



Early Learning Co-op

Parent / Caregiver Handbook

2025-2026

Early Learning Co-op

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Welcome to Co-op!

We are thrilled you are joining us for a new school year. Together, we provide a fun, positive early learning experience for all co-op children. Of course, parents need support also and that's where we come in! Our supportive learning environment has things to offer both you and your child. We strive to ensure:

- Genuine connections and friendships with other parents
- Teachers who listen to and respect you
- Songs, stories, signing, and finger-plays
- Parenting lessons and discussions
- Artistic discovery and practical life activities for your child
- Materials for your child that are interesting, meaningful, and educational
- Field trips & guests who are eager to share their expertise
- Daily indoor and outdoor open-ended play time with friends

WELCOME TO THE CO-OP FAMILY!

But first...what is Co-op? Cooperative parent-child programs are popular programs that combine parent/caregiver support and quality, developmentally appropriate learning experiences for children. Adults participate in the daily activities, which keeps costs lower and, most importantly, gives adults a unique window into their child's learning and growth.

Our Mission and Philosophy

Mission

We are a family-friendly early learning community that aims to foster the education and development of both children and the people who love and care for them. Our classroom is a safe, creative learning laboratory that supports the children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth. Parents are welcomed, valued, and appreciated as the children's first and most important teachers.

Philosophy

Children are born ready to learn, love, and be loved. They are natural scientists who are driven to question, experiment and discover. Children need people who love and care for them as well as a safe environment that encourages thinking, play, and exploration. Families are at the heart of young children's learning and development. In appreciation of the central role family members play in early childhood experiences and development, parents (and/or caregivers) and teachers work together to design learning experiences and contexts.

Parenting (and care-giving) is the hardest and most important job we will ever have. It's something we can't ever fully prepare for ahead of time, nor should we try to accomplish it alone. We are a supportive program that aims to foster the education and development of both children and the people who love and care for them.

Operations

The Early Learning Co-op is a 501(c)(3) non-profit managed by a Board of Directors. Day-to-day activities are guided by the teachers and the adults who attend weekly. It is a successful program because of the high level and quality of parent/caregiver involvement. Tuition covers essential operational costs, including building rent, insurance, teacher stipends, and classroom supplies. Registration fees, along with donations and grants, will support the enhancement of classroom environments and learning materials, such as child-sized furniture, books, educational toys, art supplies, and playground equipment.

Our Classroom & Curriculum

Curriculum Framework

Young children need the context of a supportive, loving relationship in order to flourish. Relationships are at the heart of the early childhood curriculum. This is why the participation of the parents/caregivers is so important. We also utilize class interactions and conversations, the play environment, and caregiving routines as “curriculum.” The play environment offers a variety of learning opportunities, which include: free exploration, open-ended play, practical life activities, independent Montessori inspired learning, story time, music, art and sensory experiences, and time outdoors. Because this is a group setting, and children master skills at different rates, we strive to have a range of activities that will appeal to young, growing children. Our curriculum spirals and stretches to accommodate and strengthen children's rapidly growing minds and bodies.

“Play is the work of the child.” ~ Maria Montessori

LEARNING GOALS: You will find we don’t emphasize hard skills like learning the alphabet or rote counting. Literacy and math is part of what we do daily through play and activities. But research has demonstrated that soft skills, such as **communication, problem solving, listening, practical life skills, empathy, self-regulation, and critical thinking** are far more important to the developing child. Unless there is a delay, all children will learn their alphabet and numbers but it’s actually the soft skills which are increasing in demand in today’s world. We need more creative thinkers with interpersonal skills! We work very hard at soft skill support in the indoor and outdoor classroom.

Our indoor and outdoor classrooms are a safe, creative learning laboratory that supports the children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth. We have several areas for kids to discover. These areas include sensory and water tables, a climbing structure and tumble area, an open-ended imagination area, independent work cabinets with math, language, and eye-hand activities, and a reading area. We have a family-style eating area and art tables. Our outdoor area includes sand & water bins, an outdoor kitchen, a swing, a gazebo, bikes, balls, and outdoor toys. Both our indoor and outdoor areas provide activities for fine and gross motor development, as well as social and language development.

Coming Together Takes Time

Children all react differently to this new experience, even if they have been at Co-op before. Some children adapt readily, others take their time. No matter how your child reacts to Co-op, allow time for them to do it their own way.

Adults are often surprised to find they have adjustments to make at Co-op, just as children do. Many adults experience some nervousness or uncertainty. Keep in mind it is totally normal!

