

*Habibi's Hutch Preschool and Natural Childlife Preserve*

*2004 Bert Avenue Austin, TX 78704*

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## Introduction

Our schoolhouse 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 law and order. The road of self-discovery takes many paths ... in our case more than 50 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.

Welcome to Habibi's Hutch Preschool and Natural Childlife Preserve. We have been an institution in Austin since August 17, 1982. We are not what many would call a "traditional" early childhood educational setting. In order for you to more fully understand our community and what it means to be part of the Hutch Family we have prepared this handbook. Within its pages you will find everything from practical information about what to do when you can't find everything

from practical information about how we position ourselves as educators and how we conceptualize our school and our curriculum.

We believe the work of artists 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 as an 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 in which they live.

With our children we reflect on the beauty and 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 each of us. Through unfettered conversation and social being we explore ourselves and our friends like an artist explores color and texture. These years in a house of love, learning and celebration will help sustain our children through the indifference, inertia and dispassion that could pass their way in other, more traditional, educational settings. Nothing better prepares children for the future than truly respecting their present states of mind and body. It is up to us to give your children a place where they are creating, exploring and living something that is truly their own. The joy they will take with them from their days here will last a lifetime.

## Philosophy

Often when one strolls through the alternately gooey or dusty mess that is our playground we find that our overarching philosophy is lost in the daily muck. Sometimes our school looks like a circus. Often it is difficult to see the worth in allowing children to be covered head to toe in brown paint, but we assert that by creating an environment where the children are free to decorate themselves as they see fit, we are removing the false security of rules which are adult created and adult enforced - which ultimately have very little to do with anything other than tradition or etiquette. We are actually setting the children up for the extremely complicated and difficult task of self-regulation and self-discipline. If we allow the children the freedom to explore all the possibilities that any given situation can offer, we are guiding them to a truer sense of who they are and how *they* think about the world. Similarly to the seemingly insignificant and unrelated little dots in a pointillist painting, each day at the Hutch joins with all the others to create an incredibly beautiful work of art.

At Habibi's we have attempted to create a world where a child is as free from the external pressures and expectations of our culture as possible. We realize that often we make

assumptions about children entirely subconsciously - due only to what we think we remember about how childhood should be and what a child should do - and have therefore spent an enormous amount of time and energy delineating and exposing our prejudices and preconceptions about childhood. Habibi's Hutch is a child's world. At the Hutch our children are immediately attended to and can sit oftentimes one-on-one with a teacher for hours on end in an open-ended Socratic discourse on everything from bicycle riding, to literature to physics, to death. This is a unique opportunity that is available at Habibi's. Even in our homes we are almost never able to put the rest of the universe on hold for nine hours and listen solely to our children's wants and needs (Nor should we - home is for family, not just child). Likewise in our homes, children can't jump on the couch covered in paint with clay on their fingers, because it is not solely their house, it is the family's house. The old house called Habibi's, however, is their house. We have attempted to create a place where they are jointly in charge of the activities, arrangement, and use of this, their space - a place where they are not just biding their time until Mom or Dad gets off work, but a place uniquely their own, where they are in charge of their day. We once declared that at Habibi's there is but one rule: do not hurt others or yourself. Well, we actually have about six hundred and eighty nine rules. I counted them one day with a Nike Rule-Tracker I wore on my head with little fanfare. Obviously, 689 is way more than one. So what's the deal? False advertising? New management? I think it comes down to having more regard and thus higher expectations of the kiddos. As stated, we have absolutely all day to talk to the kids. We never have to rush through something because it's time for language arts or math, so we spend a titanic amount of time talking with children about why things aren't going exactly as they would have them at any given moment. We don't want children that are unthinkingly subordinate. We want children that will understand the rules that arise in other places in their lives and follow them because they make sense. The fact is that what we believe and thus practice, has and will continue to change over time.

At HH the child's desires and needs are paramount, but the teacher's role is not simply a supporting one. It is an active and guiding role - like a master craftsman in an apprenticeship relationship. Our goal at Habibi's is to be scaffolding that guides and supports the work in progress that is our children's cognitive development. We are mentors. Our kids leave the Hutch with so much more than their ABCs and 123s. They all leave with a sense of themselves and a wonder and drive to know more about themselves and their surroundings.

