



LEARNING AND BELONGING (LAB) PRESCHOOL

Student Employee Handbook

WELCOME!

Congratulations! We believe that you have selected one of the most rewarding job opportunities on campus. Whether you are studying education, one of the human science fields or even a degree completely unrelated to early childhood education we believe that you've landed yourself a meaningful student employee position that will only serve to enhance your overall experience at the University of Montana. We welcome you to our dynamic team!

As a University of Montana student employee at the Learning and Belonging (LAB) Preschool, you are an essential member of our team. Your daily role in working with our young children directly, or behind the scene, is invaluable to the quality of our program. This Handbook serves an overview of the job. It highlights your responsibilities and our expectations. From providing you with basic orientation information to helping you understand developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood classroom this handbook will get you started and serve as a reference throughout your work experience at LAB Preschool.

The guidelines within this handbook may not answer all your questions; young children are unique and demonstrate a wide range of strengths, interests, and needs. When these guidelines are not adequate to address specific situations or questions, please arrange time to meet with the director and/or lead teachers for further clarification.

To support your membership on this team, we require you to **carefully review this handbook and sign the Student Handbook Agreement form** in acknowledgement of having done so. It is expected that you will refer back to these guidelines throughout your employment. File this handbook accordingly.

GETTING STARTED: What paperwork will I need to complete?

Student employees must complete all required paperwork before starting work at LAB. The director will provide you with Montana Childcare Licensing forms and University of Montana Human Resources forms. Please complete and submit these forms as soon as possible.

What are a student employee's professional responsibilities?

As a student employee you are an active member of the LAB team. We expect a high level of professionalism from our staff. It is expected that you arrive promptly and be ready to begin work at your scheduled times. We are responsible for the education and care of young children and must abide by the minimum teacher-child ratio (1-8) at all times. Many of your colleagues are also students who have classes to get to and from in a timely fashion. The safety of children is paramount, but so is the school attendance of our staff. We want you all to get to class on time knowing that the children are in good hands.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

What is the mission of the LAB Preschool?

The Learning and Belonging (LAB) Preschool is a model early childhood program supported by the Phyllis J. Washington College of Education and Human Sciences, and works in partnership with the Department of Teaching and Learning to provide University of Montana students an opportunity to enhance their understanding of young children and the teaching/learning process. The LAB Preschool provides academic course support, resources, mentoring and key practicum learning experiences for students enrolled in early childhood and elementary education as well as other human service degree programs at the University of Montana. The LAB's multi-age early childhood program invites children of all abilities and their families to participate in a caring community designed to promote lifelong learning (L) and (A) belonging (B) in terms of self-acceptance and as a member of a group.

What courses are offered at the LAB Preschool?

Each year, more than 150 University students complete required course work in the LAB Preschool. In order to meet this demand, the LAB director establishes scheduling criteria and assigns student schedules. As an academic program of the College of Education, the LAB Preschool supports many

levels of student participation including. Specifically the Teaching and Learning department's Level #1 field experience students and Early Childhood Practicum students.

In addition, students enrolled in elementary education, social work, psychology, and other degree programs may be eligible to complete observations, internships, research, and independent study course work in the LAB Preschool.

Who are the children enrolled in the LAB Preschool?

All children between the ages of 3-5 from the greater Missoula community are eligible for enrollment in the LAB Preschool. Families pay an annual tuition that is based on the market rate for early care and education programs in the Missoula area. We are especially interested in enrolling a diverse group of children from a range of economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds as well as enrolling children with and without disabilities.

What is the Preschool schedule?

The program offers Morning (9:00 – 12:00) and Afternoon (1:00 – 4:00) preschool sessions. School is in operation Monday through Thursday during the academic year, including Winter Session. Please see the current year calendar for holiday and school closures.

What is our philosophy?

At the LAB Preschool, we maintain a small group size (a maximum 16 children in each session) that supports our goal of meeting the individual strengths, interests, and needs of each child in the program. The classroom environment and expectations are created with respect for child development and the individuality of children. In our program, we:

- Welcome and value the uniqueness of each child enrolled in the program.