It is common for children to: Be nervous the first few weeks Remain close to you. Interact very little with other children at first Say little about Co-op at home Act differently at Co-op than at home Have more colds from contact with more people To assist your child, you can: • Casually talk with your child about what to expect • Provide comfortable clothing to wear • Bring along a change of clothes just in case • Reassure your child that you understand their feelings	It is common for adults to: Feel a little overwhelmed Be concerned about making a mistake Feel “on the spot” Worried about working with children other than your own. Just remember that: Coming together as a group takes time and practice No one can learn everything at once. We’re all a little nervous! Your Co-op teachers love to help. Ask them!
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Safety Guidelines for Caregivers

Limit cell phone use: Take calls outside class or outside of the play area; feel free to take photos but tuck the phone away when done.

Children should always be with a watchful adult.

- Be mindful of the area around the swing when the swing is in use.
- Keep the gate closed and remove children who are climbing the fence.
- Children must **not** go outside of the play area, classroom, or to the bathroom without their parent or caregiver.

Remove hazards: If you discover a safety hazard, please remove it from use and report it to the teacher. Teachers and parents work together to evaluate the safe limits of children in each play/work area.

Please help your child calm down. *Take your child to the hallway, art room, or outside if they are overstimulated, crying, or being aggressive.*

- Comfort, nurse, play, or talk lovingly with your child in a new environment.
- It’s good to take a break and come back refreshed.



- If you have to leave the class and go home, you can make-up class another day.

Please avoid punishments (spanking, yelling, threatening, withholding affection, or isolating). No need to harm a child emotionally or physically.

- Lessons stick better when taught with love or natural consequences.
- Please exercise patience, kindness, and empathy when managing your child.
- Let the teacher know if you need help calming down.

Please help your child with transitions. *If your child is struggling with transitions:*

- Give them a heads up, "two more minutes and we will be washing our hands for snack time."
- Give them a goal, "let's put five more blocks away, then we can go to circle time."
- Make it fun, "let's hop, hop, hop, to circle time like bunnies."
- Please do not bring toys from the classroom outside.

Safety Guidelines for Toddlers

Walking feet inside the co-op building. (Running feet are for outside)

If your child is running around inside:

- Physically gently stop your child from running.
- Remind your child of the "walking feet" rule.
- If your child is unable to stop running after the reminder, go outside for a quick run.
- Bring your child back inside when they are ready to walk.
- Practice walking inside at home. "Walking feet inside"

Inside voices when inside the co-op building.

If your child is screaming inside:

- Get down on your child's level, look into their eyes, and gently remind them with a gesture, such as one finger on your mouth.
- Remind your child of the "inside voice" rule.
- Remove your child to another area if they are unable to lower their voice.
- Bring your child back when they are ready to use their "inside voice."
- Practice inside and outside voices at home.

Gentle hands.

Block aggressive behaviors (hitting, pushing, kicking, biting, head-butting):

- Block or step between children in conflict.
- Let children know that "We cannot hurt others, I will help you not hurt others."
- Point out each child's emotions, "she is mad, he is hurt."
- Stay near both children until they calm down.
- Remove children if they are unable to calm down, comfort, and come back to play when calm.

Circle time is for everyone. It's okay for children to stand, walk, or play quietly **outside** of the circle during circle time. *If your child stands in front of the teachers, or starts playing at the felt board:*

- Gently guide your child back to their square.
- Gently help your child sit back down.



- Sit close with your child.
- *If your child starts crying*, please leave the room until they are calm again so others can hear.
- Circle time goal is for toddlers (age 2-3) to sit with you for 10 minutes by the end of the school year.
- Limit media use at home, children learn best with face to face interactions.

We sit while eating. *Standing or walking while chewing increases the chances of choking on food, especially for toddlers.*

- Set the expectation, “We sit to eat because it is safe, just like sitting while in the car”
- Gently help your child stay seated.
- Remove the food if your child is unable to sit, “looks like you are not hungry enough to eat safely” or “we must be safe.”
- Try again at the next scheduled meal time, “I bet you are ready to sit and eat safely.”

Your toys are safest at home or in the car. *If you need to bring in a toy/stuffie for security reasons:*

- Let the child know that the toy has to stay in the hallway during class.
- Gently remove the toy from your child’s hands if he/she is having trouble giving it up immediately upon entering the classroom. “Let me help you keep your toy safe in the hallway.”
- Take breaks outside of the classroom with the special toy.

