

RIVER MIST PRESCHOOL

Honoring Childhood

2441 County Road 225

Durango, CO 81301

(970) 385-4098

River Mist offers enrollment to all children, regardless of race, sex, religion or creed and does not discriminate against children or their families on the basis of any of these.

Parent Handbook: Policies and Procedures

Offering a Child Directed Approach to Early Childhood Care & Education:

Enriching cognitive & physical development in
a beautiful rural environment

Vitalizing health with organic snacks and food
education

INTRODUCTION

River Mist Preschool is located just northeast of Durango on County Road 225. Our school is situated on 5 acres on the Florida River, graced by gardens, meadows, trees, and a small orchard. River Mist has a 30-year history as a privately owned preschool. In 2016 River Mist received non profit status from the IRS and is governed by a Board of Directors. Our school community includes a diverse group of children, families and friends, staff, and auxillary early childhood personnel. We welcome all children, and contract with the Department of Social Services and Child Find/ 9-R School District in an effort to assist families.

STAFF

The River Mist staff is outstanding. Each of us has a unique set of strengths that enrich the overall quality of the program. Our staff meets regularly to work on healthy forms of communication and conflict resolution, and develop strategies to continually improve the quality of our program.

We are all certified in First Aid and CPR, and meet or exceed the licensing standards for early childhood educators. We also partake in a minimum of 15 hours of continuing education related to the field each year.

CURRICULUM

Our program includes a nature based curriculum that is woven throughout our environment and outdoor experiences. Curiosity is an inherent part of childhood. We aim to provide children with the environmental aspects that will contribute to their ability to act on their curiosity and believe in themselves. At River Mist there are many opportunities to experience a wide range of environments where discovery and conversation is encouraged. In this type of program the growth and development of the whole child are nurtured by our staff through a non-coercive, learner directed approach. The seasons and our environment are the foundation for our activities; and life skills, creative endeavors, and outdoor explorations are modeled and supported. In addition to the nature based curriculum, we also teach with Creative Curriculum in both our preschool program and toddler program.

We use Teaching Strategies GOLD and the ASQ (family provides information) for assessment. By combining our nature based learning with Creative Curriculum, we believe that our population is getting the best of both a nature school and traditional preschool experience. We find that our preschool graduates have positive perspectives about learning and are well prepared for kindergarten and all the new experiences coming their way as they leave us and move toward middle childhood.

PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES

River Mist philosophy is based in community. The contribution of River Mist families is a fundamental element of our program. We request that families participate in one of the following ways, donating at least 2 hrs. per 6 months of enrollment. Please read through this section and then fill out the Family Participation portion of the Enrollment Packet and check our monthly calendar for coordinating family participation.

1. At River Mist with the children: Our primary intention is to communicate effectively with each other and with the children, and we ask that participating parents honor this intention. Our goals in communicating with children and adults are to practice respect, provide consistency, and truly connect on an empathetic level.

Further we hope to enhance the children's environment by modeling rich activities of loving and living life fully. Parents/guardians may ask the staff for suggestions as to how they can be involved or bring a project. Options for projects are wide ranging (such as baking, gardening, music, movement, language, outdoor sports, building, repairs and maintenance, research, daily chores...). We ask adults to bring in or participate in projects that are of interest to them and to model all phases of projects.

2. At River Mist during off hours: This gives families who cannot be present during the week a chance to spend time at River Mist working on projects such as building, repairs and maintenance, gardening, deep cleaning, etc. We offer Volunteer Days intermittently, but are always open to arranging days and times for volunteer work that fit each family's schedule.

3. From home: We have some needs, such as assistance with laundry or preparing materials that can be taken home. Also, if you have a skill you can share from your home, such as technological assistance we invite you to contribute in this way. This may also be an

option for families interested in organizing a committee, a fundraiser, a field trip, etc., where some of the work can be done from home, and may also include meeting with staff and other families.

4. Monetary contribution: If a family is unable to actively participate in the enrichment of our community and environment a monetary contribution of \$50.00 every 6 months will be accepted as a substitute for volunteer time.

