ALC

COTTONWOOD
BRANCHES

STUDENT HANDBOOK

Introduction

Cottonwood ALC is a learning center for adventurers! It is for people who treat everything as an adventure and learn to recognize that one of the greatest parts of life comes from experiencing new things. Cottonwood is founded on the belief that humans are naturally curious and the drive to pursue our own interests should be at the heart of our learning experiences. If the idea of being challenged on a daily basis and exploring the world as your personal "classroom" sounds energizing, then Cottonwood is the place for you! If this sense of challenge and adventure sounds a little too unstable for you, perhaps you should explore another program that better suits your needs and interests.

Facilitators at Cottonwood will support you. They will also push you. Cottonwood is not intended to be an alternative to another school. We created this center for those learners who are ready to dive in, have difficult conversations, forge their own path, learn deeply, and discover themselves.

Being self-directed isn't easy but it is dynamic. We are all naturally self-directed. When we are exploring something that we are curious about, we dive in. We become experts about that very thing. We also come to forks in the road, face challenges, and change course as we learn. We believe learning happens everywhere, all the time (even when it isn't feeling exciting) and the ability to take ownership over your learning comes with great satisfaction. **We are creating a culture of people who support and share with each other, communicate honestly and effectively, develop a strong relationship with their greater community and are empowered as they gain a deep understanding of themselves and the possibilities that present themselves daily.**

Ultimately, Cottonwood is a playground. It is a venue for all of your interests and curiosities to be explored. We are creating a culture of people who support and share with each other, communicate honestly and effectively, develop a strong relationship with their greater community and are empowered as they gain a deep understanding of themselves and the possibilities that present themselves daily.

Our program demands significant motivation, perseverance, and focus to complete. We are selective in our admissions and we take our agreements seriously to ensure that as our program grows, it does so with sustainability and community in mind.

Contact Information

- The Storefront
  322 Fuller Avenue
  Helena, MT 59601

- Next Door
  320 Fuller Avenue
  Helena, MT 59601

- 406-204-7080

Staff

- Sara Casey Taleff, Executive Director
  - sara@cottonwoodalc.org

- Christopher Taleff, Creative Director
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Facilitators

Cottonwood Storefront
- Amy Shike, Branches Facilitator/ Adventure Coordinator
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Cottonwood Next Door
- Meg Crane, Roots Facilitator/ Creativity Coordinator
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Cottonwood ALC Learner Agreement

Being an Agile Learner comes with great privileges, including (but not limited to!):

- Participation in classes/courses/opportunities offered at Cottonwood ALC
- Ability to teach classes/courses/opportunities at Cottonwood ALC
- Ability to attend center and use center resources for exploration
- Time, space, and support to pursue your own interests and passions

In order to be an Agile Learner at Cottonwood ALC, I agree to contribute to our community in the following ways:

- Daily use of the tools to support Cottonwood's cycle of learning (intention, creation, reflection, sharing) including active participation in the showcases.
- Productive participation in Morning and Afternoon meetings (Set the Week, Change Up, Spawn Points).
- Focus your mind, engage your heart, and listen to others. We honor and respect others and their journey in life and differences
- Create thorough weekly documentation (a personal portfolio)
- Participate in our daily reflections
- Participate in end of day clean up
- Take care of our physical space/materials
- Respect community agreements
- Respect yourself and each other's personal boundaries and bodies

*please check each box ensuring you understand the statement completely

I am signing this agreement to be an agile learner at Cottonwood ALC, and within the larger ALC Network for the 2021-22 program year!

Name (Print):_____

Signature:_____

Glossary of Terms

Intention - Intentions are all the ideas you have in your head that you "intend" to pursue. Each day, learners set personal intentions; they choose how they want to spend their time by recording the challenge they want to pursue, why they want to pursue it, and how they will know when they are finished.

Offering - Offerings are intentions that a learner, facilitator, or volunteer is excited to share with others at Cottonwood. When we bring members of the community in to teach a class/ workshop for a set period of time, this is an offering. When a learner brings their favorite recipe in and invites others to help, this is an offering. Cottonwood is built on offerings. We value the learning that happens when learners introduce ideas and interests to each other and expect every learner will bring their unique offerings.