When learning is isolated, as it becomes in Kindergarten and is in most preschools, the child does not have a larger sense of "the way things are" either in math, science, or language. What we provide for the child is a big picture about what learning entails in preparation for the picking apart of the written or read language or the base-ten system (or whatever else) that follows.

## Structure

Think back to the first time you saw a Picasso painting - how disorienting it seemed - how utterly without structure. But upon learning of the strategies Picasso used in attempting to capture

multiple perspectives in one two-dimensional space, the structure of the artist's work became more clear. "Structure" at the Hutch is a fundamental issue. To see and understand the regularity and structure that provides the support for our school and its students and staff, one must know what to look for. At a glance, one might take Habibi's to be a place where there is no structure, but just like a Picasso painting there is something holding it all together. Habibi's is actually a deeply structured place, in fact, it is ALL about structure. The routines and the consistencies are what make Habibi's work. If the children could not count on us to be as consistent as we are there would be no rhyme and reason to what we do here. We are acutely aware of any decisions that we make as adults, especially ones that limit the children's activities or movement through the house and yard. When we give children reasons for the "way things are" we are specifically attuned to the underlying message that we are presenting them. When we tell a child that she must lie down and stay quiet for a while on her mat, we examine every detail of that requirement, making sure that there is a just, reasonable, understandable explanation for our request. This deeply critical way of thinking about the requirements that we ask of our children helps to insure that at other places in their lives, where the rules are more arbitrary, they will be able to recognize that there underlying reasons for the restrictions that surround all of us.

On a less philosophical level there is also a deep and rigid structure to our lives at HH. The children know when "outside time" is. They know that lunch procedure will be the same every day. There are very few surprises that involve the routine here. The days are very fluid. Not much breaks them up or renders them disjointed, like separating children into different rooms or having specific "math" time would do. This provides a stark contrast from the life outside the Hutch where schedules are constantly changing and hundreds of errands and tasks must be accomplished each week. We supply an environment where consistency is the marble from which our days are sculpted.

## Knowledge and Readiness

One of the most difficult concepts for us to discuss about our philosophy at the Hutch has to do with knowledge. What are we teaching the kids at the Hutch? Knowledge. But what is knowledge? While the question of what knowledge is might seem to be a bit of an obvious one to most of us, there actually is an ongoing debate in almost all the disciplines (anthropology, philosophy and, of course, education - just to name a few) about what "knowledge" really means, and how we use it and acquire it.

As we understand it, there are two types of knowledge that can be acquired as we develop cognitively. Those knowledge types are: decontextualized knowledge and contextualized knowledge. Decontextualized knowledge (often called "discursive" knowledge) is what we would call "facts" (Who wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird*? What does the Sixteenth Amendment allow the government to do? Who won the first Super Bowl?)- things taken out of the context of one's

lived experience. Decontextualized knowledge at the preschool and school-aged levels also includes number concepts or letter recognition.

Contextualized knowledge on the other hand involves what we would call the creative and/or the affective (knowing how to deal with conflicts, maintaining relationships, thinking one's way out of a tight spot, coming up with a great idea).

There are particular types of knowledge at work when one problem is solved that have little to do with any specific and unconnected knowledge. Arguably, even a mechanical engineer solves problems that arise with contextualized knowledge then applies her decontextualized, factual, formulaic knowledge to actually test her ability to think like a problem-solver. At Habibi's Hutch our number one goal is to foster the use of knowledge that is contextualized into the daily lives of our students. We are extremely good at guiding children into sophisticated ways of solving problems and thinking creatively, and we believe that anything else a child might need in life can be accessed through critical thinking (i.e. contextualized knowledge).

A first grader who can sound out words - one who reads "on-level" or above - may not be applying the themes of narration or other types of contextualized knowledge when he reads. It is contextualized knowledge that supplies him with the comprehension skills. Habibi's graduates understand what they read. Habib's graduates think through their readings. Habibi's graduates read... for fun! Some kids may leave Habibi's not knowing how to count to a hundred, write their name or even "properly" hold a pencil. Though some won't know these things, they will know how to deal with the introduction of the ABCs and 123s into their lives. They will be able to think critically about what letters represent or what the underlying concept behind a number is. They will know how to apply the tool of literacy. Algebra won't throw them into a tailspin. Ninety-nine percent of the rest of the formal education they will receive will involve the kind of decontextualized knowledge that only a truly critical creative mind can turn into anything useful. Our intention is NOT for them to learn facts or anything that you could test on a standardized test. Our goal is the fostering of problem-solving skills, risk-taking, thinking, creating, having wonderful ideas and pursuing those ideas to their fullest.