- Offer children a productive multi-age learning environment in which they can actively participate in real, meaningful work and projects.
- Provide open-ended materials and play experiences that allow each child to succeed at his/her own level.
- Plan opportunities for self-selected exploration, social interaction, and problem-solving to enhance children's natural motivation to learn.
- Introduce activities and materials that foster development of the whole child in multiple areas including creative arts, language and literacy, mathematics and numeracy, physical development and health; science, social-emotional development, and social studies.
- Interact with children primarily in small informal groups or individually. Large group interactions are kept to short periods of time related to the development of the children.
- Act as guides and facilitators by preparing the environment, observing children's understanding, and adding information, experiences and challenges to build on their knowledge and skills.
- Provide meaningful experiences in the content areas (math, literacy, science, and social studies) on a daily basis through focused play activities, games, songs and finger plays, stories, and 1-1 natural teaching opportunities.
- Promote children's dispositions for lifelong learning including curiosity, problem-solving, cooperation, and persistence.
- Use positive child guidance techniques that promote children's motivation and ability for self-control.
- Provide skill training and supports to promote children's developing social skills such as cooperation, negotiation, and problem-solving.
- Respect families as the most important teachers of their children by communicating regularly to build mutual understanding and encouraging parents to help set children's goals and observe progress.
- Value the uniqueness of each family by providing a wide range of choices in parent involvement.

STUDENT EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES: BECOMING A MEMBER OF OUR TEAM

What is your role in the classroom?

The preschool director and lead teachers consider all of us both teachers AND learners. In fact, this is the dual role of educators across their teaching careers. You have an ideal situation for meaningful learning as you work at the preschool. Your willingness to make the most of this experience will determine the outcomes you achieve from this job placement.

- As a student employee, your duties will include setting up classroom activities, constant cleaning and organizing of the classroom environment and storage areas, anticipation of teacher needs during the sessions, and freeing the teacher to be both an instructor to university students and the children in the program by providing whatever support is necessary, including cleaning, clerical, computer work, etc.
- You will receive orientation on the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and will be expected to adhere to these professional standards in our program.

What should you wear?

In your role at the LAB Preschool you will be facilitating messy play, sitting on the floor with the children, engaging with children during snack, playing actively outdoors,... Dress casually to meet the demands of the classroom environment and the Montana climate. That said you are expected to present yourself professionally.

- Select modest clothing that allows you to move comfortably throughout the room and from

the floor to standing. Pants, longer shorts (close to knee level) and sleeveless clothing are acceptable but short shorts, halter tops, etc., are not appropriate. **Remember - what may seem appropriate to wear to class may not be appropriate or modest when bending over, reaching, or running on the playground.**

- Wear shoes that allow you comfort and easy movement. If you need to move quickly to a child in danger, your choice of footwear should not slow you down.
- Arrive prepared for outdoor play with the children in all types of weather—wind, rain, cold, or sunshine, the teachers strive to offer outdoor play experiences every day.

What is your role in working with families?

Families who enroll their children in the preschool do so with the understanding that student participation is an integral part of the program. Most will be eager to meet you and talk with you about your professional goals and your experiences in the LAB Preschool. Remember that the lead teacher is the primary contact for families and your role is to supervise the children during drop-off and pick-up times so the teacher can interact with parents. To effectively develop a relationship with parents in our preschool community, keep the following guidelines in mind.

- Take time to introduce yourself to families as appropriate.
- Show interest and provide positive examples of their child's participation during the day. Remember to talk specifically about what you observed ("He played in the block area and built the North Pole today") rather than making judgments or comparing their child with another.
- If the parent asks about another child or expresses a concern, please refer them to the lead teacher.
- Read cues - parents may be in hurry or have other things on their mind at arrival and departure times. When this is the case, be pleasant and brief!
- Be alert at departure time so you can help locate the child's possessions as needed.
- If you have concerns about something the child said or a play interaction you observed, discuss your concern with the lead teacher. The teachers work diligently to develop positive relationships with each parent and any concerns will be best shared by them.
- If you believe you have evidence that a child is being abused or neglected, it is your responsibility to report your suspicions appropriately. As a childcare provider, you are a **mandatory reporter**. We encourage you to talk with the lead teacher and/or director for guidance, but ultimately a report to Child and Family Services must be made by whoever has witnessed and/or suspected child abuse/neglect, (866) 820-5437.

