

Habibi's Hutch

Introduction:

Our schoolhouse-hold runs on the belief that children are drawn to experience, to learning, to each other. We see it as our responsibility to create an environment where each child can reach out for life and touch it, wallow in it, tinker with it, interpret it and express it. From providing materials that inspire curiosity, wonder, manipulation, motion, contemplation and gales of laughter to keeping the house full of adults who are highly intelligent and deeply affectionate, our intentions are clear to us and, we hope to you as well.

This is a house of love and acceptance, not of law and order. The road to self-discovery takes many paths, in our case more than 60 of them. And to allow those differences and keep a house of children and adults is both an exhausting and exhilarating experience - one that we vow will continue here in perpetuity.

Philosophy

Welcome to Habibi's Hutch Preschool and Natural Childlife Preserve. We have been an institution in Austin since August 17, 1980. We are not what many would call a "traditional" early childhood education setting. For you to clearly understand our community and what it means to be part of the Hutch Family you will need to witness & experience our art.

We believe the work of artist's parallels our lives at Habibi's on many levels. The reason we think of Habibi's in these terms is that we see our school as a work of art, something inherently flexible and open-ended. We consider the school itself and artistic endeavor in progress, something that must be fully lived and appreciated as a combination of precise intention and raw emotion. We also speak in terms of art and artistic expression as a metaphor, which illustrates explicitly the kind of thinking and the ways of making sense of the world that life at Habibi's offers its children. When children graduate from the Hutch they may know any number of facts or utilize any number of academic skills, but what they will most certainly leave here "knowing" is how to think critically and deeply about themselves and the world which they live. With our children, we reflect on the beauty and the wonder of our world and the life within it, in the way that an abstract expressionist or an impressionist might. Not in terms of facts and absolutes, but in terms of personal impressions and full expressions of the range of emotion and creativity afforded to each of us. Through unfettered conversation and social being we explore our friends and ourselves like an artist explores color and texture.

It is the years spent at Habibi's Hutch, a house of love, learning and celebration that will help sustain our children through the indifference, inertia

and dispassion that could pass their way in other, more traditional, educational settings.

Changing of the Season Festivals: around the beginning of each season we celebrate with a festival during the school day. We use this day to encourage our parents and families to participate during the day by joining the children for many different activities (face painting, finger nail painting, moon walk, wheelbarrow rides, special food. music, etc.)

Snacks: We ask our parents to bring a healthy snack each day for the snack box. Throughout the day we will bring the snacks out for the children to share. Contributions can be as easy as an apple, orange and carrots or as exotic as seaweed, mangos and star fruit. We find that having a snack box provides the children with many choices through out the day and introduces them to new things they may not have had at home.

Lunch under the trees & Pizza Day: Like many of us dream of doing each day as we sit in our offices, the children at the Hutch eat lunch each day outside under the shade of the trees. It is a site to see - all the children of Habibi's running at the sound of the bell to wash up and get their lunch box. The Hutchers make there way to the child size picnic tables, gathering plates, silverware and making choices of beverages and where and who they want to sit with. Lunch is a great time to make new friends and share some lunch. Parents our responsible for bringing a healthy lunch Monday through Thursday. On Friday's the Hutch treats the children to many varieties of "Austin's Pizza".

Recycle & Reuse: Our families donate some of our best toys and art mediums. The children love to make potions with old mixing bowls and spoons. Toilet paper rolls make the best binoculars. The address stickers that you get in the mail - they add that special something to any collage. You bring it and we will use it.

List Serve: The families of the Hutch have an active open topic email service. Both past and present share parenting issues, idea's, social issues in our communities and schools, calendar events, invitations to picnics, camping, play dates and any thing else you want to post to the group.

Resident Wednesday Musician Neal Kassaroff: For more than 2 years, we have had our Wednesday mornings brightened with live music from Neal. This is time that the children can choose to participate if they would like with sing-a-longs and learning about and using musical instruments. Neal is a professional musician who has recorded several CD's, and frequently plays around town at the local music hubs.

The playground: The playground is a huge part of the Hutch. It is not what you may expect, we don't have a big jungle gym, we don't have slides BUT we

have a lot of other things that we find that the kids love even more. We have a mister system - since we do play outside for a big part of our day and it can get very hot, even with all of the shade, the misters make it a lot easier and more fun! We have bowls, spoons, colors & potion "powder", we have a big pile of sand, lots of vehicles to make your way around, water play bins, a play house and more. Our playground has all the items needed to stimulate the imagination.