## Integrated Curriculum

Our curriculum can really be summed up with one tiny but grand word: Art. We believe that art for the young child, and indeed for all of us, integrates every discipline in a creatively fostering and fluid way. Language arts, science, math, music, history, social awareness, and self-exploration are only a few of the areas touched upon by the artist at work. As we work side by side with our students we discuss techniques, ideas, material properties and any of a myriad of topics, all within one sitting. As we talk about our art the children's verbal prowess is challenged and enhanced. As they cut, paste, paint and draw, their motor skills are honed. As we utilize recycled materials, their social awareness and understanding of cycles and systems becomes broadened. We count beads, discuss shapes, beat our rhythms, dance, explore the complicated concepts of harmony and the physical property of musical instruments. With the

arts, our curriculum becomes fluid, and the decontextualized way of learning, as it so often exists in schools, is eradicated. We follow no themes, have no units or formalized lessons, and are never found with children sitting before a looming teacher. We learn together, side by side, with our hands and our hearts.

In order for art to live up to its potential as not only a purely creative pursuit, but also a scientific, mathematic, linguistic, and kinesthetic undertaking, we must allow the children to combine materials, make mistakes, and... well... make a big mess. When a child is really learning something about the physical properties of color, she will almost inevitably end up with a brown painting. We have to recognize that the process through which she went to arrive at that dark, dripping picture was an important learning event, and that she saw many engaging colors on the road to the brown product. Teachers who say not to mix the paints because of the “icky” brown results are not seeing the bigger picture- just the little brown one. Even now there are “educational” films circulating among the elementary schools of our country that implore children not to mess up a perfectly beautiful painting by mixing complementary colors that will result in drab olives and browns. Although, have you ever noticed that when you mix red and yellow paint together, the result is seldom the color of a ripe Sunkist orange. We encourage a more hands-on approach to an understanding of processes such as the “color wheel”.

## Apprenticeship: Teacher/Student Relationships

One of the main contributors to current learning theory is the Russian psychologist and learning theorist, Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed that all learning happens within a social context. Experience is the greatest teacher, but children do not construct their own minds. Those around them guide, model, and shape the construction of the mind. Therefore, we consider the development of our children a co-construction between the teachers, peers, and child. Habibi's is set up to be a place where mentors and their apprentices are hard at work shaping each others' understanding of our world. This means that the personal relationships that are forged between staff and child become a daily focus. We do not consider this a place where “daycare” or “baby-sitting” is going on. We consider the Hutch a place where deep friendships are wrought, where masters and apprentices go about the serious but joyful business of living life. Although there is a fine line between “teacher” and “friend,” our staff is encouraged to tread it openly. Group projects are common- a master craftsman and her apprentices hard at work creating a mutually desired product- is a process that is paramount in our philosophy.

## Naptime

Naptime at Habibi's is one of the few times when the children are not given a choice of activities in which to engage. After an extensive and thoughtful reading and book discussion time, all of the children get on their mats and are expected to allow those around them to sleep without

interruption. That does not mean that every child is expected to lie down, close her eyes, and sleep. Each child is simply expected to respect others' right and need to sleep after lunch each day. Each mat becomes a tiny universe for those children who do not sleep. They are cut off from communication with others, which allows for a magical time of introspection and daydreaming for those that don't sleep. We often watch the ones who are not sleeping as they lay there gazing into an invisible distance and marvel at what wonders must be unfolding in this quiet time. Gentle music plays and teachers repose as facilitators of quiet reflection. After the teacher sees that those who are going to sleep have been given a chance to do so, books and drawing tools are allowed on the mats. Each child is issued a mat upon which to sleep. A small blanket and a tiny pillow plus a cuddly sleepmate (if desired) should be brought from home and taken home at the end of each week to be washed.

