

Will Smith



# Family Handbook 2025-2026

Nature-Based Preschool  
103 Tuleta  
San Antonio, TX 78212

# Table of Contents

<b>PROGRAM INFORMATION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
SAN ANTONIO ZOO MISSION STATEMENT.....	4
GUIDING PRINCIPLE.....	4
<i>Our Tenets</i> .....	4
EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY.....	6
NATURE PRESCHOOL.....	7
<i>Nature Preschool Awareness</i> .....	7
<b>GENERAL OPERATIONS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
HOURS OF OPERATION.....	8
FACILITIES.....	8
ETHICAL GUIDELINES.....	8
INCLUSIVE PROGRAM.....	9
LICENSING .....	9
NAEYC ACCREDITATION .....	9
<b>ENROLLMENT.....</b>	<b>10</b>
ELIGIBILITY AND PRIORITY .....	10
PROCESS AND FEES.....	10
PAYMENT SCHEDULE.....	12
TUITION ASSISTANCE .....	12
REFUND POLICY .....	13
TERMINATION OF ENROLLMENT .....	13
<b>OPERATING PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES .....</b>	<b>14</b>
CLASSROOM COMMUNITIES .....	14
DRESS CODE .....	14
ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL PROCEDURES.....	15
VISITORS .....	16
<i>University Connections</i> .....	17
CELL PHONE USAGE.....	17
LOST AND FOUND .....	18
TRANSPORTATION .....	18
<b>CODE OF CONDUCT .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>CURRICULUM AND ACTIVITIES .....</b>	<b>19</b>
OUTDOOR LEARNING .....	19
GLOBAL AWARENESS AND THE ZOO CONNECTION .....	20
SUSTAINABLE GARDENING .....	21
ECO-HEALTHY PRACTICE.....	21
SHOW-N-TELL .....	22
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS .....	22

LEARNING-READINESS ASSESSMENT.....	22
EXTENDED CARE .....	23
<b>COMMUNICATION AT WILL SMITH ZOO SCHOOL.....</b>	<b>23</b>
COMMUNICATION METHODS .....	24
COMMUNICATION TIPS .....	24
ENCOURAGEMENT VS. PRAISE.....	25
DISCIPLINE AND GUIDANCE .....	25
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS .....</b>	<b>27</b>
SUNSCREEN AND INSECT REPELLENT.....	27
REST-TIME ARRANGEMENTS .....	28
CLEANLINESS .....	29
HANDWASHING .....	29
TOILETING POLICY .....	30
FOOD POLICY .....	31
MEDICAL POLICIES .....	33
CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT .....	39
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS .....	40

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# Program Information

## San Antonio Zoo Mission Statement



San Antonio Zoo®, operated by San Antonio Zoological Society, is a non-profit organization committed to securing a future for wildlife. Through its passion and expertise in animal care, conservation, and education, the zoo’s mission is to inspire its community to love, engage with, act for, and protect animals and the places they live. The zoo welcomes more than a million visitors each year and is open year-round. San Antonio Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Zoological Association of America, and Humane Certified by

American Humane.

**LOVE**- It starts with the heart. We are the stewards of our planet and its animals. Through the stories, connections, and interactions we make between guests and each other, we will inspire others to care.

**ENGAGE**- The spark forms a flame. Our hope is to see guests and zoo crew become advocates for wildlife, carrying the torch for conservation and education and lighting the way for others around them.

**ACT**-Turning passion into action. We invite others to join us in our mission, investing their time, resources, and talents in the work of securing a future for wildlife.

**PROTECT**- Multiplying the mission. Our aim is to see guests and zoo crew own the mission for themselves, becoming partners with us in a shared vision.

## Guiding Principle

Will Smith Zoo School is dedicated to cultivating innovative, resilient, and compassionate children who value living things and natural resources and who develop a relationship with nature through high quality, child-driven experiences involving enriched play, problem-solving and risk-taking. Our students will impact the world by helping to secure a future for wildlife.

## Our Tenets

**Innovation** - Innovation in education is driven by best practices that have been established by influential theorists such as Reggio Emilia, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, and Jean Piaget. These experts have emphasized the importance of fostering the development of creative thought, executive functioning, problem-solving skills, and conflict resolution abilities in children. By incorporating their principles into the educational approach, these critical aspects of growth are present within the learning environment.



Child-centered collaboration is a fundamental aspect of this educational approach. Students are encouraged to work collaboratively with their peers in ways that respect diversity and inclusion. The curriculum is designed to be modified to reflect the languages spoken by families, drawing from, and supported by community perspectives. The instruction, materials, and the pace/sequence of the units presented are driven by the curiosity and inquiries of the students. They are provided with open-ended questions, engaging staff, an environment that supports inventiveness and investigation, and ample opportunities to express their curiosity and observations.



**Resiliency** - Resiliency is a key focus in this educational approach, and it is nurtured through play. Students are given the freedom to experiment with various roles and engage in social interactions. They are challenged and enriched with opportunities to display and value interdependence and cooperation, while also developing flexibility in the face of change and novel experiences. Play-based learning is emphasized, with a focus on the process rather than the end result. Large blocks of time are allocated for children's self-initiated learning choices, including creative expression and play.

Safe risk assessment is another important aspect of this educational approach. Students are encouraged to gain confidence with small risks from a young age, which equips them with the tools they need to assess larger risks as adults. Through their experiences, students become emotionally competent and resilient,

learning from both achievements and failures. Staff members play a crucial role in supporting the students, facilitating increased awareness and responsibility for oneself and all living things.

**Compassion** - Compassion is cultivated through a connection to living things. The students' learning oscillates between place-based learning and studying zoo animals. They develop a deep love and appreciation for flora and fauna, which fills them with awe and invigorates their spirits. The unique affinity individuals have for nature is fostered and appreciated within this educational approach.

Empathy towards others is also a central focus. Staff members and students model and encourage respect and inclusion. They value the perspectives of others and set the expectation that all living things have an important role in this world. The curriculum and activities can be

modified to reflect the beliefs, values, and experiences of the families enrolled, further fostering empathy and understanding among students.

## Educational Philosophy

At Will Smith Zoo School, we believe that children are capable individuals intrinsically motivated to learn. Will Smith Zoo School follows a nature and play-based, emergent curriculum model where children's ideas, inquiries, discoveries, and investigations are nurtured and implemented.

At the heart of the Will Smith Zoo School experience lies a profound commitment to nurturing a child's innate bond with nature. Our aim is to weave enduring threads of environmental stewardship that linger throughout their lives. Daily immersions in nature, alongside compassionate mentors, pave the way for holistic development encompassing cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and creative facets.

Guided by a curriculum that seamlessly marries academic and social elements with nature at its core, we are dedicated to bolstering the well-being of each child. This ensures they are not just equipped for academic pursuits but also poised to thrive in life's diverse arenas. We believe in the inherent uniqueness and competence of every child; each one brimming with an insatiable curiosity and a sense of wonder about the world around them.

By harnessing their innate love for exploration and learning, Will Smith Zoo School endeavors to shape individuals who are prepared, capable, confident, empathetic individuals who are masters of their own learning, and are inspired to make a difference in the world.

The teaching staff promotes learning by:

- Providing an environment which encourages discovery, experimentation, and the opportunity to see the results of one's actions.
- Developing activities that encourage growth based on children's abilities and interests.
- Encouraging problem-solving and reflection by asking open-ended questions and providing information in response to children's ideas, insights, and concerns.
- Assisting children in their interactions with each other and offering opportunities for conflict resolution and cooperative learning.
- Appreciating the individuality of children and families and celebrating diversity.
- Engaging the whole family in the nature-based educational process.



## Nature Preschool



Will Smith Zoo School brings together the tenets of high-quality early childhood education and environmental education, with a focus on connecting young children to animals and nature for the benefit of both the child and the natural world. Inspired also by the Reggio Emilia approach, the preschool follows an emergent curriculum philosophy guided by the principles of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Daily field trips to the zoo offer the child rich experiences in animal and plant interaction, global awareness, nature play, and the many ways the zoo community works together.

Outdoor, nature- based play has been shown to provide physical, cognitive, social, and emotional benefits for children.

### ***Physical Benefits –***

Outdoor play provides more vigorous, varied, and sustained play; improves gross and fine motor development, including bone health, balance, coordination, endurance, spatial awareness, core strength and posture; strengthens immune systems and promotes lifelong engagement in physical activity.