Parents Night Out: The teachers of the Hutch offer a parent's night usually once a month. We watch the children at the Hutch on a Friday or Saturday night usually from 6-10 for \$25. It is a great time for everyone!

What the parents say:

We love Habibi's and Andrew for so many reasons! Our children get to play freely, learn to express themselves, learn and talk about diversity, know it is o.k. to explore, to fall, to cry, and to try new things in a nurturing environment. These sound like ideas/concepts that should be in all curriculums in all schools at all levels. But, they are not, not even close. We looked at several other daycares and preschools before settling on Habibi's. We had some really horrible experiences at one local school and some ok, but not great, experiences at other settings. Habibi's children are (or at least are encouraged to be) open minded, able to communicate, know how to express their feelings, and ready to enter that next scary step of Kindergarten. How many times have we heard teachers say they love Habibi's kids because they are ready for the next step and know how to function in the world? My kids have developed their self-esteem and are better people for having been exposed to Habibi's Hutch. As a few others mentioned, the drive is insignificant compared to the value of the experience. As some of you know, I travel up to 41st street for Alex and back to Manchaca/Lamar for Zane, so distance is of little importance knowing that my children in the best environments for them. We love Habibi's, but mostly we love Andrew, Kim, and his whole family, an example of great family families played out! —Zelda

I used to work at McDonald's. I do not eat at McDonald's any longer. Once I saw the inner workings of the company [in terms of both food prep and labor] I stopped being interested in fast food hamburgers. I also used to work at Habibi's Hutch. Now my daughter is a Hutch Kid. Once I became intimate with the inner workings of the Hutch [in terms of both curriculum and humanity] I can imagine sending my children nowhere else. I teach professional development courses for education majors at the University of Texas, where we talk extensively about the child-directed, open-ended, developmentally appropriate curriculum at Habibi's. Most early childhood educational scholars use the three preceding terms to describe what they believe to be the "best"

practices in teaching young children. I have the luxury of being able to tell my students the address of the place where it happens. My newest daughter will soon be a Hutch Kid also, and we, as a family, have decided to remain in Austin after the completion of my PhD in Curriculum Studies [with a focus on early childhood education]. Habibi's role in our decision not to allow the academic winds blow us where they may cannot be understated. How could I study early childhood education and let early childhood education pull my family away from the best preschool I have ever seen or heard of? —Tim

At Habibi's our son is encouraged and able to live his life, not prepare for one. He is in a community and extended family of adults and children where he is supported, encouraged, hugged, wrestled with, painted on, danced with, read to, surrounded by art and patted to sleep. Maybe most importantly he has the gift of being with adults who are eager to share his journey, not mold him into a human who will then live life; they respect him as a human who is living life. The adults at Habibi's are partners with our son in the process of living, rather than viewing him as an apprentice. I believe that our son, from the support he's gotten at Habibi's, may reply when asked what he's going to be when he grows up: "I'm not going to be anything, I already am." —Paul & Leslee

We love Habibi's Hutch because when Sam gets bored with us in the morning he demands to go to "bibi's". He'll yell jumping up and down, "I wanna go to bibis! I wanna go to bibis!" I can't think of a better endorsement than a 2 year old demanding to go to daycare, except it's not daycare; it's a natural Childlife preserve. No TV's, no lines, just freedom and encouragement to be who they are and get along with everybody else. We were crestfallen when Habibi's moved to their new location because it is so far from us. We originally went to part time thinking we would find someplace else. There is no place else like Habibi's. We now drive across Austin twice each day just to keep our son in the magical environment that is Habibi's Hutch. We live near 2222 and Mo-Pac it is quite a drive especially at rush hour. We're thinking of moving to Barton Hills just to be closer to Habibi's! —Michael

As an early childhood professional, I fully endorse Habibi's Hutch. When Henry was attending Habibi's and others would ask me why I sent him there I had a planned response: "Most parents send their children to preschool so that the children will learn to be bright. The parents at Habibi's already know their children are bright and Habibi's is a place that lets them shine." All the parents really seemed to enjoy and appreciate each other's children. —Debora

The first time I walked through the door of the Hutch, I cried. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Children running and playing freely. Children working together to resolve conflicts. Children huddled around a teacher reading a book. At Habibi's, there are no time-outs, no scolding, no shaming. Instead, teachers actually take the time to communicate with children about behavior, consequences, and solutions. It's unheard of, and yet, it's the only

way to responsibly treat our children and the only way to raise responsible adults. My son attended Habibi's for three-and-a-half wonderful years. When he started kindergarten, he continued going to Habibi's after school. I know that every afternoon he is getting at Habibi's what he is not getting at public school all day - freedom to make decisions, to experience consequences, and to discuss solutions, not to mention freedom to run and climb to his heart's content. My son is now in first grade and just got his report card. He is excelling in every subject and is described as a "quiet leader" by his teacher. He would not be who he is today without Habibi's Hutch. —Cathy