## Lunchtime and Snack Time

Lunch at the Hutch is one more time that the individuality of each child and the family from which he comes becomes evident. Each day the family provides its child with a lunch that is prepared at home. Lunches should be packed in a single container that the child can eat out of with a water bottle for hydration. Putting both container and water bottle in a bag/lunch box with a handle makes it much easier for your child to carry and keeps the items from being separated/lost. Depending upon whether or not it needs refrigeration it is placed on the "lunch table" or the fridge by the parent or child each morning at arrival. At lunch time all the children tumble out into the yard and pick a seat at one of the picnic tables. The children are encouraged to do as much for themselves as possible, unpacking their lunch and picking those next to whom they will sit during this happy time of day. This is another time when the children's choices are limited. They must sit down, get their food out, and put their dishes and lunch boxes away, but that is where the adult infringement ends. They are expected to make the decision of how much to eat and in what order. If they choose to eat their "dessert" first, that is their prerogative. We have a general understanding among the adults at the Hutch that food with sugar in it will not be packed in the children's lunches. We think that if refined sugar is not an option every day, the child is not going to care and will happily eat the nutritional options that are provided. This sugar ban is generally adhered to and sometimes ignored. That's probably the way rules should be followed. Obviously we allow sugary snacks on birthdays and whatnot. If periodically a cookie is slipped into a lunchbox, no one will be expelled, but know that we allow the children to decide whether something will be dessert or the main course. They are also allowed to decide whether they will use a spoon, a fork, fingers, straw, or tongue to get it in their mouth. This is another way that we can keep from interfering with the decision-making processes of the children - another way that they can be in charge of one of the millions of things that really doesn't need to be controlled by adults but is anyway.

Kiddos arriving in a morning rush are welcome to eat their breakfast with us. If your child arrives early and has not had a chance to have breakfast, let us know and we can give them a snack. Lunch time is around 11:15am, and afternoon snack at 3:15pm. We ask that each family



contribute once a week enough snack food (FRUIT/VEGGIES ONLY) for approximately one snack for 10 children (for example: 5 bananas, a bag of carrots, a container of strawberries, cherry tomatoes, or blueberries, etc.). We are ONLY allowed to serve foods cut in a licensed/permitted facility, so **store cut fruit is required**. If you ever forget your child's lunch, we can prepare them a "shared" lunch, since there's plenty of food to be had. Please no popcorn, cereal, chips, or pretzels. Thanks!

## Arrival and Departure

Transitions are difficult for young children. They are not able to move from one situation to another with the fluidity of an adult. They often don't understand interruption and will hold their ground to keep things "in order." One of the times that can prove to be difficult is arrival and/or departure from Habibi's. For some of the children, the morning goodbye seems to be unbearable heartache, and no matter how long mom or dad stays, they still cry desperately when it's time to be separated. We at Habibi's do not attempt to interrupt this natural sense of sadness. Rather, we allow them to go through the feelings that come with having mom, dad, or another special adult leave. We then gently comfort them, giving them the emotional room they need to experience the feeling, albeit brief, of loss so they then can fully experience the feeling of gaining security and trust with others. Be assured, our laps are available for as long as the child wants them, and our attention is very focused on any cues they may give about their source of security. We seldom see a child cry for more than 15 minutes after mom or dad has left (the average is less than a minute), and though some children who have been here for years still cry in the morning, none of them stay upset for long.

We suggest that you let your child know how long you will be staying (e.g. one book) and then stick to that time frame. Also, reassure them each morning that you or someone they love will be picking them up. Finally, realize that you may not be able to get them in a "nice place" emotionally before you leave. Rather than spending time trying to get them involved in some activity, just give your hugs and kisses and let a teacher hold them if that is what they need. Remember, they'll be fine very soon. As far as departure time goes, give them two choices: "Either you can leave with me now, walking on your own, or I can carry you." A few times of exiting with a bellowing child in your arms will actually be much less stressful than a tug-of-war every time you come to pick up your child.

## Circle Time

One of the legacies left the world by the creator of Kindergartens, Friedrich Froebel, is the "circle time." We at the Hutch also engage in our version of the traditional circle time. At transition times during the day (i.e. before washing hands and going outside for lunch or snack) at least one teacher and as many children as care to gather and bang drums, strum guitars, dance,

sing, or just watch. There really is no “circle” involved in this time, and the songs that we sing or instruments that we play are usually decided upon by the children. Someone is always calling out for a favorite song to be sung (a perennial favorite is “The Hula Hop”). Many, if not most of our songs, involve the children providing the key words or body movements that go along with a given verse. This is a way to give them control of what we do at their school in their space with their time. As always, no one is required to come to the romps that are circle time. Those that choose not to participate simply wash their hands and/or head outside.