### ***Cognitive Benefits –***

Outdoor, nature-based play supports improved executive functioning and self-regulation abilities; increases observation and problem-solving skills; increases attention and focus; and challenging play supports children’s resilience, independence, and self-confidence.

### ***Social & Emotional***

***Benefits –*** Nature-based play supports development of empathy for the natural world and an emotional connection to special places, laying the foundation for environmentally responsible attitudes and behaviors and reduced stress, anxiety, and depression.

## **Nature Preschool Awareness**

- Children will go outside rain or shine, and in all temperatures.
- Children will get wet and muddy, often requiring changes of clothing.
- While we always do our best to return your child in perfect condition, your child may occasionally experience small scrapes, scratches, bumps, and bruises.
- Promptness not only supports your child’s learning experience, but also positively impacts the entire class. Additionally, punctuality supports the teacher’s ability to plan and prepare class activities.
- Young children who are new to social situations may experience conflict. This can be stressful, but it is also an important part of learning how to interact with others.

# General Operations

## Hours of Operation

Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.	Arrival 8:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.	Extended Care Arrival 8:00 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.
Preschool Programming 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Dismissal 2:00 p.m. – 2:15 p.m.	Extended Care Gradual Pick-Up 2:15 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

## Facilities

Will Smith Zoo School was awarded LEED Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, the first for a preschool in the country and second in the world. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and LEED Platinum certification is the highest certification available. To earn the certification, a project must earn 80 or more points from the council’s rating system. The campus was rated on sustainability, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resource, indoor environmental quality, and innovation and design process. The renovated campus opened in January 2018 and was designed by Lake Flato and built by Guido Construction. Mission Solar gifted the campus with solar panels which were installed by GoSmart Solar.



Will Smith Zoo School is the largest nature-based preschool in the country. The 2-acre campus sits on the perimeter of the zoo and consists of 11 classrooms, a 20-foot-tall outdoor butterfly house, a garden to raise food to feed both kids and zoo animals, a special discovery pond (complete with tadpoles, aquatic plants, fish, and crawfish), and an interactive child-sized birdhouse. The campus also has several outdoor learning environments that challenge and develop students’ physical, mental, and cooperative skills. Open-ended equipment and supplies encourage creative and cooperative learning. In addition, the 56 acres of San Antonio Zoo offer great opportunities for learning during the daily group explorations.

## Ethical Guidelines

All staff is expected to know and use ethical guidelines in their conduct as members of the early childhood profession and as San Antonio Zoo employees. Upon hire, all teachers receive orientation regarding the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and receive a copy. To review the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct, see the front office for a copy.



### **Confidentiality**

All concerns should be addressed to the teacher outside of the care of students. If you would like to set up a conference with your child's teacher, please send a message on the LineLeader App or call 210-686-5606.

Given that our work centers on children and their families, in addition to collaborating closely with other staff, the information we have access to and discuss will be held in the strictest confidence. We will refrain from discussing personal information concerning children, families, and staff in the presence of children and other adults.

We shall follow the ideals and principles of professional, ethical, conduct in our work with the children, families, colleges, and community to the best of our ability. (See NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment)

### **Inclusive Program**

Will Smith Zoo School does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, or ability. The preschool program is committed to providing a developmentally appropriate education for all learners and implements the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) by providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression. If a child needs significant 1-on-1 attention to be successful in the program, the family may arrange for a professional aide to support the child.

### **Licensing**

Will Smith Zoo School adheres to the Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers and is licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS). A copy of the Minimum Standards is available for review in the Will Smith Zoo School's office or by contacting the local licensing office at (210) 337-3399, the Child Care Information Line at 1-800-862-5252 or at the TDFPS website: <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/>.

Families may also request to review the Will Smith Zoo School's most recent licensing inspection reports located in the office.



### **NAEYC Accreditation**

In 2020, Will Smith Zoo School earned accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a prestigious recognition that is the hallmark of quality assurance for the early childhood preparation profession. In 2024 Will Smith Zoo School again earned accreditation from NAEYC.

Early childhood preparation programs serve a wide range of students and prepare early childhood educators for a variety of early learning settings. Accreditation serves as a mechanism for ensuring a consistent and high level of program quality and alignment to NAEYC's Professional Preparation Standards while respecting the unique mission and context of each degree program.

To earn and retain accreditation, professional preparation programs must demonstrate that they:

- Align to NAEYC’s Professional Preparation Standards.
- Respond to the unique needs of their degree candidates and communities.
- Provide intentional learning experiences for their degree candidates to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to be effective early childhood educators; and,
- Continuously assess and reflect on their degree candidates’ performance.

## **Enrollment**

### **Eligibility and Priority**

Children must be at least 3 years old by the date of planned admission, and no older than 5 years old by August 1 of the school year session. They must be using the toilet independently by the child’s first day of class.

Priority for admission will be given as follows:

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1- Children currently enrolled             | 3- Children of San Antonio Zoo Staff |
| 2- Siblings of children currently enrolled | 4- Children on the wait list         |

Admission is subject to availability and program needs. When an opening exists, early enrollment may be granted for children who are awaiting age or developmental readiness. Early enrollment is dependent upon full tuition being paid while awaiting the child’s admission.

Will Smith Zoo School does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, or ability.

### **Process and Fees**

#### ***Waitlist***

To secure a spot on the Will Smith Zoo School waitlist, a completed Waitlist Registration Form must be submitted through LineLeader along with a \$45 Waitlist Fee. This fee is non-refundable.

When an opening occurs within a classroom, families will be contacted in the order of the date they were added to the waiting list, considering eligibility criteria. If an enrollment offer is declined or a family fails to respond, the child’s name will be removed from the waitlist. Once the child’s name has been removed from the waitlist, families must reapply before the child can be considered for enrollment. Submitting a waitlist fee does not guarantee an enrollment opening for the requested school year.

#### ***Tour***

This unquestionably unique early childhood program is the perfect introduction to a world beyond home. You can register for a tour of Will Smith Zoo School directly on our [website](#). This

is a wonderful chance to witness the classrooms and students in action, as well as to ask any questions you might have about our philosophy, procedures, and curriculum.

### **Registration Process**



Please be aware that registration opens in January for current families, and priority groups for the upcoming school year.

In February, enrollment opens for summer seats.

To enroll your child in Will Smith Zoo School, you will need to complete the LineLeader registration form and submit it with a non-refundable \$45

application fee per child. The non-refundable application Fee is payable once and is waived if previously on the waitlist and paid the Waitlist Fee.

A complete list of needed paperwork and documentation will be sent via email link through LineLeader App upon payment of application fee.

Completed Registration documents include:

- Informed Consent: Consent information for photographs, field trips, insect repellent, etc. Authorization for emergency medical attention
- Vision and hearing screen information (for children aged 4 or older)
- Proof of Immunization, verified by a health professional.
- Health appraisal (physical) signed by a licensed physician.
- Authorization for Dispensing Medication form, if needed
- Acknowledgment of the following items:
- Enrollment Contract, Family Handbook, Immunization Policy, and Discipline & Guidance Policy
- Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan, if needed

\*Any changes in address or telephone number should be reported promptly in writing via email to Will Smith Zoo School administration. Telephone numbers of emergency contacts and individuals authorized to pick up the child should also be kept current.

**Once ALL registration documents are completed** a \$495 Registration fee will be charged. This fee will be deducted/credited to your first tuition payment. \*Note that your first tuition payment will be less than your second because of the registration fee credit.

Children will NOT be placed into a classroom until the \$495 registration fee is received. Upon receipt of payment, your Lineleader App will show which class and teacher they are assigned.

### **Hearing and Vision Screening**

In accordance with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, each child four years of age or older by August 1<sup>st</sup> of each year must receive a professional screening for hearing and vision. Vision and Hearing Screening are offered on campus annually or must be provided by student's physician at the four-year-old checkup. WSZS must receive a copy of the screening results. These reports are sent to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services each year as proof of our compliance with the Special Senses and Communication Disorders Act, Texas Health, and Safety Code.

### **Payment Schedule**

Families can choose to pay tuition in a full year, by semester, or by month. For the 2025-2026 school year, monthly tuition payments commence July 5<sup>th</sup> with subsequent payments due on the fifth of each month.