FAMILY EVENTS

We aim to support families in connecting with one another by coordinating regular events.. When a child's parent or guardian is at River Mist, he or she is legally responsible for his or her children if: they are at River Mist and not enrolled for the day, it is not within school hours, and during family events.

DAILY RHYTHM

Please see the Daily Rhythm for each age group posted in classrooms. Decision making is a large part of our daily experience and the relaxed format of our daily rhythm allow for us to encounter the day as it unfolds, understanding the independence and responsibilities associated with choice. Consistency is also an important aspect of our group dynamics. Each child will have a primary care giver who will be specifically aware of that child's needs and developmental growth. This is also who will be available for conferences (see current calendar for conference weeks). We hold parent conferences twice a year, in the fall and spring, and anytime one is requested by either staff or families. We strongly encourage parents to drop off by 9:00 am to ensure their child is here to participate in circle, and ask you to call or message if you will be dropping off after 9:30 am or if your child will be absent. We do not recommend dropping off at lunch or nap time as a regular routine, as this does not give your child time to enjoy free play before these structured routines begin.

CLOTHING

It is important to know that we spend a lot of time outdoors. The children need to be prepared for this and therefore dressed appropriately. **This includes an initial application of sun block before arriving at school.** They need to wear durable, washable clothes suited for the weather. **A complete change of clothes, labeled with their name or initials, needs to be kept in their cubbies.** This includes a light jacket and a change of shoes or slippers, and gear for the season (sun, rain or snow). Clothes kept in the cubbies need to be rotated regularly. Occasionally parents have picked up the wrong snowpants or swimsuit because it was identical to their child's- we tend to shop at the same places so please, label your child's belongings. And if you accidentally take an item of clothing that is not yours, please return it! It won't be the first time it happened and we will all be grateful for the return. If River Mist provides "extra clothes" please wash and return them in a timely manner.

SUPPLIES

Please provide the following supplies on your child's first day at River Mist: A sturdy water bottle (labeled), sunscreen (labeled), nap blanket and/or small pillow/small stuffed animal, extra set of clothes, 2 boxes of tissues, a toothbrush and toothpaste (labeled), diapers and wipes for toddlers, and a lunch box with lunch inside (daily). Your child's lead teacher may request additional items as well.

Due to the current concerns regarding Coronavirus, we are not brushing teeth at the center. You do not have to supply a toothbrush/toothpaste at this time. We will let you know when we begin this routine again.

DROP OFF AND PICK UP

Please help us to honor our safe zone and use caution when pulling into our driveway, and please drive slowly in our neighborhood. When dropping off or picking up children please park in a way that does not block others from getting in, out, and around the circle drive. You can park on the perimeters and there is extra parking to the left side of the preschool playground. Also, **please do not park or drive in the grass.**

Upon arrival it is required that you check in with the staff before leaving. You must either sign your child in and out on the ELV digital system or on our manual sign in/sign out sheet of paper.

Services for Children with Special Needs

We welcome special needs children, and will work with specialists within our school environment to serve them to the best of our ability. Our spacious, natural setting can be especially beneficial for children with special needs. However, because our building was created before ADA requirements we cannot service children in wheelchairs. We are not able to provide a full time aid for individual children who may need a one to one ratio with an adult in a group setting. If your child has special needs, please discuss with our Director so that we can determine whether or not we can meet the needs of your child.

(Please scroll down for our Policies & Procedures Index)

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES INDEX

(The following policies and procedures directly correlate to the Rules Regulating Child Care Centers 7.702.41 A-Z)

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A. Purpose and Philosophy

The purpose of River Mist Preschool is to honor childhood by offering a non-coercive child directed approach to early childhood care and education, guided by the belief that learning is an intrinsic aspect of human nature and academics are an integrated rather than isolated part of learning. We further intend to include children in the growth of a rich sustainable environment where all members of the community learn to balance freedom and responsibility. We provide a safe and healthy setting for developing life skills, deepening our connection to the natural world, and learning to be ourselves with others. Our program continually evolves as we all bring what we learn and love to our community, adding to its warm and creative atmosphere. At River Mist children have choices, enabling them to be decision makers and problem solvers, empowering them with a sense of self and community.