## The Play Yard

The playground at the Hutch is probably its most distinguishing feature. Although we speak lovingly of our two old houses, it is actually the yard in which we do most of our playing, learning, loving, laughing, and crying. When people visit the Hutch it is often the playground that draws them to our lived here. The playscape, concrete, sandbox, and everything else within our fence is apt to be slathered with paint, mud, clay, shaving cream, or any of the other materials we use to create and explore. Children are free to move the loose assemblage of materials wherever suits their needs or desires. One is apt to find boxes, crates, tires, planks, brushes, toys, jugs, or anything else we can recycle or add to our collection of materials. The children are encouraged to use what we find in creative and imaginative ways. Having the freedom to use any of the materials as they see fit sets the stage for both dramatic and physical play. And as both leading minds in child development, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky assert, play is the tool a child uses to develop socially and cognitively. We allow the children to play with all the materials in whatever way they can dream up. The children are in charge of the aesthetics outside, and it shows!

## “Discipline”

Again, there is but one rule at Habibi’s Hutch: Don’t hurt yourself or anyone else. But what happens when this rule is broken? We do not use “time out” or any type of formalized rewards and punishment system. If a child is hurting another child (physically or mentally) we intervene and initiate a dialogue between the victim and the perpetrator. The intervention is usually in the form of something like, “Do you want child’s name to tell not to hit you anymore?” “Do you want to tell him how that made you feel?” We find that the vast majority of the time a discussion centered around these prompts suffices. If the victim seems to need help with a word we will offer him one. “You can tell her you are frustrated...angry...hurt...embarrassed...etc.” The victim gets to express her outrage and the perpetrator understands the results of her actions. If the problem persists we tell the perpetrator that we don’t feel like the kids they are playing with at the time will feel safe and that it is time to go somewhere else on the playground or in the school, either walking or being carried by a teacher. The “perp” must then go play somewhere else. If we hear a child screaming “Give me that back?” We do not ask him to lower his voice. We say, “You used your words. You really want child’s name to give you that back!” By

supplying our children with the vocabulary to express their emotions, and supporting their efforts to convey them without violence, we are not only keeping the playground a safe place, we are providing the children with problem solving techniques that they will be using the rest of their lives.

Likewise, if a child is angry or frustrated with an adult, we expect him or her to have the opportunity to tell that adult in pointed or precise language how he or she feels without fear of censure. The organic dialogue-based discipline policy having been stated, in the following pages you will find the state guidelines that are the required “bare minimum” compliance in terms of discipline and guidance. In these guidelines you will find #4 of the “positive methods” for discipline the use of “brief supervised separation or ‘time out.’” We will not put your child in time out, but we ask that you sign the following page as an understanding that at the absolute lowest common denominator we will not engage in any of the “harsh, cruel, or unusual treatment of any child.” [including, “requiring a child to remain silent or inactive”]

## Safety

It is a powerfully beautiful sight to step onto the Habibi’s playground and see children at absolutely every level upon which your eye can gaze. These are children who have dug holes and sit in them, almost subterranean. There are children stretched out on the tables staring into imaginary landscapes. There are children sitting still in chair or zooming by on bikes. There are children swinging. There are children climbing. Some scale the playscape like monkeys. Some even climb beyond the playscape into the low branches of the trees above. There is invariably a child stationed high watching cars go by. All of this activity raises an incredibly important question. Is my child safe at Habibi’s Hutch? Despite the acrobatics and the risks it looks like the children are taking, we assure you this is a safe place where no one has ever been injured more seriously than a hug and a band-aid or a piece of ice hasn’t sufficed as treatment. The climbing, running, and zooming risks they seem to be taking are merely pseudo-risks that will foster a greater respect for their own abilities and limitations. So often children begin their tenure here not being able to climb the first step to monkey bars, but peer apprenticeship and adult encouragement quickly bolsters confidences and bodies are set in motion. The teachers are watching the kids extremely carefully- but not obviously. The student/teacher ratio is such that we are never more than a few feet away from an intrepid climber or a few inches away from a busy carpenter. And if danger looms, there is always our one rule: Don’t hurt yourself or anyone else.