**Auto-Billing** –Automatic billing can be selected by the parent in the LineLeader App or by calling the front desk..

**LineLeader App** – Families have the option of paying through the LineLeader App by inputting the card information in the billing section. When the card information is inputted, you have access to view the outstanding balance and the ability to make the payment yourself. As a reminder, tuition balances will appear on the ledger on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month, with payment due on the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month.

Tuition payments remain the same regardless of absences, holidays, vacations, illness, etc. If payment is returned by the bank for any reason, the customer is responsible for the \$25 decline fee. If tuition payments have not been received in accordance with the contract, the child will not be permitted to attend.

### **Tuition Assistance**

We know that providing the best quality preschool education for your child represents a financial commitment. Will Smith Zoo School has full and partial scholarships available to assist with tuition.

The exact percentage is determined by household size and annual income. If you are interested in being considered for a scholarship, please complete the [scholarship application](#), on our website [www.willsmithzooschool.org](http://www.willsmithzooschool.org), and submit it along with the registration form. Limited funds are available.



## Refund Policy

Tuition and registration fees are not refundable. The program's budget is determined based on enrollment numbers at the start of the academic year and financial commitments are made to faculty, staff, and facilities investments accordingly. Therefore, requests for pro-rated tuition charges or refunds as a result of illness, unexpected departures, or extended holidays cannot be granted. Thirty days notice is required for withdrawal.

The following tuition forgiveness is offered:

- If a student becomes medically disabled and must withdraw, Will Smith Zoo School shall forgive 100% of the unused yearly tuition less the Registration Fee.
- If a family moves out of town or transfers due to military duty or for a job-related purpose, Will Smith Zoo School shall forgive 100% of the unused yearly tuition less the Registration Fee.

No refunds will be processed for any transaction three months or older.

## Termination of Enrollment

While the school works to ensure termination of enrollment is considered only after other interventions have taken place, in certain situations termination will be utilized: Aggressive parent/family member towards students/staff, a student who has had three instances of violent behavior during any 12-month window that has impacted the safety of other students/staff, and/or non-payment of tuition. Families will be included in the conversation prior to the campus's decision impacting termination of enrollment; however, the final decision is determined by the campus behavior committee and provided to parents in writing. If exclusionary measures must be taken, the program offers resources to the family in accessing services and an alternative placement.



# Operating Procedures and Practices

## Classroom Communities

Will Smith Zoo School classroom families consist of no more than 16 children ages 3-5, facilitated by a dedicated and knowledgeable teaching team. Multi-age classrooms provide benefits in whole child development.

Classrooms arranged with a number of different inviting areas of interest. These interest areas ensure that a variety of activities, such as drawing, painting, blocks, manipulatives, and puzzles, are always available in the room. There are spaces for a small group, large group, and individual play. This includes a space for children to get away from the group.

## Dress Code

Children should wear their orange Will Smith Zoo School t-shirt each day they attend school. Families may purchase additional shirts through the front office. We recommend close-toed shoes for safety and convenience. Please leave an extra set of clothes, including an extra pair of shoes, socks, and underwear, in a labeled bag with your child's teacher. The children will be working with water, sand, dirt, paint, and glue which could require a change of clothes. Should an accident occur, please remember to replace the extra set of clothing. Extended care will need a separate change for that classroom.

### ***General Recommendations***

- Durable play clothes that can withstand the rigors of outdoor activity.
- Necessary items for transitioning weather or activities should be packed in the daily backpack.
- Multiple outfit changes might be needed on particularly active days.
- For dresses, please include shorts or leggings underneath for play.

### ***Footwear***

- Closed-toe shoes are essential for safety during outdoor play.
- Consider water-resistant varieties, especially for damp days.
- Shoes should have a good grip: think adjustable straps or laces, avoiding slip-ons that might cause accidents.

### ***Summer Attire***

- Lightweight, breathable materials: opt for cotton shorts, T-shirts, sun dresses, and hats.
- Water play days: Have a dedicated set, including a swimsuit, a light cover-up, water shoes with grip, and a quick-dry towel.

### ***Fall & Spring Attire***

- Be prepared for changeable weather. Layering is helpful. Opt for lightweight sweaters and windbreakers.
- For rainy days, rain jackets and rain boots are ideal.

## Winter Attire

- Layers, layers, layers: Start with thermal undershirts and leggings, followed by a fleece or wool sweater.
- Outerwear: Opt for fleece jackets or down-filled coats. Ensure they are easy to move in.
- For the legs: Thick leggings, woolen long underwear, and sturdy winter boots.
- Accessories: Warm hats that cover the ears, water-resistant gloves, or mittens.
- Safety first: Avoid scarves or hoodies with neckties. Neck gaiters are a safer choice, especially beneficial for children with cold-triggered asthma.

## Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

Will Smith Zoo School runs five days a week, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The main gate to enter will open at 8:00 a.m. for Extended Care families and 8:45 a.m. for Non-Extended Care families. Please walk your child down and entrust them to the teacher in their classroom each morning, bidding a cheerful and confident goodbye. Remember, any hesitation on your part may make your child feel they have something to fear. We ask families to reassure their children by letting them know that you will be back to pick them up soon. Children are very perceptive and can sense your emotions. It is best to remain calm and friendly but authentic. If you feel nervous, say that you are nervous. If you are excited, say that you are excited. It is important to know that when you label and express your emotions, you are modeling helpful behaviors for your child.

You are welcome to come into our classroom on the first day of school, share the children's excitement about the brand-new class, and help them place their lunches and belongings in the proper place.

For many children, preschool is their first big step away from parents and home. Some children need to separate by initially developing a relationship with the teacher. Others may need to find other children or materials that they are comfortable playing with before the family member leaves. Then there are those children who will really not get started until their parents have left



the room. We work with all of the different separating styles. Saying goodbye once is a good technique for a parent. This communicates to the children that you trust the teachers to take good care of them. These are your child's first steps towards becoming an independent, happy individual. We will collaborate with each family to make this a successful and positive experience.

Should a child arrive late, please check-in at the lobby and administration will direct you to your child's class. Families must avoid arriving when their child's class is at the zoo. Teachers do NOT wait for a late arrival NOR meet up in the zoo for a late arrival.

Your child MUST remain with you until the expected time the class should arrive back at the Will Smith Zoo School campus.

The main gate will open for dismissal at 2:00 p.m. Please check-out with the teacher and remember to ask for any reminders. We will hold Family Workshops and send newsletters with information on what is happening in class and what the children are learning. Even though we would love to talk to each family on a daily basis, in the interest of safety, please wait until the last child is picked up if you need to discuss matters with the teachers in detail.

Please ensure that any person, including yourself, picking up or dropping off the child is on the approved pick-up list and has a picture ID. If an individual outside of the approved list is picking up, administration must be notified via email or teachers must be notified via a direct message on LineLeader App with the individual's full name and phone number. We consider the safety of the children our topmost priority and thank you in advance for your patience and understanding in this regard.

If something prevents a child from being picked up on time, please call 210-686-5606, and let the person at the front desk know that you are running late. We ask that you make every effort to be on time as children get a little nervous if they are the last ones to leave.

### ***Dismissal Late Fees***

Non-Extended Care Families with children remaining at the school at 2:15 p.m. will be charged \$20.00 for any portion of the first ten (1) minutes after 2:15 p.m. After the initial ten (10) minutes there will be a \$2.00 charge for each additional minute until the child is picked up.

Extended Care Families with children remaining at the school at 5:30 p.m. will be charged \$20.00 for any portion of the first ten (10) minutes after 5:30 p.m. After the initial ten (10) minutes there will be a \$2.00 charge for each additional minute until the child is picked up.

### **Visitors**

Will Smith Zoo School has an open-door policy. Families may visit the preschool at any time during the day to observe their child, upon confirmation from the teacher. All visitors are required to check-in at the front office upon arrival to receive a Visitor Badge. At departure, visitors will sign-out at the Front Desk. If a family member would like to volunteer on a consistent basis, they may contact administration to set that up and submit a background check.

Families may contact members of administration to schedule an appointment at any time to meet with them.





Under Texas Penal Code, any area within 1,000 feet of a childcare center is a gang-free zone, where criminal offenses related to organized criminal activity are subject to increased penalty.

As with all areas of the San Antonio Zoo, there is a comfortable place for mothers to breastfeed their children. All mothers have the right to breastfeed or provide breastmilk to their own child in care. We have a room available to provide privacy for breastfeeding mothers.