We are deeply influenced by our connection to the world around us, in particular the surroundings here at River Mist. Interacting with young children is a constant reminder of the wonders found in nature.

“Education is not something that the teacher does...it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being.” ~Maria Montessori

Our philosophy has been influenced by: Non Violent Communication, Love & Logic and as well as people such as Jean Piaget, Lev S. Vygotsky, and Maria Montessori.

At River Mist we treat education as an awakening of the whole child, recognizing the integrated importance of physical, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual development. As adults we honor our role as models for the children as we share the educational process with them. Through a variety of environments, experiences, and conversations we are supporting the children’s passionate and conscious involvement in their world. We work to enrich life with strong relationships and creative expressions. At the heart of our

responsibility as adults is our passionate and conscious involvement in our world. Our enthusiasm for life introduces and exposes children to the beauty of diversity and the freedom of choice.

B. Ages of Children Accepted

We currently have a full day, full year program for children ages 1-5.

C. Times of Operation

We are open from 8:30 am until 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Fall session begins the day after Labor Day in September, and summer session begins the first Wednesday in June. We are closed on Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving week, two weeks for the winter holiday and New Year, and one week in the Spring and one week in July. We will also be closed once per season for staff in-service days. Service on all national holidays that have not been mentioned will be assessed on a needs basis. If you have plans to be gone when we are open, we need written notice in advance- thank you.

D. Inclement and Excessively Hot Weather

During inclement and excessively hot weather the school will be open. All reasonable considerations and precautions will be taken with the children's health, safety, and comfort as our paramount concern.

E. Admission and Registration

Families are required to schedule a time to come and visit prior to enrollment. Initial registration requires the completion of an intake application and the payment of the nonrefundable registration fee. The rest of the enrollment packet, including immunization records and the physicians report, must be completed and returned to our staff on or before the first day of attendance for admission to be granted. Please be aware that the State of Colorado allows unimmunized children to attend preschool. If your child is not immunized, you will have to sign an immunization waiver to be kept in your child's file. If there is an outbreak of disease and the CDC or SJBH requires that non immunized children be

excluded, your tuition will not be refunded and the standard two weeks notice will apply if you choose to withdraw your child.

F. Fee Schedule

REGISTRATION/DEPOSIT

\$65.00 (nonrefundable) for the school year due September 1st or upon enrollment.

\$35.00 (nonrefundable) for the summer due June 1st or upon enrollment.

TUITION

Tuition is due on the 1st of each month and a \$50.00 late fee will be collected after the 5th. Any non payment of tuition, no matter how late, is due to River Mist. An additional \$2.00 per minute will be collected for parents or guardians arriving late to pick up their children. Tuition costs have been prorated for the year based on the number of days we are open in a twelve month calendar year, and will therefore be the same each month, regardless of absences or holidays when River Mist is closed. To reiterate, **tuition will be the same every month of the year**. If a child is absent on a day that school is in session, make up days will not be offered. Make up days are extremely hard to offer as our school is usually full. In the case of a family emergency or illness lasting more than two weeks, reduction in tuition may be negotiated with the Director. The enrollment options and coinciding monthly rates are listed below. The cost of am and pm snacks are included- students bring lunch from home each day.

Tuition Rates:

	<u>Ages 1-3 (Toddlers)</u>	<u>Ages 3-5 (Preschool)</u>
2 days	\$440.00	\$424.00
3 days	\$660.00	\$634.00
4 days	\$880.00	\$845.00
5 days	\$1100.00	\$1056.00
Extra Days (Daily Rate)	\$55.00	\$53.00
Drop in (not enrolled)	\$65.00	\$63.00

G. Identifying Where Children Are At All Times

Parents are required to use the Brightwheel digital system to clock their child in and out OR write the time that they drop their children off and write the time that they pick their children up as well as signing at pick up. We also keep a daily attendance sheet for recording attendance and absence. The staff uses the daily attendance sheet throughout the day to be sure all children are present. A count of the children is done for each group as they change activities or locations. Before closing each day, we check the attendance sheet and the sign in and out sheet to be sure all children are accounted for.