## Housekeeping

### Clothing Options

Habibi's Hutch is a child's space, so we do not expect them to stay clean or even fully clothed. Shoes may be taken off as well as any encumbering item of clothing. We do require underwear with the simple explanation that sand will hurt one if it gets in the penis or vagina. The procedure for discarding clothing in order to feel more free or to don a costume is simple. If it is wet with water, we will hang it up outside. If it is wet with urine, we will put it in a plastic bag and stash it in the child's cubby. If it is dry, it also goes in the cubby. If these procedures fail to contain the clothing and you, the parent, find that an item has gone AWOL, there are various places throughout the school that the teachers stash unclaimed items. They are usually in sight, but ask for help and a teacher will get right on the case.

### Appropriate Clothing

When dressing for school each morning, the family really should keep in mind the types of activities in which their child will engage during the day. We strongly suggest that in the summer time you send your children to school wearing only underwear and light shorts. They will probably take off their shoes, socks, and shirt anyway, and there is much less to round up at the end of the day if shorts and underwear were all that were brought. We are perfectly aware that there are some children who insist on coming to school in full costume - whether it be Wonder Woman, Prince Charming, Darth Vader, or a blushing bride. As long as they understand that whatever they wear will get extremely dirty here, and as long as you are aware that whatever they wear will get extremely dirty here, we have no qualms with any sort of dress.

### Extra Clothing

The children are always aware that should an accident occur, they will have something to wear. We greatly appreciate donations of extra clothes, especially underwear, so that the children are always confident that there will be something to put on if an accident happens.

### Items Brought from Home

We do not discourage families from bringing toys or any other accoutrements of childhood to Habibi's. We do, however, insist upon the understanding that most things the children bring are small enough to fit in their cubby, and therefore, small enough to be lost in the sea of stuff. We are happy to allow and encourage students to bring things from home. In a way every day is an opportunity for "show and tell" at the Hutch. The value of personal property and the discussions that arise from the ownership of something "cool" that other kids might want to see or play with (but no one is forced to "share") is an important part of our curriculum. Make sure your child knows that anything brought to the Hutch is in eminent danger of being lost. It's okay to lose things, and if they want to play with some toy until it is finally swept away into the ether, we don't mind that they bring it.

## **The Cubbies**

A child's cubbies are her private spaces where treasures and creations are safe from any harm. The children may put anything they find or create in their cubbies, and we leave it up to the families to maintain them as they see fit. Some cubbies are as cluttered as grandpa's attic, and others are as neat as a dentist's waiting room. It's up to the individual. Some things each child should have in her inside cubby are: "softies" for nap time (a blanket, maybe a very small pillow and or a cuddly stuffed animal), a change of clothes, and anything else left up to the family. If your child is toilet learning, then you are obviously going to want to stock up on extra underwear. If your child is a budding geologist there may be thirty pounds of rocks rattling around in there. Outside cubbies are generally reserved as a place to put clothes, shoes, and other items taken off throughout the day, an extra jacket/raincoat, rainboots, and the many personal and creative items your child may find, make, or bring.

## **Communication with Parents**

Open communication between not only students and teachers, but parents and teachers is vital to our work at the Hutch. The most obvious way to keep that line of communication open is to talk to us as you pick up your child each day. That is the most obvious way, but it is also one of the most difficult. Teachers at the Hutch are extremely busy and children are ready to have their parents to themselves after having been separated all day long. It is extremely difficult to have a meaningful and fully attended conversation with a teacher during the work day. So we have a system of communication devices in place to facilitate your understanding of what our daily activities are and how your child is feeling and growing.

## **The Habibi's Newsletter**

The newsletter is distributed (by email) every few months or so to keep parents abreast of important dates, requests and curriculum issues. Interesting facts and events are discussed. The newsletter is an excellent source for the staff to address curriculum or policy amendments or to elaborate on any of a number of topics touched upon in this handbook; any policy changes will be put in writing for you and delivered via the newsletter.

## **The Notebooks**

There are two notebooks affixed to the upper beam on the far corner of the Vamanos awning (we will happily direct you to them). One is for families to write communications to the teachers about any special arrangements or changes that parents feel the staff should know (e.g. Grandma will be picking up Billy today, or please make sure Sarah keeps her shoes on since she has a cold). The other notebook is to communicate any injuries that might have occurred during the day (e.g. Bobby fell of a trike by the sandbox and scraped his knee. Hugs, hydrogen peroxide, and a band-aid were administered).