Cycle of Learning: A learner's day will be made up of a combination of pursuing personal intentions and participating in offerings made by others. In each instance, they should follow the cycle of learning:

Intention - Creation - Reflection - Sharing

Intention - Intentions for the day should be documented in the form of a challenge on the Challenge Monitor in Egodact or a physical card on a Kan-Ban or Planning Journal. While we believe the Challenge Monitor is an incredible planning tool, some learners find alternative methods that work for them and we support them in this.

Creation - Make, do, research, make, do, and repeat. Set goals for yourself and take advantage of the time and space to work independently and collaboratively.

Reflection - Close out your day by reflecting on your preset challenges and the unexpected things that came up throughout your time. Give yourself time and go as deep into reflecting as you can.

Sharing - Close the day with your spawn point. Share challenge developments with your facilitator and fellow learners and close out the day.

What Does it Mean to make an Offering?

Offerings are a form of connection and are meant as an opportunity to share something you are excited about while exposing learners to varied people, expressions and experiences. Offerings can take many shapes and cover a wide-range of subject matter.

Sharing is an inherent part of the learning cycle at an ALC as sharing stems from passion. Passion spreads motivation and motivation ignites learning. You don't have to be great at something to share. You just have to be interested in it. Our young people are curious and love to meet and connect with new people and new ideas, regardless of mastery.

Offerings can take a variety of shapes:

Structure:
- Formal class
- Discussion
- Sharing experiences or creations
- Playing together
- Making together
- Panel
- Experiential
- Project-based

Roles:
- Teacher/learner
- Guide/learner
- Mentor/mentee
- Partners
- Business/customer

Location:
- At the school
- At a location of your choosing

Frequency:
- One-time event
- Several times in one week
- Over a series of weeks
- Over the course of the year

Examples of offerings:

- How to talk with police
- How to write an essay
- How to play 2 scales on the piano
- Planting plants together in the garden
- Hosting a game of soccer
- Making puppets and a puppet show
- Making pinhole cameras
- Building a loft
- Packing meals for those in need

- Pilates class
- Meditation course
- Book club
- Sharing about personal experiences from visiting the legislative session
- Sharing about Hanukkah
- Lessons and discussion on non-neurotypical peoples from an Occupational Therapist
- Panel on gender identity and expression

If you run a business, offerings can serve as a tax-deductible service in kind. We can provide you with the donation paperwork for your tax purposes.

What Does It Mean to be Self-Directed?

It means that you have been given a gift! There are so many benefits to being self-directed. Your personal interests shape the way each day looks for you. Bring your ideas and interests, let yourself be endlessly curious and you will thrive.

Does being self-directed mean that I can do whatever I want, whenever I want?

NO. If we all operated under this presumption, the spaces we share would be pretty awful. While your interests and your individuality are important, so is the community around you. The commitment to the world around us grows exponentially in scale from the learners who share a table with you, to all members of the Cottonwood community, to the community of people in our town, all the way to every creature in the world.

It is our aim to foster the development of compassionate, acutely aware, curious, concerned citizens of the world. There will be times when participation in activities determined to be for the good of the center as a whole will be required. There will be times when facilitators, parents, or other learners ask you to do something that is inconvenient or outside of your comfort zone. Is this ok? **YES!** It is how we grow!

Parent - Child Responsibilities

Learners - It is the responsibility of each learner, not the facilitators to document and share the projects they are exploring with their families and others. It is also the responsibility of learners to contribute to the community by planning and sharing offerings and experiences.

Parents - Frequent conversations are the primary way parents can support their learners. As it has been stated, Cottonwood is a dynamic learning environment where a wide range of learning opportunities emerge everyday. As a parent, checking in on these opportunities daily and then discussing the choices your learner made to participate or not is the clearest way to understand and support your learner. Learners will have bi-weekly 30 minute meetings with a facilitator.

While we make time for a big share (Showcase) 2 times per year. We also recommend setting aside regular time to check in with your learner each week about the things they are pursuing and the way they are spending their time.

Care for our Space

Make it beautiful for the next person. If we all followed, this line of thought the world would be quite a magical place.