H. Discipline

Prevention is our first disciplinary strategy. Through focus on communication skills, recognition of the validity of emotions, witnessing, and neutral attention we aim to prevent the need for discipline. We use natural consequences to enforce the basic rules (Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Clean). Redirection of children from one activity or environment to another is an effective approach toward recognition of acceptable behavior. In the case of conflict between children, we ask the children involved to express their feelings to one another and discuss alternative ways of dealing with their conflict. In some cases it may be necessary to separate a child who is threatening his or her personal safety or that of the group. In this case we do “time out with teacher” wherein the teacher is in proximity to the child and can discuss feelings and behavioral expectations. River Mist cultivates relationships with families through regular conferences, daily communication, and family events. Our staff is expected to communicate in an emotionally safe way and use their relationship with families to better understand and support the children. Positive Behavior Support methods are employed by River Mist staff and team created behavior plans are created to support children who need them to enhance healthy social emotional development. In extreme cases when a child repeatedly threatens the safety of other students, and/or staff, a family may be asked first for a conference to help the staff & family understand that child’s needs, and inform a team

based behavior plan. River Mist will also offer the family access to an early childhood mental health consultant. If the center cannot successfully manage the child's behavior after these steps have been taken, the family may be asked to stop bringing their child if all other solutions have been exhausted and the child continues to threaten the safety of others. If such a case occurs no tuition will be refunded. **Corporal and other harsh punishments are never allowed at River Mist.**

I. Illnesses, Accidents, and Injuries

Children must be healthy and able to go outside and participate in the daily activities, in order to attend school. Please see the Illness Policy discussing how sick is too sick to come to school. If you need any clarification on this information please call and discuss it with our director or with the health department. When children are diagnosed with a communicable illness, the center will immediately notify the local health department, all staff members and all parents and guardians of children in care. Children's confidentiality will be maintained. Children are free to attend school if they have been to the doctor and are no longer contagious, and are able to go outside and participate in the daily activities. Please also see item R as well as the attached documents regarding medication.

In the incident of an illness, accident, or injury identified or occurring at the school, an incident report will be filled out, and the parent will be notified. If necessary, the child will be isolated until they can be picked up. We will contact the physician identified in the enrollment packet if the situation calls for such action. In the case of an emergency the procedures outlined in the enrollment packet will be followed.

J. Emergencies Such as Lost Children and Fires

In the event that a child has been identified as missing the parents or guardians will be notified, as will the local authorities. The center will continue to make reasonable effort to locate the child.

In the event of a fire, we will call 911 and follow the procedures practiced in our regularly scheduled fire drills. This means that the director or responsible group leader will pull the alarm and get the attendance sheet. Each group leader will gather their groups into a line at the door, (the routes are posted on the bulletin board in the cubby hallway). They will proceed at a walking pace, to exit the building, and meet at the gathering area beside the

garden. There is an alternative path to the left of the property where a vehicle can reach the population while maintaining distance from the building. The director or responsible group leader will proceed to check the entirety of the building, being sure that all children have been evacuated and that all doors and windows have been closed. The director or responsible group leader will then exit the building and take attendance. When all children have been accounted for, the procedures followed will be discussed. In the case of a fire drill, the director or responsible group leader will then return to the building, checking to be sure that there is no fire, and all is safe. In the case of a fire, we will wait at the gathering area for the arrival of the fire department. For a more comprehensive and detailed view of River Mist preparedness for emergencies, please request access to the River Mist Emergency & Preparedness Plan.

K. Transportation of Children

In any circumstance requiring the transportation of children, all Federal, State and local regulations will be followed. If we take a field trip parent volunteers and teachers will be asked to drive, they will be equipped with first aid kits in at least 2 of the vehicles and parent permission slips specified for the outing. We will further abide by all rules outlined in the Rules Regulating Child Care Centers 7.702.69.