Challenging Behaviors

It is very likely that your toddler will exhibit some challenging behaviors at some point during the school year. At this age, it’s **completely normal** for a child to lose control and hit, push, bite, or break down screaming. It is also age appropriate for your child to ignore you, say “no,” refuse to share, or not come when called. **We will be working all year to help you with step-by-step tools to handle challenging behaviors.**

All discipline in the co-op needs to be kind, gentle, and humane. If you are prone to spank, yell, threaten, shame, or handle your child roughly, take a deep breath and ask for help. There are no bad kids and no bad parents in the co-op. There are just big and little people who are trying to learn how to behave appropriately and how to manage their emotions. We are all in the same boat!

I. Sharing

We naturally want our kids to be kind and share with others. However, “sharing” by adult coercion isn’t necessary. We can help give kids a voice when they want a turn by modeling how to ask for something (“Maya would like a turn....”) but we don’t force a child to give up something they are playing with (“...but it looks like Jackie isn’t done with that toy yet.”)

II. Toy Taking

Some kids experiment with taking toys from others. We usually do not intervene with toy taking unless there is a big developmental difference between the two kids



or if they begin to exhibit signs of aggression. If an older child is grabbing a toy from a much younger, smaller child, we block the toy taking and say, "Ellen is still playing with that." We also intervene by blocking in cases of aggression. It is okay to encourage a child to hold on tighter or use their words.

III. Aggression

Aggressive behaviors (hitting, pushing, pinching, biting, kicking) are unfortunately common in young children. This phase does pass. We strive to help children learn to use other methods for expressing feelings while also protecting other children from acts of aggression. We **block, correct, redirect, and reflect**.

Example: Evie wants to walk on the balance beam but Alexia is in front of her. You see Evie reach out to push Alexia. You would block the push and say, "You're upset. You want to walk on the balance beam but Alexia is there. Wait or go around. I can't let you push. Pushing hurts." Then help Evie find another way around the balance beam or to another activity.

We will work with you all year with how to handle these common behaviors. The great part is that kids have a chance to learn these new skills with other children who are learning, too. And the parents get to know the other kids, too! It is much less stressful than interactions with strangers at the park.

Co-op Duties For Caregivers

Co-op runs most smoothly when everyone contributes. Job responsibilities include supervising children, leading class discussions, setting up the snack table, cleaning up after play times, and facilitating artistic discovery. You will know ahead of time when it is your turn to help with a classroom job. We know sometimes kids get sick and you can't make it in when it's your turn - no worries! Just let us know via Band, email, or text and we will handle the job in your absence.

We use "**When to Help**" software and we will send you a temporary login password. You'll then be able to log in, view, and change your job assignments. Also, you can opt to have text reminders sent to your phone.

Art Duty:

- Plan an age-appropriate, process, or sensory art project for your class.
- If you need help, do not hesitate to ask the teacher.
- Come to class fifteen minutes early.
- Gather materials from the art room and bring them to class.
- Cover the tables with crib sheets or paper.
- After the children are finished, please make sure the supplies are cleaned and returned to the art room.
- Please wash the tables and chairs.
- Place any used washcloths or tablecloths in the laundry basket.

Teacher's Assistant Duty:

- Supervise the children during parent education.
- Set boundaries for safety first, then care of self, others, and the environment.
- Learn how to observe children and how they learn.
- Follow the children's lead.
- Learn how to encourage instead of praise.
- Learn when to "step in and step out" when helping children.
- Learn how to show Montessori materials and model behavior.
- Model placing learning materials back into their place after each use.
- Model keeping the room tidy.
- Occasionally switch places with the teacher and lead a lesson discussion.

Snack Duty:

- Please provide and prepare a simple and nutritious snack for your class. No candy please.
- Come to class fifteen minutes early.
- Set the tables with your child. We have placemats, plates, cups, bowls, utensils, and napkins.
- Prepare four bowls of the following: fruits, grains, vegetables, proteins, or dairy.
- A refrigerator, cutting board, and knives are available for food preparation.
- Foods must be sliced or small.
- Place a serving utensil in each bowl.
- Fill the filtered water container.
- Fill a children's pitcher with an inch of water and place one on each table.
- Please help the children dispose of their food and wash their dishes.

Outdoor Duty:

- Help the teacher take the outdoor toys, bikes, balls, and wagons out of the shed.
- Help the teacher put outdoor toys, bikes, balls, and wagons back into the shed after outdoor play time.
- Help the teacher fill and empty the water table.
- Place a cover on the sand bin.
- Help take down the swing and move it inside.
- Sweep the patio around the playground.

Co-op Duties For Toddlers & Waddlers

If you are assigned a co-op job, your child gets to help too! At first, they will need you to show them what to do, guide them, then they may need some encouragement. We will try to assist as little as possible. They will gain so much pride in doing these tasks on their own.