Confidentiality Guidelines

All LAB employees, university students, volunteers and visitors are required to read and sign the confidentiality statement. Employees must adhere to this statement in all circumstances. Missoula is a small community. Even minor details/stories shared outside of the program may be spread in inappropriate ways.

Do not discuss behaviors or concerns about children and families. Never discuss someone else's child with a different family – even if they ask you specific questions (refer to the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct). If you hear confidential information from children or parents and you believe disclosure is important to the welfare of a child, talk with the lead teacher or director.

BASIC HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDELINES

The LAB Preschool is a licensed childcare program that meets health and safety standards established by the state of Montana. You play a role in helping the preschool maintain these standards by following these guidelines. In addition, we are accredited through the NAEYC and adhere to a higher set of national standards in all program areas.

What are the basic safety guidelines?

Effective supervision of the children at all times is our first priority in the teamwork we do at the LAB Preschool. When multiple adults are supervising a group of children, it is particularly important to establish guidelines and clarify roles so supervision happens in a systematic way.

- **Children must be in view of a teacher at all times** to visually monitor their safety and wellbeing.
- **Outlet covers must always be in place.** If you unplug an item, immediately REPLACE the outlet cover.
- **The kitchen is used by adults only.** Children are not allowed in the kitchen.

Emergency information and supplies

Family contact information, doctor's contact information and other pertinent information are listed on the *Emergency Contact list* and located near each phone (in the big binder in the classroom) and in the red fanny pack First Aid Kit that goes outside and hangs on the coat tree near the door. The First Aid Kit should go outside on the playground every day and accompany any group on a walking field trip. If a child is hurt and needs first aid, the lead teacher should be immediately

notified and will render the aid. An injury log is in the big binder on the teacher counter in the classroom and must be filled out when a child has been injured.

The phone number for Poison Control is posted on every phone, (800) 222-1222. It would be wise to program this number into your personal phone as well.

Please also insure that you have requested UM campus alerts/text messages to your phone and email. You can make this request in Cyber Bear.

Food and drink guidelines

- **Personal water bottles or other drink containers must remain in the kitchen to the left of the refrigerator, or near the stove.**
- **Follow the posted hand washing procedures prior to preparing food or assisting children with food.**
- **Wear gloves** when preparing or serving snack.
- **Dishwasher soap and all cleaners must be directly returned to the high cupboard** to the left of the refrigerator out of children's reach. NEVER put them under the sink and do not leave them sitting on the counter.

How can you stay healthy?

- **Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently-** This is the #1 way to keep YOU and the children healthy. Follow the posted hand washing procedure. Wash well with soap, dry your hands thoroughly, and use the paper towel to turn the faucet off. Wash hand upon entering the classroom, every time! Be sure to wash your hands constantly and before and after most routines.
- If you must be because of illness, please notify the director and lead teacher(s) right away.

GUIDING THE BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN IN THE GROUP

What Is Positive Child Guidance?

Positive child guidance provides us with a positive way of thinking about the behavior of young children. Rather than looking at a child's inappropriate behavior as an action that should be "punished", positive child guidance instructs us to see this as an opportunity to *teach*. In the words of a five-year-old child who was asked to define *discipline*, the old way of thinking means that "if

you done something wrong, they gots' to pay you back!" Rather than looking for new ways to “pay kids back”, a positive approach is focused on supporting healthy social development, building on the emerging self-control skills of young children, and understanding behavior as a form of communication.

Current recommended practice informs us that a positive approach begins with a focus on **prevention**—developing a positive relationship with each child in the group; using observation and assessment to learn about the individual strengths, interests, and needs of each child; setting up an environment that is interesting, stimulating, and appropriate for each child; evaluating our schedules and routines so they better support the success of children in our group, and keeping our focus on the positive interactions children have throughout the day.