Cleaning is one of the basic agreements made by every learner at Cottonwood. It is mandatory and necessary. Every day we clean our space as a community. This act of resetting the activities of the day and creating a space as inviting as it was when you arrived is an important piece of being a contributing community member.

We create beautiful spaces and surround ourselves with intentional material because we value the physical space around us just as we value the people we surround ourselves with. It takes a village to keep our spaces inspiring.

Offsite Learning

We encourage learners to use the world as their classroom and trust that there is great value in giving learners the flexibility to spend time working in places around the community, at a parent's office, or from home. If learning offsite, the set of daily practices grounded in the cycle of learning should be fulfilled just as if you were at Cottonwood. Please fill out the "offsite learning form" on our website https://www.cottonwoodalc.org/forms-for-enrolled-families Password: **agile**

Mixed-Age Learning Environments

Cottonwood ALC embodies the belief that learning, just like life, should involve interactions with people of all ages. This means there is the potential for people ages 0 to 102 (or more) all to share space, resources, and conversation.

In a mixed age environment you are at once a learner and a teacher. The beauty of this age mixing is the deep connections and impacts people of diverse ages can have on one another. This also means that each of us is always in the spotlight and it is important to remember that you are always modeling behavior that supports our mission of mixed-age learning. What does this mean?

Language - Use thoughtful, descriptive language that is appropriate for people of all ages at all times.

Non-Violence - Cottonwood ALC commits to being a safe space for all. We are committed to living and teaching practices of non-violence. Playing guns, fake killing, violent games, and threats will not be tolerated in our community.

Mindful Technology Use - At Cottonwood, technology is always used with intention and as a tool. There may be rooms, spaces, or times that are deemed "tech free."

Physical Play - We often speak about 'outside' and 'inside' energy. When people are participating in physical play inside the center, it makes it very hard for focused work to go on and often ignites that same level of energy in the other learners. Again, remember that you are always modeling behavior for the learners around you. Keep physical play outside and non-violent.

Age Appropriate Discussions - In creating a community of open, accepting individuals, conversations will and should come up around all subjects. Please be aware that the place where discussions happen is very important. We trust the learners and facilitators to make their own judgements on the appropriateness of each discussion. If the subject of a conversation is not appropriate for learners of all ages or anyone around expresses discomfort, please find a space to have the discussion where you can close the door and have the conversation in private.

Field Days

While we encourage frequent use of the world as a classroom, Field Days are laboratories for learning and need to be treated as such. Branches who wish to opt out of the Field Day must complete an off-site learning form prior to the start of the Field Day.

We take advantage of the cultural and natural landscape around us. Field Days can be visits to sites around the state such as Sculpture in the Wild, Freezout Lake, sapphire mines or various ghost towns. Other Field Days may include service days such as helping out at the Animal Sanctuary, visiting a retirement home, or picking up garbage around town. Field Days are a critical part of our educational philosophy and learners should attend as many as physically possible. These are the days where memories are made, bonds created, adventures begin, and comfort

zones are challenged! Remember this is a program for adventurers and <u>we ask all learners to plan a minimum of one field day per year.</u>

Tools and Practices

Cottonwood Agile Learning Center is founded on the use of 'agile' tools for time management and intentional culture creation. When we speak about the tools of the center, we are talking about both physical tools and programs, as well as practices that allow us to live and learn successfully in community.

Tools

Some of the tools used by Cottonwood learners are described below. Facilitators work with learners to determine the planning and documentation process that works best for them. It can look different for each learner.

G Suite for Education - Each learner over the age of 8 at Cottonwood will receive a cottonwood email account. The Google suite is a powerful tool and we leverage it in many ways which eases communication between facilitators and learners.

Trello - Learners create a list of ideas, intentions, and plans in a Trello board that can be shared with others. This is a place where families can support their learners by adding ideas in when they come up. Learning happens everywhere and when curiosity strikes, Trello is a great tool for keeping track of all those ideas. Ideas from Trello can become challenges in Egodact.

Egodact - This is a new platform to us, developed by a group of learners in the Netherlands. Their program is called Agora and they have been kind enough to let us pilot the program here in the U.S. Egodact is a primary way a learner activates the cycle of learning. In the morning spawn point, learners will initiate "challenges" within the Egodact platform. They will use Egodact to document project progress, collect evidence, reflect, perform self-evaluations, and communicate with their spawn point facilitator and mentor.