Art Duty:

- Help pick the art project.



- Wash the art tables and chairs.
- Wash and dry brushes and trays.

Snack Duty:

- Help caregivers plan, shop, and prepare foods for snack time.
- Set the placemats and napkins on the table for friends.
- Set the plates and cups on the table for friends.

Outdoor Duty:

- Collect the balls and place them in the wagon.
- Move toys into their container or wagon.
- Move bikes and wagons into the shed.
- Water flowers.
- Sweep the walkway.

Health and Safety

We are committed to having a clean, safe environment for you and your child. It is our first priority and we are continuously evaluating our procedures and policies to ensure the utmost in cleanliness and safety.

● **First Aid**

- Teachers have current First Aid / CPR training for adults, infants, and children.
- We have first aid supplies in the classroom by the door.
- A First Aid guidance poster is located on the bathroom door.
- A fire extinguisher is located in the hallway outside of the classrooms.
- If a medical emergency occurs, do not move the person. Have someone call 911 and have someone else alert the front desk so the secretary can help direct EMS to our location when they arrive.
- Be prepared to complete an incident and witness report on that day.
- We will offer First Aid / CPR training for our families during the school year for a nominal fee.

● **Cleaning and Sanitizing**

- Toys and other objects that have been in a child's mouth will be cleaned, then sanitized with a germ killing agent. If a child has been mouthing a toy, please place it in the **Yuck Bucket** so it can be properly cleaned and sanitized prior to going back into the classroom.
- Tables, counters, and chairs are cleaned, then sanitized before class.
- When using cleaning supplies, be aware of the children. Keep supplies in your hands (don't put the bleach bottle down).
- The bathrooms and changing stations will be cleaned and disinfected daily.

● **Toileting and Diapering**

- We have three bathrooms inside the building, one between classrooms, two

down the hall.

- The child sized toilet between classrooms is for children only.
- Only the child's own parents/caregivers may change diapers or assist with toileting.
- Please change diapers in the bathrooms.
- Place soiled diapers in a wet bag or plastic bag and take them home, *please do not place soiled diapers in the garbage cans.*
- Both parents and children need to wash hands after diapering and using the toilet.
- Bathrooms, and the changing tables, will be cleaned and disinfected daily.

● Hand Washing

- Upon arrival: **Wash hands!** We ask everyone, adults and kids, to wash hands or use hand gel upon arriving.
- Children and adults **wash hands** with liquid soap and warm water before eating and after toileting.
- Remember to wash your hands after any contact with bodily fluids, such as after diapering, nose blowing, etc.

● Sick Policy

	Do you or your child have any of the following symptoms within the last day or 24 hours? • Fever or chills. • Cough, congestion, or runny nose • Fatigue or fussiness • Muscle or body aches • Headache • Sore Throat • Nausea or vomiting • Diarrhea • Rash, hives, or flushed If you answered "yes" to any of these questions please stay home or wear a mask. The teacher reserves the right to determine if a child is too ill to stay in class during class.
Rash	An unexplained rash is a reason to stay home and seek medical advice. Some children have a condition that is under management with a doctor, such as allergies or eczema. These rashes, due to skin irritation, are OK. The rashes of concern are those that you aren't sure what they are or if you suspect impetigo, scabies, or other contagious skin conditions. These would need to be addressed with your pediatrician and medicated before returning to school.
Lice / Nits	Any sign of lice or nits needs treatment for the child



	(possibly the whole family) and the home environment. It is something that happens to people no matter what their background is but it spreads easily so please eliminate it before coming to co-op.
Eye Infection	Signs of an eye infection include redness, itching, and/or eye drainage. Please seek medical advice before returning to the co-op.
Just Not Feeling Well	Sometimes kids are just under the weather and need extra love, snuggles, rest, and care at home. Take time to meet that need!

*Please keep your child home if you exhibit any of the above signs of illness.
We know it is hard to miss class but we have a generous Make-Up Class Policy.*

● Make Up Days

If you need to miss days due to illness, vacations, or personal reasons, please consider coming for a make-up day! **Make up a class by attending any of our other classes.** We are unique in offering this kind of policy but we think it is so important! Thank you for understanding when there are new faces in the classroom for make-up days.

Class Schedules

Toddler & Waddler Class Schedules (Teachers Dani & Mae)

8:30 - 9:30 Teacher arrives to prepare classroom and answer emails.