HH makes you want to be a kid again. I know that my daughter has had a good day when I pick her up and she is in her underwear with a painted on bikini top, a temporary tattoo on her forearm, freshly painted fingernails and makeup done by one of her friends. The teachers at the Hutch have made me a better mom. I also LOVE that the Hutch has several male teachers - it is very rare and I think that it makes my daughter a better person to see and learn from men in addition to her father. —Bianca

COME BY AND SEE HABIBI'S HUTCH
2901 Manchaca (at Lightsey)
478-7775
www.habibishutch.com

THE HUTCH STAFF:



Andrew (Director): I have worked with kiddos for more than 20 years, 3 of those while wearing a mullet. I have learned so much more than I have taught...and I've taught so little. Our days spent at Habibi's are in some strange way an attempt to realize the dreams of Mahatma Gandhi, Jack Kerouac and Foghorn Leghorn (but not necessarily in that order): to live a day-to-day life with a fine heapin' of purpose, spontaneity and mischievous song and dance. This is the Habitian way, so dress accordingly.



CAROLINA: I have been at Habibi's for 16 years. I first started out volunteering on Thursday afternoons so that I could improve my English. I have attended ACC for 4 years. My favorite thing at HH is the source of community that the teachers, parents and kids have; we are a big family. I know that after leaving the Hutch the children will have confidence and self esteem to achieve anything that they want. When I am not Habibi's I enjoy spending time with my family, helping my kids with homework, cooking and playing outside.



MIKE: Although it seems like yesterday, I started at HH in 1993. I worked at several other pre-schools in Austin and I have taken community college courses in early childhood education, and I am currently still learning things everyday from each of the children of Habibi's Hutch. I know that we let the kids be kids. We let them be what they need to be not what we--as adults--need them to be. I like the way that I get a chance to watch kids learn, see the way they learn, and try to learn too. HH kids are always excited, happy and open to learn about the things they don't know because we give them that chance. I hope the kids leave with a profound sense of who they are, self confidence, sense of adventure and a few lasting memories. The kid that I am, I enjoy BMX riding on 9th street, eating fried chicken, listening to loud music and finding funny shapes in clouds when I am not at HH. To me Habibi's Hutch is like being at your grandma's house but only she's not there; your cool uncle is...HH is a great place, for work and play!



THOM: I've been at Habibi's since July 2005. It's a great place for kids to explore and begin learning social skills. I like the fact that for most of the day all ages are mixed together. I often see the older kids treating the younger ones in the way the teachers treat them. I have worked with children the past 10 years, including 4 years at Sri Atmananda and working at other day care schools in Austin. When I'm not playing zoo at Habibi's, I enjoy skateboarding and playing the piano.



ALISON: My favorite part of my day is telling the kids stories. Sometimes I tell folk tales, stories from my life, or just make one up. If we make up a story, I have the children pick the characters and main events and I elaborate. In my 2 years + at HH, I have enjoyed the family atmosphere. I love getting to know the children and their parents. Habibi's gives children a strong sense of self. I hope kids gain the ability to stand up for themselves, voice their opinions and to respect others, from their time at Habibi's. I a BFA in Art from Southwestern University. I enjoy dancing, creating mosaic art, reading and laughing with my 3 children.



CHELSEA: I hope to one day teach science to middle school-aged kids, and am currently enrolled at ACC studying education. I enjoy trimming, watering and singing in my garden. Well, singing anytime is great. Watch out! I make a mean tomato basil pesto from home-grows that'll lay you down! For fun I throw bowls, cups and other goofy-looking vessels on my potter's wheel. I enjoy making just about anything with my hands. Laughing is my medicine and the guys and gals at Habibi's keep me in stock and smiling. I love how imaginative the Hutchsters are. Habibi's is a place like no other and I'm excited to be here with you all.