### **University Connections**

Will Smith Zoo School offers a unique learning environment that includes many of the best practices expected in traditional early childhood while also going far beyond the traditional classroom setting. Students from local universities, such as Hallmark University, Trinity University, University of Texas at San Antonio, and University of the Incarnate Word, have the opportunity to observe and participate in classroom observations and lessons that are not only framed around research-based standards, but also incorporate the natural world, which aligns with the latest trends in early childhood education and supports the accreditation expectations of NAEYC.

Collaborating with students and faculty from varying universities has proven to be an invaluable experience for Will Smith Zoo School staff and children. It promotes a commitment to foster experiential learning and community engagement. University students gain practical, hands-on experiences in an innovative educational setting that emphasizes the importance of outdoor and nature-based learning for young children.

Participating in university partnerships allows undergraduate and graduate students and our staff to develop a broader skill set, as they learn to adapt and create effective lesson plans that integrate developmentally appropriate standards with outdoor and nature-based activities.

Prior to their engagement with Will Smith Zoo School, expectations and policies are reviewed by the professors and their students. This ensures that their presence aligns with the guidelines set by Will Smith Zoo School's governing bodies. Furthermore, Will Smith Zoo School conducts tours for these classes, where the expectations and policies that must be adhered to during their observations are reiterated. University observers do not contribute to our student-to-teacher ratios, and under no circumstances are they left alone with the children.

### **Cell Phone Usage**

Families are encouraged to refrain from talking on their cell phones as they drop off or pick up their child. The arrival and departure times need to be special one-on-one time between child and family to say goodbye and to reconnect after a long day.

Taking into consideration the view of the child, it can give your child the message that work or the other person on the phone is more important than they are when families are talking on the phone as you say goodbye in the morning or greet your child at the end of the day.

## Lost and Found

Labeling all belongings is a great practice to prevent loss. Check with teachers and the front desk as soon as you notice an item is missing. Unclaimed lost and found items will be sent to local charities at the end of each semester.

## Transportation

Students will be transported from the school to the San Antonio Zoo every day for a field trip.

Transportation will be regulated by Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TXDFPS) minimum standards. The Texas Department of Motor vehicles is referenced for vehicle safety standards. Safety precautions will be taken when walking, loading, and unloading children from the bus, and utilize children passenger safety seat system to restrain children when transporting. Transportation minimum standards may be viewed at TXDFPS website.

[\(Subchapter X Transportation §746.5601\)](#)

## Code of Conduct

At Will Smith Zoo School, our goals are to promote positive relationships between all children and adults; to encourage each child's sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community; and to foster each child's ability to contribute as a responsible community member. With that in mind, we have developed a Code of Conduct for all adults in our programs including family members, volunteers, and visitors to ensure that we act as role models for our students. At all times, on Will Smith Zoo School property and inside the building, children under 12 must be directly supervised by a parent or adult caregiver.

Please Do:

- Treat others with respect and dignity regardless of race, creed, sexual orientation, disability, or any other ground.
- Protect the privacy and confidentiality of our parents, guardians, teachers, and students.
- Share all concerns and comments with the teachers first before speaking to the Managers or Director.
- Understand that it is the parents' responsibility to share this code of conduct with all caregivers, babysitters, or nannies.
- Understand that once you have signed your child out of class, you must vacate all preschool spaces including classrooms and Outdoor Learning Environments.
- Use the Will Smith Zoo School building in a respectful manner.
- Use the San Antonio Zoo Parking garage in a safe and respectful manner and maintain a safe school zone speed at all times.
- Care for people and property with kindness and respect.

Please Refrain From:

- All forms of corporal punishment.
- Inappropriate behavior or harassment of any kind towards a student, parent/guardian, or teacher.

- Inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to harassment or intimidation by written notes, email, words, gestures and/or body language.
- Using inappropriate language or displaying aggressive or threatening behavior toward staff, children, or other parents while in view of our students or anywhere on our premises.
- Verbal attacks on other children and/or staff, which include racial or other discriminatory slurs, the use of threats, name-calling, as well as repeated profane or degrading language. Individuals engaging in such behavior will be asked to leave the premises immediately.
- Discussing sensitive issues within earshot of children.
- All forms of gossip. Gossip is considered to be casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people and other people's children, especially those conversations or reports involving details that are not confirmed as being true; especially that which pertains to sharing private, confidential, or medical information about another person's child.
- Idling in your vehicle on and near Will Smith Zoo School property.
- Attempting to pick up your child if you are impaired by alcohol or other substances.
- Allowing children to engage in unsafe behavior while in your care. Unsafe behavior includes: climbing on furniture; jumping off of furniture; being removed from adult supervision; playing or running in the parking lot or on top of cars.

Breach of this Code of Conduct will result in immediate intervention up to and including the family's expulsion from the building or from any Will Smith Zoo School programs and events. It may, also, result in the call for police involvement.

If an incident should occur in which a family member or visitor breaches the Code of Conduct, there will be a written notice warning them of their inappropriate behavior. The second infraction will result in a written notice of immediate withdrawal from any and all programs of Will Smith Zoo School.

## **Curriculum and Activities**

Will Smith Zoo School has developed a robust nature-based preschool curriculum that draws inspiration from the natural world, explores related concepts through play, and incorporates authentic experiences that build global citizenship through conservation and gardening. Our emergent curriculum inspires students to connect with nature, chase adventure, and pursue their passions. It is a time for fun, laughter, exploration, and inquiry, while building relationships, expressing creativity, and getting dirty! Our day is interspersed with a gentle integration of proficiencies such as numbers and letters in a highly supportive learning environment.

### **Outdoor Learning**

The children explore nature through outdoor experiences either on our grounds or in the zoo for at least 70% of their day. Outdoor exploration will take place in all weather conditions, so it is very important that your child comes to school dressed appropriately. In the case of lightning or extreme weather conditions, exploration will be held indoors.

Children will not participate in swimming or wading pool activities while under the care of Will Smith Zoo School.

### Understanding Risk

At Will Smith Zoo School, our foremost priority is to minimize hazards to ensure a secure environment. However, we are also firm believers in the constructive elements of age-suitable risks. Facing and managing these risks bolster a child's confidence, enhancing their problem-solving and decision-making skills.

**Risk:** A challenging situation where a child can exert control and make decisions. Examples include climbing a log, handling sticks, or rolling down a grassy hill.

**Hazard:** A situation where control is absent and potential harm can occur. This includes perilous weather, unstable ice, or a sharp branch at eye level.

While we take every measure to uphold the safety of our students in outdoor environments, we intentionally incorporate age-suitable risks such as playing with sticks, playing near puddles, balancing on logs, or even climbing smaller trees. Additionally, we encourage social risks like initiating play with peers. We are convinced that mastering these risks equips children with invaluable skills, benefiting them long after their time with us.

### Global Awareness and the Zoo Connection

The San Antonio Zoo environment provides the context for children to develop an awareness of and an appreciation for the animals, ecosystems, people, and cultures of our world. Children broaden their understanding of our global community through guided investigations of zoo habitats with a focus on universal concepts such as use of water, homes, food, safety, families, and communities.

Zoo walks will take place daily and may include the following:

- Observation of zoo animals, habitats, and horticulture
- Interaction with zoo staff
- Interaction with animals, including feeding and contact.
- Educator modeled mini-lessons or data collection to develop skills in the cognitive, social/emotional, and/or physical domains.



**Animals** - While most of our animals are in enclosures and not a touch opportunity for the children, we do have educational presentation animals that can be used in the classroom. Some of these animals may be available for a controlled touch opportunity under certain circumstances. All animals in the zoo collection have been properly vaccinated and are under the care of staff veterinarians.

## Sustainable Gardening

Our organic gardening projects integrate social and emotional learning and connections to wildlife as we observe the plant life cycle from seed to seed and strive to understand how plants, animals, and humans are intrinsically intertwined. As native insects and bird sightings emerge through the year, so do the plants with which they are co-adapted. Sensory garden plants provide opportunities to ground children through mindful interactions; edible garden plants connect children to animals through shared nutrition experiences; and pollinator gardens provide a life cycle habitat for butterflies, bees, and beetles, among other animals.