## **Parents Pockets**

In every nap room there are a set of pockets somewhere on the wall in which notes, birthday invitations, art, trinkets, etc. will be placed for parents to take home. This is one of the best and

most personal ways we can communicate. Teachers also have pockets so that parents may communicate with them in the same way. Half day kids that don't have a nap room have pockets either in the Tree House Room (for Vamanos) or to the left of the fireplace in Mango Tango (for Chones House kids). Each nap teacher will also post their phone or email if you need to get in touch with them that way as well.

### **GROUPME:**

We encourage parents (both full time and part time) to participate in open communication with their child's teacher through an app called GroupMe. Your child's teacher utilizes this app to post photos and announcements daily. You can private message your child's teacher through the app with specific questions/requests. There's a message board where the parents will receive pictures, videos, and notes from the teacher (accessible only to those in the group). Each naproom has their own group. This is also a way for parents to communicate with one another. If you DO NOT wish for photos of your child to be posted on this group, let your naproom teacher know. You will receive an invite to the group once your child is attending. If you don't receive an invite, let your child's teacher know!

### **Contacting Andrew**

If you wish to address *any* concerns or questions, please call Andrew at the school (512-478-7775). If he cannot speak at the time of the call, leave your number and he will contact you as soon as he can. Whether through the telephone, in person, or by email ([habibishutch@gmail.com](mailto:habibishutch@gmail.com)), let us know about any concerns you have or questions you've been pondering. We love to talk about what we do here at the Hutch.

### **Parent Visits**

Parents are *always* welcome. Stop by and have lunch with us. Spend an afternoon playing with us. We have been told on more than one occasion that families find an afternoon at the Hutch banding drums and painting faces rather therapeutic.

### **Parent Involvement**

In spring and autumn we host festivals (Fridays) where parents become carnies and paint faces, sing tunes, play chase, and more. Look for sign up sheets a couple of weeks before each fest to sign up and join us for a while. We also host two big parties each year. One is graduation. Everyone is invited. Bands play. DJ spins. Kids play night time style. Parents and teachers visit with good food and drinks. Graduation commencement, a graduate song performance, and finally a video to close the festivities. In Autumn we host our Halloween Bash complete with Silent Auction/Fundraiser. Same fun as above but with the added grins from bidding on cool items to help raise money to spend on our cool kiddos. Volunteers always needed for both events.

### **Toilet Learning**

Learning to use the toilet is a huge step in each of our lives. It marks a transition from dependence to independence, and bolsters self confidence and bodily awareness. We

understand it to be a deeply personal experience. Each child and each family is different. We never rush children into anything, and something as important as toilet learning can never be forced on a child. What we do *do* (no pun intended) is work with each family according to their own schedules and requests. If you want us to tell you how we think you should go about making the transition from a “diaper wearer” to a “potty user,” we will always be glad to help. The accidents are part of learning. Nobody’s perfect the first time they try anything. Note: during the months of November through February, we will not be doing any toilet training at school so as to keep our kiddos nice and dry during those cold winter months.

## Official Policies

### Hours of Operation

We are open Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 6:00pm, 12 months of the year, barring holidays that are posted at least a month in advance.

### Sickness and exclusion

If a child has a fever of 100F or higher, suffers from persistent diarrhea, or vomits two times within one school day, that child’s parent will be called and they will be asked to remain out of our school population for 24 hours after the child’s temperature/condition has returned to normal. When these are not the issue, always follow your pediatrician’s advice about whether or not your child is well enough to attend school.

### Medication

We do not administer any medications.

### Immunization and other Records

Records of your child’s immunizations must be provided (photocopies are okay) and kept current. These records will be kept on file. All children 4 years old and above attending day care must receive annual hearing and vision screenings. These can be done at your pediatrician’s office, but a registered nurse comes to Habibi’s once a year to perform these screenings for a small fee.

### Late Pick Up Fees

There is a one dollar per minute late fee charged to parents who are unable to get to school in time to pick up their child. Please remember to call if you are stuck in traffic or there has been a miscommunication about who is retrieving your child.

### Persons Other Guardians Picking Up Children

If you need to make arrangements for someone other than a parent to pick up your child, you may do so. Leave a note in the notebook on the playground with the person’s full name. They will be required to show identification that matches that name. If you need to call and ask one of the teachers to write the name in the notebook, you may do so.

## **Birthdays and Holidays**

Birthdays are special events that warrant special ceremonies. On a child's birthday a small celebration is held during afternoon snack time. Parents are invited to the singing of the birthday song in English and Spanish and may bring enough "special treats" for everyone. In the summer months, we prefer popsicles!