JEAN MARIE: I recently returned to Austin after an extended adventure spent exploring Southeast Asia, weathering the tsunami, practicing meditation, writing copiously about the experience, and living off the grid in a Zen monastery in the California wilderness, where I spent countless hours chopping vegetables, hiking in the mountains and staring at a blank wall. I've had a rainbow of employment experiences over the years, but I always seem to come back to working with kids which, for me, is that rare and lucky combination of being something that I love and am good at. I feel really grateful for the opportunity to learn and teach and play at HH. I am constantly amazed and humbled to witness and encourage the art of conflict resolution by people who can't even tie their own shoelaces yet! I have a BA in Anthropology and Philosophy. I swim like a fish, ride my bike whenever possible, eat lots of kale, write when the mood strikes, and dance like a maniac. I love the Beatles but can't stand beets. I play the piano and drums, and am trying to teach myself violin (although I sound more like a screeching cat at the moment). I have a thing for dark chocolate, Vonnegut, and third world travel, and I still get a kick out of Sesame Street.

A View of our usual Day:

Stuff we do...

*Outside play: water play, sand digging, swinging, running, hiding, reading, bug-watching, wheel-barrow rides, potion making, story-telling, daydreaming, etc.

**Inside play: painting, drawing, collage-making, wood block building, soft block play, signing, dancing, reading, writing, cooking, play-writing, theater performing, etc.

***Circle time: interactive stories and songs

Special Activities:

Dance Party: Every Tuesday and Thursday morning we have dance party. We turn up the music du jour LOUD, flicker the lights and DANCE, DANCE, DANCE!

Music Class: Musician Neal Kassanoff joins us each Wednesday morning

Habibi's Theater Group Performance: Every Thursday morning the older children rotate in being in the theater group. The group makes up a play and performs for the rest of the children.

Cooking Class: Each Thursday afternoon the children rotate in being involved in the cooking class. The class is lead by a different teacher each week, who chooses a recipe which the children help make for the rest of school for afternoon snack.

Observations from Habibi...

What's in a word?

Habibi's education is about context, much like real life. Words or deeds that are helpful and comforting in one situation may be invasive and destructive in another. For children at school, throwing sand in the air when no one *is* close by is a harmless activity. But the same *action* performed when people are within range can cause pained eyes and itchy heads. So... sometimes, throwing sand...*OK*. Sometimes, throwing sand...*not OK*.

It's the same with words. What is the context in which the words are being expressed? What are the feelings behind the words being expressed? What is the intention of those expressing the words? How are they interpreted by the other child or children? These are just some of the questions we ask in guiding your child through this maze called language and human interaction. We're

here to help clarify meaning, to help tie together expressed feelings, to advocate for *all*. We talk a lot, adults and children, about what we say to and about each other, about what hurts our feelings or make us laugh.

Everyone has the right to not be called whatever it is they don't want to be called, whether it's poop head or dung beetle. They also have the right to test these "hidden in the sand" boundaries with each other and the teachers. How else will they truly understand their own feelings and the feelings of others, if they don't try it out? I know that some of you have felt more than a little uneasy when your child greets me with a big, smiling "hey butthead Andrew" or "morning poopy dumbhead." Please don't be alarmed. First off, if I don't want them to call me something, I will tell them. "Wolfgang, I don't want to be called dorkface," and they won't call me that anymore. I know what you're thinking. "If you let my child call you a name then they're going to call grandma, or a neighbor, or the babysitter, or me, a name that none of us want to be called. You're right, they might. And if they do it's your job to work through your embarrassment and say out loud to your child and the 'victim':

"I don't know if grandma is OK with being called an old bag. Are you mom? She said 'no,' she's not OK with you calling her an old bag.'" Doing this firmly, clearly and empathetically, even with the very youngest ones will help you both see that -each person and each situation is different. When you tell your child, "don't say stupid, it's not a nice word" as a blanket, from-this-day-forward rule, they simply can't apply it to every situation that will surely arise. Take each interaction separately, considering who's involved.

"My old college buddy says he doesn't want to be called a dorkface, he had enough of that at grad school."

"The bank teller says she doesn't want to be called a wiener face."

"I'm OK with you calling me a butthead, but not a buttass, it's just redundant, you know."

Remember that they're learning about lots of social rules that they had no part in creating. You shouldn't be bullied by your child so that you feel you can't be in charge. You are in charge, they need to know that. But be a boss who rules with understanding, sympathy and good humor. And remember, some grandmas really are old bags. *Later, buttcrack!*

Potions and Paint

As you probably know, one of the most popular activities at Habibi's (one of the many that makes us Habibi's) is potion making. It is a very complex process that involves mixing deadly baking soda, highly volatile food coloring, liquid Dawn (it's not just for dishes) and a variety of dirt (wet, dry, etc.). The combination of these elements can create a variety of results-from the transfiguring to the

edible to the positively lethal. This is a sensitive process, prone to the arguing of chemists if the potion has been misused or adjusted without the proper consult.