Our garden produces various edible plants, including herbs, fruits, and vegetables, some of which are also consumed by Zoo animals. However, children must understand not all plants are edible. To instill this knowledge, we involve them in the process: harvest, wash, and then eat. Directly consuming from the plant is discouraged.

## Eco-Healthy Practice

Will Smith Zoo School is committed to maintaining a facility that is as environmentally healthy as possible. This includes the use of least-toxic cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfectant products that are sustainable for the environment.

The teaching staff give the children the opportunity to learn how behaviors can both positively and negatively affect the environment. Children are spoken to about recycling and littering. Families and children can take part in various activities to learn what impacts our environment.

The school discourages idling vehicles (buses, automobiles) in our parking areas, except if vehicles need to idle in extreme heat or cold to maintain interior or engine temperatures.



## Show-n-Tell

We ask that children leave toys at home. In a group environment, the introduction of children's own toys can cause complications with the process of learning to share. This is a major developmental goal for preschoolers, and they are able to master it more successfully using the items at school. However, one of the reasons we have show-n-tell is to offer children an outlet for bringing to school something special that is then shared in a structured, successful manner.

For show-n-tell, children are encouraged to bring in nature-related items that pertain to a topic or theme being discussed in class. Families are expected to communicate with their teachers if students want to bring living things to Will Smith Zoo School.

## Birthday Celebrations

The Will Smith Zoo School staff enjoy being a part of the birthday celebrations of their students. Please talk with your child's teacher as the special day approaches so that they can plan accordingly. Birthdays celebrations can involve pictures and stories of the birthday child rather than sugary treats. In accordance with our food policy, we encourage all families to pick healthy alternatives to traditional large cupcakes. For example, small muffins and fruit with yogurt can be birthday snacks. Details will be dispersed by teachers to families.

## Learning-Readiness Assessment

Will Smith Zoo School instructors focus on providing the children with opportunities to gain confidence in nature consciousness and skills that will prepare them for kindergarten.

Throughout the year the children are observed in the following four areas of nature consciousness:

- Awareness
- Compassion and Care
- Discovery/Exploration
- Appreciation

The students are also assessed on the following skills:

- Math
- Literacy
- Art
- Social Skills
- Science and Social Studies
- Motor Skills



Periodically, family workshops are held during the day to share what is being explored in the classroom and ways to incorporate those themes and ideas into home life. Activities are also shared to help develop good discussion topics between families and children.

Staff discuss and review student progress three times per year. Two classroom showcase events are held which occur at the beginning and middle of the year. At the end of the year, a formal one-on-one conference is held. We use each touch point as an opportunity to review and discuss your child's glows and grows and to name the focus for the upcoming weeks/months. During the end-of-year conference, the focus for the next year is discussed.

A family may request a conference at any time if they have any additional concerns during the school year.

### ***Support Services***

When the school and/or the family of a child suspects that a child has a developmental delay or other special need, a series of steps are followed which is handled in a sensitive, supportive, and confidential manner. The preschool staff works together with the family to provide documentation and explanation for the concern, suggested next steps, and information about resources for diagnostic evaluation. This could include further screening and assessment and contact with public and private special education programs. Teachers meet and work with whomever the parent selects to guide them in working with their child. This could include the public school system or private agencies.

### **Extended Care**

Extended care is offered from 8:00 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. for an added fee. Children staying for extended care will have a rest time. The rest time will be for one hour. Children are to bring a shoe box size container with a blanket to go inside, similar to the size of a crib-size blanket. Children are provided with nap mats. Please do not send pillows, large blankets, or toys/stuffed animals. The children will also be given a second snack for the day. Children staying in extended care will be playing outdoors and have planned activities provided for them until they are picked up.

## **Communication at Will Smith Zoo School**

Families are always welcome visitors to Will Smith Zoo School. Our main goal for students and families is to create a community in which each family, regardless of its family structure, socioeconomic, racial, religious and/or cultural backgrounds, gender, abilities, or preferred language is included in the process of early childhood education and meeting the cognitive, social, emotional, health and developmental needs of their child.

Families are the primary caregivers and educators of their young children. We use this principle to guide us in our relationship with our families here at Will Smith Zoo School. In planning our conferences, activities in the classroom, and family events we also base our decisions on our ethical responsibilities to families as stated in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct which says, "Families are of primary importance in children's development. Because the family and the early childhood practitioner have a common interest in the child's well-being, we acknowledge a primary responsibility to bring about communication, cooperation and collaboration between the home and early childhood program in ways that will enhance the child's development."

Staff are expected to establish and maintain positive communications with parents through daily conversations, newsletters, LineLeader app, bulletin boards, phone calls and individual notes. The Will Smith Zoo School Administration is responsible for sending a school-wide monthly newsletters and other important notices to the classrooms. The teachers are responsible for classroom newsletters and ensuring that family members receive their handouts. Staff or family members can request assistance from the office to translate or explain the handouts, if needed.

### Communication Methods

Will Smith Zoo School uses a variety of communication methods to ensure families receive accurate and relevant information. The following methods are utilized by the campus:

- Email
- LineLeader App
- In-Person
- Phone Calls
- Paper Handouts



### Communication Tips

It is very important for teachers and families to work together to help children participate successfully in the early childhood setting. This begins with positive two-way

communication. When teachers and families exchange information on a regular basis, children's care in both places becomes more consistent and responsive. However, good communication may be hard to achieve when there is little time to communicate or when professional values and practices differ from those of the families.

If there are routines, practices, or values that differ from family routines, practices, or values, we will work with the family to find a common ground and attempt a resolution. It is our intention to be respectful of all of our families' practices, values, and cultures. For this reason, we learn about celebrations around the world. Different views of toilet training and eating or drinking habits could also be areas that might need to be discussed. We will always be guided by what is developmentally appropriate and what is a part of our ethical standards when attempting to resolve these differences.

Program staff and family members should use a variety of techniques to negotiate difficulties, always keeping the child's best interest in mind. Children need their teachers and families to deal with differences in ways that do not interfere with their care. A disagreement does not have to mean that someone is doing something wrong. Instead, a disagreement can be a point from which both the teachers and families can learn and grow.

Four steps to negotiation:

1. Teachers and parents should take time to figure out what the issue is and how to state it clearly and in an unbiased manner.



2. Restate the other person's side to show your understanding of their points.
3. Together, teachers and parents should brainstorm solutions that would work in a classroom environment and/or be reinforced at home.
4. Choose a solution and decide on a plan together. It is important to arrange a check-in with each other after the plan has been implemented to see how it is working.

Information will only be shared about the family's own child, not the children in the classroom and children will not be compared. Staff shall be a resource to families. Resolving differences often takes much time and discussion. Some differences may never be resolved. However, as long as both are willing to negotiate differences and have realistic expectations, families and teachers can remain partners in the child's development.



### Encouragement vs. Praise

Everyone knows a little praise goes a long way, but a little praise really needs to be something more than the same few phrases repeated over and over. Children need more than the traditional "good," "very good," and "fine." Staff verbally describe what they notice a child doing. They make a connection with the child, and try not to attach a value judgement, especially to art projects. They comment on what they see, and value the child's perspective and opinions.

### Discipline and Guidance

Staff encourage developmentally appropriate independence in children by using positive techniques of guidance, including redirection, anticipation and elimination of potential problems, positive reinforcement, and encouragement rather than comparison or criticism. At Will Smith Zoo School, we believe it is important for our teachers to:

- Listen to their students
- Allow students to express opinions
- Encourage students to discuss options
- Foster independence and reasoning
- Place limits, consequences, and expectations on behavior
- Express warmth and nurturing behaviors
- Act in a fair and consistent manner
- Model kindness and care

Staff abstains from corporal punishment or other humiliating or frightening discipline techniques. Under no circumstances will children be deprived of their basic needs. Persistent refusal by a child to cooperate in cases of biting and inflicting bodily harm to other children may result in the use of "time away" procedures. The staff and child discuss the situation and feelings to determine when the child is ready to return to the group. Consistent and clear rules are

explained to the children and understood by the adults. The staff will be proactive in regard to discipline.

Any strong concerns will be communicated to the parents, as well as developed with parent input as to what will be done in the future to encourage positive behavior and relationships. In the event a child's behavior is unacceptable and out of control, the child's parent will be contacted immediately, and the parent may be asked to pick up their child. Parents are encouraged to give the staff any suggestions or insight regarding their child.