The celebration of holidays is not integral to the Habibi's curriculum. We are never averse to singing songs that the children might suggest based on an upcoming holiday, and they may choose to create Valentine's Day cards, but we generally allow the holidays to be a family affair. We do however celebrate the changing of the seasons and all of life's other cycles in our every endeavor.

## **Water Play**

Water is an important part of our curriculum. Water tables, buckets of water, mud puddles, and other wet activities are often part of our day. However, we do not currently have swimming activities on or off campus.

## **Pets**

Your dogs, cats, gerbils, etc. are not allowed on campus. However, we do have two aquariums filled with various fish. Fish gazing is highly recommended!

## **School Calendar**

Any official government holidays that might be observed by a school closing (such as Martin Luther King Day) might be observed at Habibi's as well. If on such a day the school is closed, there will be a posting well in advance in the Habibi's Newsletter and posted on doors. We are generally closed 2 days in August, 3 days in November, two weeks in December/January, and 5 days in March that coincide with AISD/UT Spring Break.

## **Weather Closings and other Weather Issues**

Inclement weather conditions that cause AISD to close will result in our closure as well. If the weather looks bad, listen to your radio/tv/internet. If AISD is closed, so are we. Rain happens so seldom in Austin that it actually only slightly changes the look of our school day. When it rains we will eat our lunches under the awnings or inside at tables throughout the school. Raincoats and rainboots are encouraged, and depending upon the temperature and lightning conditions, we often frolic in the downpours. Umbrellas are delicate things and often end up bent or broken, so you may want to leave them at home- but this is only a suggestion.

## **Tuition**

Tuition is due on the first day of every month. It should be in the form of a check or money order and placed in the tuition can on the mantle in the Chones House or the countertop in the Vamanos House. Late fees of \$25 per day will be added to late payments.



## Withdrawal Procedures

If your family is moving or you are otherwise required to withdraw your child from Habibi's Hutch, a 30 day written notice is required.

## Field Trips

Habibi's does not currently take off-campus field trips.

## Gang Free Zone

As a result of House Bill 2086 that passed during the 81<sup>st</sup> Legislature, Regular Session, Chapter 42 of the Human Resource Code, we must inform you that our school and a surrounding perimeter of 1,000 feet is a gang free zone. Certain gang-related criminal activity or engaging in organized criminal activity within 1000 feet of our center is a violation of this law and is therefore subject to increased penalty under state law. The area that falls within the gang-free zone can vary depending on the type of location. The local municipal or county engineer may produce and update maps for the purposes of prosecution. As a parent, you may contact the local municipality or courthouse for information about obtaining a copy of the map if you choose to do so.

## Emergency Evacuation Plan

1. Upon becoming aware of the threat of danger, the emergency coordinator will move the emergency box from the top left shelf of the changing station to the exit gate (designated meeting place).
2. Teachers will round up their kids and meet at the front gate facing Bert Avenue with their nap room clipboard in hand, grab an emergency bag from the emergency box, and confirm the presence of all of their children. Teachers must check off which children are there before evacuating and after arriving at the predesignated safety zone.
3. Emergency coordinator will designate who will lead the group across the street. The emergency coordinator will also designate the person who will be responsible for calling parents once everyone has reached the safety zone at the The Human Potential Center.
4. Teachers will lead their students towards Bert Ave, beginning with the oldest students, who are more capable of moving quickly.
5. Parents will be notified by email and text message from the designated safety zone.

\*\*Should The Human Potential Center be deemed unsafe, we will head to The Ann Richard School.

## Health Checks

Each morning the lead teacher will conduct a health check of each student upon arrival.

The teacher will check for:

- Breathing difficulties
- Severe coughing
- Discharge from the nose or eyes
- Changes in skin color

- Bruising or swelling
- Cuts, sores or rashes
- Coldness, warmth, or clamminess that is unusual

If the child can talk, the teacher will ask questions for further information.

The teacher will communicate with parents/guardians to find out about changes in the child's sleep, eating and drinking, toileting habits, and mood/behavior at home.

If a child is observed to have any condition that would lead to exclusion from school as detailed earlier in the sickness and exclusion section, then parents/guardians will be notified to come pick them up as soon as possible. The child will be taken to an area away from the rest of the children if symptoms could be contagious.

Now that the legalities are out of the way...

Welcome to the wacky world that is our little schoolhouse!