A second ingredient is **teaching**—supporting the development of social skills, teaching children problem-solving strategies, and helping children understand expectations for behavior so they learn to live within the boundaries we have established.

A third focus is on **understanding the child's behavior**—what need is the child communicating, what skill or classroom boundary might a child need to learn to get needs met in a more appropriate

way, and how can we use the environment and interactions with this child to support them in learning and using this new skill?

What Is your role in guiding children's behavior?

One of our most important roles in early care and education is to help children learn how to get along in, and enjoy, the social environment. When a child is using an inappropriate behavior, our job is to help the child learn to use a better way to communicate and get their needs met. The guidance we provide should be consistent and based on an understanding of the classroom expectations, the developmental levels of preschool-aged children, and the individual strengths, interests and needs of individual children in the group.

- **Pay attention to and comment on positive behavior.** When you focus on inappropriate behavior, you end up reinforcing it or getting into a power struggle with a child - two places you do not want to be.
- When a reminder is needed, tell children what *to do* rather than what not to do. For example, say, “Walk” rather than “Don't' run.” Suggest “first, then....”
- Use encouragement to help children recognize and value their positive efforts and behavior as well as to set a positive tone for the classroom.
 - Make 90% or more of your communication positive rather than corrective.
 - Positive communication can be a smile - don't unnecessarily interrupt positive play.

Using Encouragement Rather than Praise	
DO	DON'T
You worked at the easel a long time. I see 5 different colors on your paper!	“That is a beautiful house.”
You take good care of your school - thanks for putting the book back on the shelf.	“I like it when you clean-up.”
You kept trying and you did it!	“That was very good.”

What Are the Program Rules for Children?

Rules or guidelines for children's behavior should be brief and consistent. Every interaction we support in the LAB Preschool falls under one of the following three classroom rules.

- Keep yourself safe
- Keep other children and teachers safe
- Take care of our preschool

It is not possible or even good practice to try to identify every appropriate and inappropriate behavior that might occur in an early childhood program in order to make a rule about it. As you become familiar with the program and are unsure about whether or not a specific behavior is allowed, apply these 3 rules to help guide your decision. For example, if you see a child swinging a large block around in the block area, ask yourself, "Is this child safe? Are other children and teachers safe? Is this allowing the child to take good care of program material?" Most likely, you will respond with a "No" to questions 2 and 3—indicating that you will need to intervene and help the child redirect their play.

What do I do when a problem occurs?

- Prevention first. If something seems dangerous, stop the activity or remove the materials first - then seek the advice of the lead teacher.
- If a situation seems to be escalating, *GO to the children and get at their eye level* to redirect the activity - *do not attempt to gain children's attention by calling across the room or playground.*
- Use redirection to help children engage in a similar activity (throwing) in an appropriate way ("The blocks are for building. Let's play over at the basketball hoop if you want to throw.")
- If indicated, gently step between 2 children if you think a child might begin hitting, throwing an item, etc.
- Help children engage in problem-solving using the 3 P's
 - **Problem:** What is the problem? Give each child equal time to describe their issue.
 - **Possibilities:** What could we do to solve the problem? Each child offers possibilities.
 - **Pick One:** Together, the children pick one idea and try it out.
- **Teachers should not physically lift or move a child as part of their child guidance approach.** Do not attempt to lift or move a child unless you consider the situation an emergency. This does not help a child learn to resolve a problem and you risk injury to yourself or the child.
- **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO PHYSICALLY REMOVE A CHILD WHO IS UPSET.** This is likely to escalate the child's behavior and may lead to the injury of the child or teacher. Move the other children away (and/or materials that might cause harm) and allow the child time/space to calm.

Expectations for working in the classroom:

Guiding Priorities:

- 1) Make certain the children are SAFE and learning.
- 2) Make certain the environment is SAFE, inviting, and user friendly.

Before Children Arrive:

- Complete the tasks on the daily checklists
- Collaborate with supervising teacher to prepare for the day.