9:15 Families with snack or art duty arrive to set-up

9:30 Families arrive, Wash hands, Hang-up coats, Take off shoes

9:40 - 10:00 Circle-time

10:00 - 10:40 Parent Education Lesson & Exploration of Montessori materials & Process Art

10:40 - 10:45 Wrap-up & Clean-up

10:45 - 11:00 Wash hands & Family style Snack-time

11:00 - 11:10 Dish washing & Clean-up

11:10 - 11:30 Outdoor Play

11:25 - 11:30 Outdoor Clean-up

11:30 Goodbye song; Dismissal

11:30 - 12:00 Teachers finish cleaning up in the classroom

Cuddler Class Schedule (Teachers Mae & Kylie)

9:00 - 9:15 Tummy time or play time

9:15 - 9:30 Signs, songs, fingerplays, & books

9:30 - 9:50 Parent education and play time

9:50 - 10:00 Artistic or Sensory Discovery

10:00 - 10:15 Wrap-up & Goodbye Song

Calendar 2025 -2026

We follow the Kennewick School District for holidays:

- First Week of School: **September 2-5**
- Thanksgiving Break: **November 25-28**
- Winter Break: **December 23-Jan 6**
- Spring Break: **March 31- April 3**
- Last Week of Co-op: **June 16-19**

Field Trips (no classes at school during these weeks):

- September: **Apple Orchard**
- October: **Pumpkin Patch**
- December: **Tree Farm**
- March: **Fire Station**
- April: **Nursery**
- May: **Farm**

Parent Education and Developmental Screenings:

Lifelong Education

When you are part of a co-op, you are connected with a community of people who know and understand the joys and challenges of children. We have a topic for every class day to address parenting concerns, child development, or family management. We also have books and handouts available in class that tackle common concerns, such as language development, emotional regulation, potty learning, and typical ages/stages of development. Topics are determined by the interest and questions of the parents and caregivers who are currently in session.

Peer support is a valuable component of belonging to a co-op. While one can always find parenting suggestions on Google, it is much more fun (and fruitful) to connect with real people who are experiencing the same joys and concerns that you are. Very often, families have valuable and helpful information to share about overcoming parenting challenges as well! In-class discussions, both formal and informal, are an extremely valuable component of the Early Learning Co-op.

Why we offer parent education

We believe parents are children's first and most important teachers so we help kids by helping parents. Children acquire skills and abilities from the people they spend the most



time with. Parents and other primary caregivers leave a profound, life-long impact on the children they have cared for. Despite the significance of this commitment, modern society doesn't typically offer educational opportunities or supportive communities for parents.

- Parent education documents, slideshows, and videos will be available in the family folder and sent via email every Friday for the following week.
- During class, a Parent Education Teacher will briefly review the lesson and answer any questions.

Screening, Testing, and Intervention

Co-op families have access to the ASQ-3 and the ASQ-SE screening tools. This is voluntary but we encourage all families to participate in the screening process.

- Developmental screenings will be administered once every three months. Results of the screening will be given in private.
- Learning activity suggestions or referrals are available.

Before Your First Day

Open Houses

During the summer we will hold several open houses. You will have the opportunity to drop by to meet the teachers, learn about our classrooms, and our day together at Co-op before our first week of school. Co-op kids & siblings are welcome to attend.

Orientation- the first week of school

During the first week of school, we will work together to guide you and your children through a typical school day and answer any questions.

Food allergies

Food Allergies or other important medical conditions? Please let us know ahead of time if you'd like parents to accommodate or to bring your own snacks.

Dress for a mess!

Bring an extra set of clothing and expect kids to get wet or messy.

Parking

The Co-op is located in the education wing of the First Lutheran Church in Kennewick, 418 N Yelm St. Please use the parking lot located across from Chaplaincy, Hospice House. Look for Early Learning Co-op signs. .

Weekly Emails or BAND Notifications

We will send out an email or a message on BAND once a week with information about the following week. Your teacher will send out invitations for you to join the BAND app.

Family Folder

We will be using a "family folder" for Co-op lessons, videos, and information: [FAMILY FOLDER](#)



Jovial Parent Portal

Payments may be made in class via check or cash or online via the Parent Portal. If you have not received a **Parent Portal** yet, please let us know at earlylearningcoop@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about the online payment process, or if you believe there is an error, please let us know! We are happy to help!

Thank you for joining Co-op!

We are glad you have joined our classes and look forward to getting to know you. We hope to provide a satisfying learning experience for your child, and a greater knowledge of children and parenting skills for yourself. Your participation in our class can be a rewarding experience as well as a challenge and an opportunity for personal growth. We welcome your ideas, questions, and concerns. Please feel free to contact us any time. We're so glad you're part of the family.

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