility.

...create a sense of ownership and pride in the school. After spending time raking leaves at a workday, providing snack for the classroom, or helping at a fundraising event, you feel as if the school is successful because of YOU (which is true!)

...have fun!

Thank you for being part of the  
Peopleplace family.

We hope your experience is a joyful  
and rewarding one!!!

-The Peopleplace Board of Directors