### ***Challenging Behavior (Non-violent, Common Behaviors)***

Conflicts and challenging behaviors are expected in preschool. Teachers will gather information from families on how they manage these behaviors at home and consult with their manager if needed. A team of teachers, families, and professionals will create an individualized plan to support children with persistent behaviors like non-violent aggression, tantrums, or noncompliance. Positive strategies, such as modifying the environment, shadowing, and redirection will be used, and behavior progress will be documented. If disruptive behavior continues, the child may be briefly removed (no more than 10 minutes) to regain control. Parents will be contacted for safety concerns. The goal is to minimize suspension, expulsion, and exclusionary measures.

### ***Challenging Behavior (Violent, Uncommon Behaviors)***

When violent behavior (intentional acts of aggression which cause harm to another student/adult) occurs, the following steps will be taken:

- 1st Incident: Victim's family is informed, child is consoled. Respondent is temporarily separated, and family conference is scheduled.
- 2nd Incident: Victim's family is informed, child is consoled. Respondent is temporarily separated, family conference is scheduled, and an alternative classroom placement is set.
- 3rd Incident: Victim's family is informed, child is consoled. Respondent is temporarily separated, family conference is scheduled, and enrollment is terminated.

### ***Elopement (Running Away)***

When students elope (run away) from their class, this impacts all students by impacting the teacher-to-student ratio. When this occurs at the zoo, it places all students at risk as it leaves a large group with one teacher while the other attempts to ensure the safety of the student who ran away.

The following elopement policy is meant to reduce the risks that arise when a child elopes (runs away) from the group. Below you will find the steps on how the policy works:

#### **1. Two or More Incidents in Two Weeks:**

- If a child elopes twice or more within a two-week period, they are placed on probation for the following two weeks.

- During this probation period, there will be ongoing conversations, reminders, and efforts to identify any potential triggers or antecedents to prevent further elopement.
- 2. Third Elopement During Probation:**
    - If the child elopes again during the probationary two-week period, the risk a one-week suspension of services.
  - 3. Post-Probation:**
    - If elopement occurs again after the probation period ends, there is a risk of termination of services altogether.
    - Termination will only occur if the campus behavior committee determines that the child's safety cannot be guaranteed despite multiple efforts to address the behavior.
  - 4. Financial Note:**
    - Registration fees and tuition paid through the end of the 30-day period are non-refundable in case of termination of services.

This policy is designed to address both safety concerns and the impact of repeated elopement on the overall classroom environment. It balances intervention with a process for increasing accountability while still aiming to provide support and opportunities for improvement and individual development.

## **Health and Safety Protocols**

Will Smith Zoo School values the health and safety of all who are in our care. The teaching staff is trained to take an active role in preventative care, including maintaining the children's good hand-washing routines, maintaining a clean environment, encouraging children's hydration and nourishment throughout the day, providing excellent supervision, and teaching safe responses to weather related risks, such as resting and finding shade in the heat.

### **Sunscreen and Insect Repellent**

Staff may apply sunscreen and insect repellent only when written authorization by a parent or legal guardian has been obtained. We will apply sunscreen and insect repellent once a day. Should consent not be provided, an alternative protection method must be ensured for the child. Family members must apply the first application before the child comes to school. Sunscreen or insect repellent are applied by spraying the application outdoors to avoid inhalation by children and adults.

Approved sunscreen and bug spray MUST be SPRAY only. No lotions will be allowed.

## Rest-Time Arrangements

Children who stay for Extended Care must have a supervised sleep/rest period. The sleep/rest period occurs between 2:30-3:30 p.m. Children are not required to sleep during this time. Staff will allow each child who is awake after resting or sleeping for one hour to participate in an alternative, quiet activity such as books, puzzles, drawing, etc. until the nap/rest time is over for the other children.

Families arriving during naptime are discouraged, but we understand things arise.

Staff members are encouraged to have a nap-time plan which includes assigned areas for each child's mat or other special instructions. All staff are aware of and positioned so they can hear and see any sleeping children for whom they are responsible, especially when they are actively engaged with children who are awake. Staff may lower the lighting in a room while children are sleeping, provided there is adequate lighting to allow visual supervision of all children in the group at all times.



### ***Nap Mats***

Each child will be provided a separate sleeping mat that will not be shared. These mats will be labeled with the child's name. Nap mats are disinfected daily, utilizing a three-step cleaning process. Nap mats will be arranged in the following manner:

- A solid barrier, or at least three-foot spacing, will separate sleeping children from one another.
- Not block entrances or exits to the classroom.
- Not be set up during other activities or left in place to interfere with children's activity space.
- Provide a sufficient walk and workspace for staff between each mat.
- Each child and staff member has access to a walkway without having to walk on or over the mats of other children.
- Staff members can adequately supervise all children in the classroom.

Mats will be disinfected daily, and blankets should be sent home weekly for laundering.

### ***Blankets***

Students are to bring their own crib-sized blankets and must be labeled with the child's name. Blankets will remain on campus during the week and will be sent home at the end of each week for laundering. Families are requested to provide a storage container with the child's name to store the blanket on campus, when not in use.

## Cleanliness

All surfaces and items in classroom must be sanitized or disinfected according to the [NAEYC Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting Frequency Table](#).



Cleaning supplies must be stored and locked out of reach of children. The floors, sinks, and bathrooms are cleaned during the day by maintenance staff. Maintenance staff is also responsible for cleaning carpets and other heavy cleaning according to the NAEYC Cleaning, Sanitizing and Disinfecting Frequency Table.

## Handwashing

Proper hand washing procedures are followed by adults and children include:

- Using liquid soap and running water
- Rubbing hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds, including back of hands, wrist, between fingers, under and around any jewelry, and under fingernails.

The program follows these practices regarding hand washing:

- Staff members and children are taught hand-washing procedures and are periodically monitored.
- Hand washing is required by all staff, volunteers, and children. Thorough hand washing is the best prevention to reduce the risk of transmission of infectious diseases to themselves and to others.
- Staff assists children with hand washing as needed to successfully complete the task. Children wash either independently or with staff assistance.
- Children and adults wash their hands:
  - On arrival for the day, parents are included if they are staying in the classroom
  - After using the toilet
  - After handling bodily fluids (e.g., blowing or wiping a nose, coughing on a hand, or touching any blood, mucus, or vomit
  - Before meals and snacks, before preparing or serving food, or after handling any raw food that requires cooking (i.e., poultry, eggs, meat)
  - Before and after playing in water that is shared by two or more people
  - After outdoor activities
  - After returning to inside the classroom

- Any other time when he/she comes in contact with any substances that could be harmful to children
- Adults must also wash their hands:
  - Before and after administering medication
  - After assisting a child with toileting
  - After handling garbage or cleaning

Staff wear gloves when handling blood or bodily fluids that might contain blood, which includes wiping a child’s nose. Handwashing is required even after using gloves.



Note: The use of alcohol-based hand rubs in lieu of hand washing is not recommended for early education and childcare settings. If these products are used as a temporary measure, a sufficient amount must be used to keep the hands wet for 15 seconds. Since alcohol-based hand rubs are toxic and flammable, they must be stored and used according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

### Toileting Policy

When a child begins enrollment, he or she must be independently toileting. We define successful independent toileting as having the ability to lower his/her clothing, wipe themselves, flush and re-dress themselves, without assistance from teachers or teacher assistants. The child should be in cloth underwear and not in diapers, pull-ups, or training pants. Will Smith Zoo School is not licensed to meet Texas licensing standards and health requirements to diaper or assist in the toilet training process.

### ***Accidents Happen***

We recognize that children will join Will Smith Zoo School, having reached differing levels of independence and development in toileting and self-care. Some children will be engaged in fully developing this aspect of their self-care when they start school. Some children will not have had the practice that they need to use the facilities available: this could include culturally different expectations of self-care. Therefore, it is inevitable that from time to time, some children will have accidents. Children who have accidents will never be humiliated, punished, or belittled. Any child who has an accident will be removed from the classroom discreetly and escorted to the bathroom by a teacher or assistant.

Some children will come to school with ongoing/specific physical or medical issues such as urinary tract infections or soiling difficulties. If a child needs support that is additional or different to the practices and procedures outlined, an individual continence care plan is needed in consultation with your child's doctor. Please speak to the Director for further information and support with this process.