A few months ago, I noticed an interesting request from a few Habibi-trained chemists. The exchange would go something like this: "Kay-ate, I want red and blue and orange and green." My response, "Well, I think that will just make brown." The scientist would stare at me with that you-don't-know-what-the--bleep-you-are-talking-about look and I would inevitably cave on my three-color minimum rule and administer the desired colors. This went on for days. Finally one day I ended up saying something like, "Do you like brown. You are just going to make brown." The chemist responded, "No, I'm not. It makes pink." I think that I probably scoffed. I gave the colors and a few minutes later he came back holding his container high for my adult eyes. "See," he said, "It makes pink." His purple bucket was full of a beautiful dusty pink.

I don't know how or why. My experiments in the days that followed never had the same results. Maybe it was the way the colors had been diluted that week. For me, I soon learned...sometimes they know more than me. They see everything different, perhaps a little better... maybe a little more interesting, more bright. I feel humbled every day I spend at Habibi's. The delight my grown-up eyes just don't seem to find anymore in this crazy world of ours, I experience through them and I thank them for that. And just so you know, red and orange and blue and green don't always make brown, sometimes it makes pink.

Weapons

We'd like to talk briefly about our "No Weapons" policy. We will never tell a child what can or cannot be assembled in the Art Room, at the tool table or anywhere else in the school. Though, I'm sure you all are aware that we ask that toy weapons be left at home. By "toy weapons" we mean toys that were bought at a store and were in the form of a weapon when they were bought. What each of our families buys and has at home is obviously (and thankfully) up to each of us. We ask that these toys not be brought to school. *However*, quite often we help the children build weapons from paper towel rolls or sticks or anything that is longer than it is wide ("Sometimes a cigar can be... a dagger"). Or they use things we already have to represent weapons and spend hours dueling away. We never make a child stop playing pretend violence unless someone is actually getting hurt. We are convinced that this sort of play is serving an educative and positive purpose for the children and their development.

We allow violent fantasy play not because this is some kind of *laissez faire* school where "anything goes". We allow it because we believe it is developmentally appropriate. When children play they are exploring themselves and the world in a way to which "real life" does not lend itself. The

brilliant learning theorist Lev Vygotsky wrote: "in play a child always behaves beyond his (sic) average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development."

What good ol' Lev is saying is that children can "do" and "experience" when they play what they couldn't possibly do in reality. We think shooting people, impaling them, bludgeoning, etc. are ways that our kids can be "a head taller" or, in other words, capable of powers they can't really have, and *don't really want*. We talk extensively about what it would *really* be like if Sean shot Cosmo. Everyone always agrees that they are pretending, that they wouldn't really want to hurt their friends. Most agree that they wouldn't even want to really hurt a "bad person" who was hurting one of their friends (although this is a point of contention among them just as there might be disagreement among their parents about capital or even corporal punishment). The point is: they know the difference between fantasy and reality and are satisfied with the violence remaining in their fantasies, *because* they are allowed to explore it there.

Not too long ago, I tried a little experiment: a group of older boys and girls had been physically rough all morning, and the rough-housing had resulted in tears and angry accusations more than once. So I decided to make "ray guns" in the art room. I simply sat down and quietly made one for myself and admired it. The rough-housers were at hand and jumped at the opportunity to make guns with me. We all made fanciful space-aged weaponry for over an hour, then headed outside to engage in battle. They shot at each other for about fifteen minutes. Then after about a half hour, I noticed that the kids who had been so violent earlier that morning were sitting in small groups (clutching their guns) talking and planning together quietly and without anger or raised fists. The same children that had been *actually* violent earlier, had calmed into a cooperative group of planners and imaginers. This is just one day in a long life, and should certainly not be construed as any sort of real "research". But that's what happened. We believe that pretending to harm others is not such a bad way to release aggression. How many times have you pretended there were machine guns mounted on your hood in rush hour traffic? (I hope never, but I won't tell on you if you have.)

The children's use of strong language at Habibi's could be misinterpreted as a lack of guidance or (moral) value in the education of our kids. Our stance is as simple as it could be: We believe words only have power if they are given power. If we wince or reprimand children for using certain words, those words become inflated tools of power. Children are fascinated by the scatological, so we allow them the power to talk and sing about their interest in the functions of their bodies. Threats are treated differently. Those kinds of words are linked to actions. But the word "poop" or even "shit" is as powerful or powerless as our

reaction to it allows it to be.