L. Field Trips, Television and Video Viewing

All field trips will be supervised under appropriate adult- child ratios. We will take walking field trips on a regular basis, both on and off the River Mist property. If a field trip involves vehicle transportation, we will require permission forms be filled out for each trip specifically. There will not be any television viewing, and on the rare occasion that an educational video is used, we will request parental permission. We do consider ourselves a screen free school and encourage no or very limited screen time for young children. In any special circumstance, whether it be a guest speaker or field trip, staff are always responsible for the supervision of children unless their parent/guardian is present.

M. Vehicle Safety

Any vehicle or driver involved in transporting children under supervision at River Mist will comply with all applicable laws of the Colorado Department of Revenue, Motor Vehicle Division as well as local ordinances.

N. Release of Children

Children will be released only to persons authorized by the legal parent or guardian in the enrollment packet. In the case of an emergency, should somebody else need to pick up the child, we require consent from the parents, and will always check for identification before we release the child to someone other than the legal parent or guardian. We encourage parents to take pictures of the ELV codes they are provided upon enrollment and provide the codes to everyone on their emergency list. Please be aware we require at least one emergency contact in addition to the parent's/guardian's information.

O. Pick up of Children After Hours

As a part of our closing duties we check the attendance and sign in/out sheet to be sure that all children have been picked up. If a child remains after hours, the staff on duty will wait with the child for the parent/guardian to arrive. If we have not been contacted by the parent/guardian we will make reasonable effort to contact them. If this is not successful after thirty minutes we will contact one of the people authorized by the parent/guardian to pick their children up. If this is not successful the Department of Human Services will be contacted one hour after closing (5:30 pm). A staff member will remain with the child on the premises until they are safely retrieved.

P. Caring for Children Who Arrive Late

We encourage drop off by 9:00 am, but understand that families have different scheduling needs. If you are dropping off after 9:30 am or not coming please call or message us and let us know. If a child arrives late to the center, and their group is away from the building,

the parent or guardian will be asked to take the child to meet with his or her group, unless they have left the property entirely in which case the child will stay with the staff on duty at the center until he/she can rejoin his/her group. Late arrivals are also required to sign in—please don't drop your child off without signing them in.

Q. Children's Medicines

WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT EVERY POSSIBLE MEANS BE TAKEN TO GIVE CHILDREN NECESSARY MEDICATION AT HOME, RATHER THAN AT SCHOOL

River Mist contracts and consults with a nurse to supervise medication administration in compliance with state law. If a child needs to be administered medicine at school, whether it is prescription or over the counter, (This includes diaper ointment, fever reducing medication, vitamins, etc.) the following legal requirements must be met.

1. We must have written authorization from the person with prescriptive authority. (Even if it is not a prescription medication.) We have included a “permission for medication” form in this packet. Please feel free to make copies of it or get more copies from us. A separate form must be filled out for each medication. If you would like us to be able to apply diaper ointment, use fever reducing medication, or any other form of medication you are currently using, please return a completed “permission for medication” form with your enrollment packet.
2. Medication must be properly identified and in its original pharmacy labeled container. If the medication is non-prescriptive it must still be in its original container labeled with the child's name.
3. We must also have the parents' permission to administer medication and this is included in the “permission for medication” form.
4. On our end, only properly trained staff is allowed to administer medication.
5. We must keep a medication log to document when medication is given.
6. And we must store the medication in a clean, locked cabinet or container.

ALL MEDICATION MUST BE GIVEN DIRECTLY FROM THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN TO A RIVER MIST STAFF MEMBER; IT MAY NOT BE LEFT IN A CHILD'S BAG OR CUBBY. (THIS INCLUDES MINOR MEDICATIONS LIKE CHAPSTICK).

7. When no longer needed, medications must be returned to parents/guardians or destroyed after 14 days at the center and parent has not picked up after being notified.