### ***Health and Safety***

In the case of a child accidentally wetting, soiling or being sick:

- Staff must wear disposable gloves on each hand when assisting children with toileting accidents.
- The child's and caregiver's hands must be washed after each toileting following hand washing guidelines. Handwashing procedures should be posted by each hand washing sink.
- The soiled clothing will be returned to the child's backpack in a zippered plastic bag.
- In the event a child is reluctant and refuses, a parent or guardian will be contacted immediately.



**If a child has three or more accidents within a one-week timeframe**, a probationary warning will be issued unless there are medical documents provided by a health care professional with reasons why this may not be appropriate at the time.

**If another accident occurs during the two-week probationary period**, the child will be required to stay home until securely potty trained. The child's place will be held for the remainder of the month. Termination of enrollment will result if it is determined that the child is not independently toileting after their return, continuing to have two or more accidents a week. Please be aware that the registration fees and tuition through the end of a 30-day period are non-refundable.

### **Food Policy**

**Will Smith Zoo School is a nut-free school.** Foods containing nuts or processed in facilities that also process food containing nuts are prohibited.

### ***Snack***

Will Smith Zoo School provides snacks for the children. Students will receive one snack during the daytime program and will receive an additional snack if enrolled in the afternoon Extended Care program.

The food is prepared, served, and stored in accordance with the United States Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) guidelines. The program documents compliance and any correction it has made, per the recommendations of the program's health consultant, nutrition consultant, or sanitarian, which reflect consideration of federal and other applicable food safety standards. Our consultant reviews our menus as well as nutrition policies and procedures and makes recommendations needed.

For all children with dietary restrictions or specific feeding needs, we will handle the child's needs individually as the family and program develop an appropriate plan. If a child has a food allergy, parents are to indicate this in their enrollment paperwork and provide a food allergy plan that is signed by the child's physician. This information will also be a part of their file.



### ***Meals***

The school does not provide meals for the students, but lunch is eaten together with staff as they model engagement in conversation and promote healthy living. Families are to send a nutritious lunch every day for their child. Lunch should be brought from home in a reusable lunch bag. Make sure to include an ice pack if your child's lunch needs to be refrigerated. We do not have refrigerator space for lunches, or a microwave available for warming food. Staff will not microwave any food or drinks for children.

Will Smith Zoo School emphasizes the need for less waste and reusable items. Please pack your child's lunch in containers that can be washed and reused. In addition, consider your child when selecting items for their lunch. Make sure they can open their containers and they like the food you are sending. We have recycling bins in our classroom, and since we will be learning the concept of the 3 R's (reduce, reuse, and recycle), it could be a fun project to put together a minimum waste lunch.



With food and items brought from home, we ask you to take certain safety precautions:

- Items such as water bottles and lunchboxes should be labeled with the child's first and last name.
- Wash hands before and during food preparation.

### ***Special Events***

Families may bring in food for special events, such as birthday and/or classroom celebrations. We highly encourage food to be made in commercial kitchens or in the original packaging to ensure the health and safety of our students.

We ask that families get confirmation and approval by the teacher to ensure there are no food allergen risks.



### ***Water***

Water is always available. Students should come to school with a reusable water bottle, labeled with their name. Students have access to refill their water bottles at all times of the day.

Water should be the only beverage sent in the water bottle. Students will not be served beverages with added sugars as they can contribute to child obesity, tooth decay, and poor nutrition.

## **Medical Policies**

### ***Hearing and Vision Screenings***

Hearing and Vision Screenings are required for all four-year-old students and will be offered on campus annually or must be provided by student's physician after their four-year-old checkup.

### ***Medications***

Per Child-Care Licensing regulations, medication means:

- A prescription medication; or
- A non-prescription medication, excluding topical ointments such as diaper ointment, insect repellent, or sunscreen.

The school prefers not to administer any medication to children. If the school is to administer medication, it must be handled by trained staff. Teachers are annually trained to administer emergency medication that is kept with the class backpack. No medications will be administered without written parental permission and signed documentation from the child's health care professional. The parent must sign a medication authorization form stating the medicine to be

given and the times at which it is to be administered by office staff and the length of time to be given. All medication must be in the original containers.

Medications must be labeled with:

- Child's first and last name.
- Date that either the prescription was filled, or the recommendation was obtained from the child's licensed health care provider.
- Expiration date of the medication or the period of use of the medication.
- The manufacturer's instructions or the original prescription label and details the name and strength of the medication instructions on how to administer and store it.



No prescription medicine or over the counter, OTC, will be administered without a physician's signature and only as needed. The medication must specify the dosage indicated for the child's weight/age and must be the original containers. If medication does not have a specific dosage or says "consult physician" it must be accompanied by a licensed health care provider's statement. The health care professional's office may fax over, or email instructions only as stated on the label directions. Staff will document the dosage/time for the medication administered. We will not accept expired medication.

Medication will be stored and locked in the child's classroom out of reach of students. It is the parent's responsibility to retrieve the medication at the end of the day if needed. Epi- pens, sunscreen, special soaps, lotions, bug sprays do not need to be kept in a locked cabinet but must be inaccessible to children.

For recurring medical problems, such as asthma attacks, allergic reactions, or other special health care needs the school will require an action plan from the child's physician with type of medication, instructions, and symptoms to watch for. A new authorization form to dispense medication for such conditions is required every six months. Parents must speak to the director if their child requires any special medical procedures. The administrative staff is required to review written instructions from the child's health care provider on how to perform the procedure and receive additional training. Teachers will be informed of children needing medication or any special medical procedures.

Fever-reducing pain medication will NOT be administered to any child, as they mask the symptom, which would prevent a child from attending school. There should be NO fever reducing pain medication vitamins or cough drops in a child's water bottle, backpack, or lunch box. They are considered medications.

Diarrhea treatments such as Pedialyte fluids or similar treatments will not be substituted for regular diets so children may attend school while the illness is treated. Children must be symptom-free before attending care.



### ***Communicable Diseases***

Communication with the medical consultant and/or the public health authorities will be provided for families and staff as needed in the event of an outbreak of any communicable disease or public concern. For daily attendance, the children must be free of symptoms of illness for 24 hours.

Parents of children with chronic symptoms of colds/allergies may be asked to have their child checked by a physician to rule out any infection. Written documentation from a physician is required for readmission if your child has had a communicable disease.

When a child becomes ill during the day, the parent will be notified immediately for you to pick up your child. In an attempt to prevent illness from spreading, sick children will be isolated from others in the treatment room and supervised by an administrative staff member. If you are to be away from your usual phone numbers during the day, please let the office and your child's teacher know how they can reach you. If a student becomes ill and a sibling attends the school. Will Smith Zoo School request both students to be picked up to ensure the health and safety of the students and staff. The ill child may not return until cleared by a physician, or free of symptoms for 24 hours.



When children are exposed to a contagious illness, staff will inform parents verbally and written notices will be posted in the infected classroom.

Any child that may be under-immunized (when medically necessary) will be immediately excluded from the group of children, if a vaccine-preventable illness occurs in the school. Parents will be called to pick up their child immediately to prevent the child from becoming ill. Children will be allowed to return once the illness had been contained.

The following guidelines for the exclusion of children with transmissible disease will be followed:

- An illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in classroom activities, including outside play.
- The illness results in a greater need for care than the staff can provide without compromising the health, safety, and supervision of other children.
- In the past 24 hours, oral temperature of 100.4 degrees or greater. Child must be fever free without fever lowering agents such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen for 24 hours before returning to school.
- Two or more vomiting episodes in the past 24 hours
- Two or more episodes of diarrhea or loose, watery stools in the past 24 hours or within 2 hours at school. Rash with a fever, discharge from the eyes, mouth sores with drooling, wheezing, behavior changes or other unusual signs, until medical evaluation indicates the child can be included in classroom activities.
- The child has been diagnosed with any communicable disease, including, but not limited to chicken pox, mumps, diphtheria, scarlet fever, fifth disease, strep throat (24 hours after treatment and without fever for 24 hours), lice (after treatment and all nits are

removed), conjunctivitis or pink eye (24 hours after treatment), impetigo (after 24 hours of medication/treatments and covered, if needed). Until medical evaluation determines that the disease is no longer communicable, and the child is able to participate in classroom activities; child must recuperate at home (See Minimum Standards for a complete list of communicable diseases)

- For symptoms associated with monitored diseases (e.g., Covid-19), a return to care is permissible once symptoms are controlled after 5 days or upon presenting a doctor's clearance note.