The School Day:

-GATHERING: Children arrive in the classroom and engage in drawing, manipulative play, or book reading on the rug in the library area. Supervising teacher will open the door and greet families as they arrive. Student employees are expected to help children enter into their day by greeting them and interacting with individual children over on the rug.

-LEARNING CENTERS: During Learning Centers, children choose to engage in centers based on their individual interests. They are not required to stay for any specific amount of time at each center, nor is there a required "product" that must be completed at any center. Children should tidy an area before they leave.

During Learning Centers student employees help children as needed, always encouraging as much independence as possible. Modeling and self-talk/parallel-talk at centers are appropriate and desired. Completing a task for a child (such as cutting or drawing) is discouraged. The goal is to empower children to complete and value their own work.

Student employees should move to different centers throughout center time. It is easy to get engaged with a certain activity or group of children and be inattentive to other needs in the classroom. Student workers should always be aware of what is going on around them and position themselves strategically.

Always refer to our classroom rules if children's actions are harmful to themselves, each other, or our classroom. Facilitate problem solving if there is a conflict between two or more children.

Of special note during center time is the snack table. If you, as a student employee, you are facilitating snack, use the cue cards posted in the snack area to remind the children of the expectations before, during, and after snack. Student employees are encourage to socialize with the children at the table, but also be managing the service of food, making certain that children are using the utensils and taking an appropriate amount of food. Keep the service table tidy and stocked. When children put their dishes in the 'dirty' tub, transfer dishes to the dishwasher as soon as possible to reduce the chance of broken dishes in the tub. **If you wish to have a snack, take the same portion as the children and join them at the table. As tempting as it is, do not stand at the counter in the kitchen and nibble.** It is important that we are always modeling best practices at LAB Preschool.

-CLEAN UP: The classroom is put back in order at the end of center time. All children help tidy until the task is complete. Student employees assist children to get things back where they belong. Most everything at LAB Preschool is labeled so getting things back where they belong is easy for all.

-WHOLE GROUP: Children meet in whole group to play learning games, sing songs, be introduced to new concepts, and engage in a story. Student employees tidy the classroom and set the tables for Small Group. If a child is disruptive during whole group, student employees should set aside the task they are doing and assist the child who is struggling. Most of the time this can be accomplished by sitting down behind the child and giving him/her a physical cue, such as a gentle tap or some light pressure on the shoulders. Try hard to give physical and visual cues rather than verbal. Once the child is reengaged in the circle, the student employee can return to other tasks.

-SMALL GROUPS: Children complete specific tasks in small groups as specified and directed by the teacher. Student employees lead a small group unless there are university students able to lead. If a student employee is leading a small group, he/she needs to be aware of the learning goals and prepared to guide the activity. Please gather the small group of children at whole group and guide

them to the activity area if small groups are assigned at circle. If names are set at the table, be at the table ready to welcome children and give direction.

After the small group activity is completed, student employees help children prepare (bathroom, hand washing, coats, etc.) to go outside. A student employee takes the lead to the playground as the first group of children is ready.

-OUTSIDE: Children engage in outdoor play. Student employees interact with children and have an awareness of all activity on the playground. Keeping children safe is paramount on the playground. **Two** adults must be present on the playground at all times. Usually the two adults will be the supervising teacher and one student employee. During the morning session, the second student employee will prepare for lunch bunch and help the p.m. teacher prep for the afternoon session. During the afternoon session, the second student employee will help children clean up, bring toys to the shed, and continue to engage with children until families come. The supervising teacher needs to be available to connect with families at the end of each session when children are transitioning from preschool back to home.

OTHER:

- It is very important that student employees be punctual because of the nature of this job and out of respect to fellow student employees who need to get to class.
- Student employees should wash their hands upon arrival and several other times throughout the day. We are always trying to model healthy habits and keep germs to minimum at LAB Preschool.
- There is always a list of tasks that need to be completed if a student employee is not needed in the classroom or on the playground.
- Nothing gets put away dirty. A soapy bath is always a good thing. Small items can be put in a mesh bag and cleaned in the dishwasher if they are dishwasher safe.
- Student employees are a very important part of LAB Preschool. **We value your hard work and the contributions you make to LAB Preschool. Thank you!**