R. Personal Belonging's and Money

In order to help the children and staff keep track of **your child's personal belongings**, they **must be labeled with the child's name or initials**. Children's personal belongings will be kept in their cubbies, or on their hooks. We recommend that children do not bring money to school, if they do, River Mist will not be responsible for it. Children may bring one small snuggle toy from home to comfort them at rest time. We ask that children do not bring other toys from home to school. Staff may have sharing days for particular children on particular days- we will allow a toy from home for sharing days only and that toy will be kept in a safe place outside of sharing time. **Otherwise, we claim absolutely no responsibility for keeping track of children's toys from home.**

S. Meals and Snacks

We serve a morning and afternoon snack using organic or all natural products. We prepare our snacks fresh daily according to the "Rules and Regulations Governing the Sanitation of Child Care Centers in the State of Colorado." We encourage children to try a variety of nutritious foods, but do not force or coerce children to eat. Each student brings a lunch from home each day- we can warm food and we strongly encourage glass or pyrex containers rather than plastic. We ask that each family provides a healthy and substantial lunch for their child that includes a source of protein, a carb, and a real fruit or vegetable. We understand that sometimes parents want to put a treat in their child's lunch, such as a cookie, but we highly discourage sugary treats like candy and especially do not encourage sugary snacks on a daily basis. If you provide candy or gum to your child at school, we will kindly send it home to enjoy. Also, lunch boxes cannot be refrigerated and do require ice packs- thank you!

T. Diapering and Toilet Training

Diapers and wipes are to be provided by individual families. Our staff is trained in Standard Precautions, and follows these precautions when diapering or helping with toilet training.

We work as partners with parents in toilet training, encouraging and giving children

opportunities without pressuring or pushing them. We do not have diapering facilities in our preschool room and therefore any child in diapers must be enrolled in the 1-3 year old toddler program.

U. Visitors

Visitors must sign in upon entering the building, and may only visit under staff supervision.

V. Conferences

Parent/Teacher Conferences will be scheduled twice a year, once in the fall, and once in the spring. These will be opportunities for each family to meet with their child's primary care giver and discuss any topics of interest including but not limited to the child's behavior, progress, social, and physical needs. We also make every effort to communicate daily with parents either through conversation or daily reports, and are available to schedule individual conferences at any time. At conference, Teaching Strategies GOLD assessments based on their child's development are shared. We also reserve the right to request families to partake in a family meeting if there are concerns or issues needing discussion or resolution.

W. Filing a Complaint

If you have a complaint you would like to share with us, please let us know by setting up a time to meet with the director and/or any staff member. Please note that pick up and drop off times are not always optimal for serious discussions and verbal complaints. Written comments and concerns can be left in the Tuition Box anytime.

River Mist is licensed by the Colorado Department of Human Services, and our license is posted in our entry hallway. If you would like additional information regarding licensing, please ask to see our "Rules Regulating Child Care Centers", issued by the Division of Child Care, Colorado Department of Human Services, or contact them directly at (303)-866-5958. In the unfortunate event that someone suspects a licensing violation or wishes to report a complaint at the State or Local level it should be addressed to our licensing specialist at (970)-556-1987.

X. Reporting Child Abuse

Colorado State law requires that people who work with children report all known or suspected cases of child abuse or neglect, and we understand and abide by this law. Any reports of child abuse or neglect should also be addressed with the La Plata County Department of Social Services at (970)-382-6150. Please feel free to observe our program, and talk to our staff if you have any questions or concerns.

Y. Withdrawal

If for any reason you wish to withdraw your child from our program, **we require two weeks written notice**. If sufficient notice is not given, you will be charged tuition for two weeks from the time that we receive written notice. If you receive service from River Mist and do not like the service, you are still expected to pay for the days your child attended and two weeks notice. You are agreeing to do this by enrolling your child. Please email jennifer@rivermistschool.com with your written notice or leave a physical note with staff (please include the date).

Z. EXPULSION

It is not the intention of River Mist to expel any children from its program. However, River Mist can expel a child if it is determined that the safety of others is in jeopardy due to that child's behaviors and the staff has made reasonable efforts to manage the behaviors. Before this happens, every effort will be made to support the child and the family, including all of the actions already outlined in this document and repeated here:

1. Family Conference
2. Behavior Plan
3. Access to Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant for family
4. Behavior Plan monitored & adjusted, progress assessed over a reasonable amount of time
5. Decision to expel if progress has not been made and child continues to threaten the safety of others

All of these actions will be documented, along with evidence like Incident Reports that show whether or not the child is a safety threat on a repeated basis. If River Mist must make the decision to expel, we will provide written notice to the family.