For the wellness of all, if your child is unwell, we ask that they stay home to recover. Both your child's health and the health of others in our care are paramount. Should your child be unable to attend, please notify us through LineLeader.

Teachers follow the same exclusion rules as children in regard to communicable disease.

All staff and families of the children in the school must exchange information on exposure to communicable diseases, so that staff will be aware of whatever measure are necessary to prevent or control spread of infection. Families should notify staff if their child has a communicable disease. If a child has been absent for two days without communication, staff will contact the family and check on the child.

Families will be notified of the presence of a diagnosed contagious illness such as conjunctivitis, strep throat and others recommended by the Texas Department of Health. When a child has any sign or symptom that requires exclusion from the program, staff must immediately inform the Will Smith Zoo School administration team and notify the parents.

### ***Head Lice Protocol***

Head lice, though bothersome, are common and can affect anyone. While they are not responsible for severe illnesses or disease transmission, they can be an inconvenience.



Treatment is primarily done at home, encompassing both the affected individual and their living environment. Still, consulting a doctor before proceeding is essential. The State Health Services no longer deems lice as a justification to miss school, yet given their contagious nature, we aim to curtail their spread proactively.

Should your child be diagnosed with live lice or nits (eggs), we will promptly contact you, requesting you collect your child. This facilitates timely consultation with a healthcare professional and initiation of treatment. Additionally, our teaching staff will implement a lice mitigation plan for classroom fixtures.

To ensure proactive measures, we will notify parents from the impacted classrooms about the situation, offering guidance on symptom identification and treatment. The identity of the affected individual will remain confidential.

### ***Injuries***

Active play is intrinsic to childhood, and occasionally, minor bumps or scrapes might happen. Parents will be notified as soon as possible and no later than the end of the day of injuries, minor cuts and scratches requiring first aid by teaching staff.

During active outdoor play, children may occasionally sustain injuries in areas generally concealed by clothing, such as the torso, shoulders, or hips. If our teaching staff suspect an injury in one of these covered regions, they will promptly notify an administrator. Together, the teacher and administrator will assess the injury with care and sensitivity and notify parents.

For incidents that do not require medical attention, an incident report will be provided through the LineLeader app. The report is to be signed by the parent in the app.



Staff will notify parents if a child bumps their head or something appears to be more serious and needs parent decision for possible medical treatment.

For incidents that DO require medical attention a paper incident report is filled out and submitted to licensing for review and investigation. Parents must sign this form and a copy is kept in your child's physical record.

In the case of an emergency when a physician is needed, the San Antonio Zoo medics will be called to assess the need for Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The information provided on the enrollment form will be shared with the required medical professionals. The call to EMS is made at the same time a call to the parent is made.

### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Will Smith Zoo School staff members are trained annually on the following:

- Methods for increasing employee and parent awareness of issues regarding child abuse and neglect, including warning signs that may be a victim of abuse or neglect and factors indicating a child is a risk for abuse and neglect warning signs of abuse and neglect.
- Methods for increasing employee and parent awareness of prevention techniques for child abuse and neglect.
- Strategies for coordination between the center and appropriate community organizations; and
- Actions that the parent of a child who is a victim of abuse or neglect should take to obtain assistance and intervention, including procedures for reporting child abuse and neglect.

### ***Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect***

Will Smith Zoo School is committed to compliance with the Texas law on reporting abuse and neglect of children. The law requires any person, including personnel at a school or childcare facility, who has cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect by any person- whether a parent, an WSZS staff member, or anyone else-to make a report to the appropriate authorities, Child Protective Services at 1-800-252-5400. Before reports are filed, staff members are expected to share concerns with the director and/or assistant director, so that WSZS may take appropriate action.

- Staff who report suspicions of child abuse or neglect are immune from discharge, retaliation, or other disciplinary action for the reason alone unless it is proven that the report is in bad faith. The program is required by law to cooperate with any investigation of child abuse or neglect.
- This report should be made immediately when, and in no event more than 48 hours after, a person first suspects abuse or neglect. The report should reflect the person's belief that a child has been or may be abused or neglected and should also include the name and address of the child and of the person responsible for the care, custody or welfare of the child, and other pertinent information about the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect of the child.
- It is a criminal offense under Texas law to knowingly fail to make a report of abuse or neglect. In most cases, the identity of the person making the report is confidential, and a

person acting in good faith who reports or assists in the investigation of a report of child abuse or neglect or who testifies in the legal proceeding is immune from civil or criminal liability. There is no immunity, however, for a person who reports his or her own abuse or neglect of a child, or who acts in bad faith or with malicious purpose.

- If any staff member has questions about what constitutes abuse or neglect, about whether a report should be made in particular situation, or has a question about this policy, please contact the director immediately.



## Emergency Preparedness

### ***Weather-Related School Closures***

San Antonio Zoo security staff always monitor weather conditions. In the event of severe weather, updates and any changes to school operations will be communicated via email, the LineLeader App, and

social media. Any decision to do so is made with the safety of all in mind.

There may be times when Will Smith Zoo School cancels, delays, or has an early dismissal due to conditions near or at Will Smith Zoo School. In the event of a weather-related closure or delay, we will work to get information to parents as quickly as possible using our LineLeader App.

Will Smith Zoo School's schedule and school year are fixed long in advance and will not be altered due to school closures. There are no make-up days or refunds for closures due to inclement weather or other hazardous conditions. It is important to note that when school is closed due to the hazardous conditions listed above, we continue to pay our teachers and staff. That is why we do not offer a refund.

### ***Drills***

Emergency Preparedness Practice drills, such as fire, severe weather, and active threats, help everyone become more familiar with emergency procedures, thereby reducing anxiety, and promoting an appropriate response during the real emergency. Practice drills will be both announced and unannounced, be implemented at different times of the day, and involve children of all program options. These practice drills are designed to test the various aspects of our Emergency Preparedness plan and promote an appropriate response during a real



emergency. After each practice drill, a critique is conducted to evaluate practices and determine methods of improving the plan, its functioning, and our response.

While we refrain from providing advance notice of drill dates and times, as it allows us to accurately represent our staff's emergency response, we encourage families to have positive discussions with their children about what happens during a drill.

In the event of an actual emergency, Will Smith Zoo School Administration will communicate with family members about the event and provide updates as they become available through the LineLeader App.

### ***Emergency Evacuation***

In an emergency, the staff's first responsibility is to move all students to the designated safe area, or alternate shelter, that is known to all employees. Staff is provided training in evacuation procedures on an annual basis.

If a neighborhood evacuation is ordered by the fire or police department, Will Smith Zoo School reserves the right to follow the evacuation orders and emergency location determined by the authorities.

In the event of an environmental emergency or other circumstances that would require staff and students to leave the building (fire, gas leak, toxic fumes, chemical release, bomb threat, etc.), the administrative staff will announce that staff should take the children to the pre-determined evacuation site:

The DoSeum  
2800 Broadway  
San Antonio, Texas 78209  
(210) 212-4453



The students will be relocated by campus busses and/or staff's personal vehicles to the designated area in the safest and most efficient manner possible. The administrative staff are responsible for assigning children to the vans and/or staff vehicles. Every effort will be made to have each child in a seatbelt, but in the event that all children must be evacuated off site immediately, some children may need to be double belted in the cars. Those with limited mobility will be offered assistance.

The teacher will have the roster and emergency contacts for their students, as well as the authorization for emergency care for each child. Name-to-face counts will be conducted once the classes have arrived at the evacuation site.

In the event that it is not safe to return to the Will Smith Zoo School campus, families will be contacted to pick up their children from the designated location. If an individual outside of the approved list is picking up, the parent must notify the teacher via the LineLeader pp with the individual's full name and phone number.

Teachers will continue to care for the children until their families arrive by playing games, reading books, singing familiar songs, and retelling familiar stories. Snacks, water, and extra clothes will be available for staff and students to use.

Families will sign their children out upon reuniting with them.



**Evacuation Food Items** - Upon notification from the WSZS Director, the Culinary Manager shall complete a full inventory of all non-perishable supplies that may be necessary during the operation of the evacuation. The inventory shall also include toilet paper, paper towels, 240 water bottles, and garbage bags (55 gal and 5-gallon bucket).

*Will Smith*



# Family Handbook

For more information, visit <https://willsmithzooschool.org>