Egodact was developed by a teenager in the Netherlands who attends a self-directed program. The app is designed to facilitate taking interests and ideas through the cycle of learning.

There are two main pieces to the Egodact program:

Challenge Monitor

The Challenge Monitor is a sort of upgrade to trello. Each day during spawn point, learners enter their intentions into the challenge monitor. These intentions are the basis for each challenge. A challenge is essentially a project and everything a learner pursues at Cottonwood will be in the form of a challenge. The challenge monitor prompts the learner to dive into each challenge. We will give an example because it may be easier to understand that way.

Preparation:

Describe the challenge in detail: I plan to create a video game from scratch.

Why are you doing this? I want to be a gamer when I grow up and the more I understand about video games, the better prepared I will be to do this. Also my friends and I love video games and it would be so cool if we could play one that I made.

This challenge will be finished when...I will be finished at showcase when I invite my friends and family to play that game I created.

I am working together with...I am working alone on this challenge but I will be excited to share it with my friends when finished and have them test it along they way. (This is the place where group challenges can take shape. Each learner will complete the challenge monitor independently even as they collaborate.)

Execution:

In the closing spawn point, learners will reflect on each challenge they pursued in the day. These reflections are called situation reports and together, they tell the story of your journey on this challenge from beginning to end.

What discoveries did you make? If you got frustrated or stuck, why? What are the next steps you will take? Are there more resources/supplies you need to continue progressing? Etc.

Footprint:

The footprint is the physical mark this challenge leaves behind. Here learners can include photographs, written documents, certificates, etc. When assembled,

individual footprints form the visible path of a learner's journey through each challenge.

Sources:

The sources section becomes the bibliography for each project. List the resources (websites, people, books etc.) used as you progress through each challenge.

Progress Monitor

The Progress Monitor is a powerful tool for self awareness based in the intentional development of Habits of Mind. A Habit of Mind is a pattern of intellectual behaviors that leads to productive actions. Learners who choose to use this tool will be continuously visiting the progress Monitor and should be supported by a parent at least one time per week as they self-assess. This assessment will be one point from which the learner connects with their mentor. It is the intent that learners at Cottonwood are always moving toward mastery of these Habits of Mind. Habits of Mind are based on the book of the same name by Bena Kallick and Art Costa. Follow the link below to see the Habits we have created for Cottonwood ALC.

[The Four Practices of Cottonwood ALC](#)

Band

Cottonwood uses BAND app for all our daily communications between staff and families. It is our tool for communication between all facets of our community. We will post any updates, communications and photos there. Each parent should become a member of the "Cottonwood Storefront 2021-2022" Band which can be accessed here…

https://band.us/n/a8ac54u3p159d

Once you register you will need to set up a profile. There are instructions on the community post page walking you through how to set up a profile. In an effort to build community and open communication, we ask that you include your learner's name and your phone number (visible to "anyone") in the profile. You can also find instructions to setting up your profile and other tips on our Band 101 and FAQ document here:

You must download and physically open the app each day to connect with this important part of the process. It is the expectation that all parents check Band daily.

Practices

Set the Day/Week - Each morning we meet briefly as a whole to create a map of the day(s) ahead. Learners, facilitators, and parents are all welcome to attend and add offerings to the calendar. Learners will then use this information to plan their days.

Spawn - Spawns are small mixed age groupings of learners. Spawn meet every morning and afternoon to connect, set intentions, and reflect at the end of the day.

Facilitator Check-ins - Learners will meet with a facilitator in a one on one session on a biweekly basis. These regularly scheduled meetings are meant to support the learner in receiving regular support and guidance throughout their self-directed journey.

Change-up Meetings - Our change-up meetings happen weekly. The purpose of Change-Up is to address issues affecting the larger community. If a particular conflict has a wide-reaching effect, it will likely come up in this meeting. This facilitates the whole community being attuned to the solution. The structure of Change-Up meetings iterates throughout the year(s), but the goal of community-caretaking through seeking solutions remains the same.

Community Mastery Board - The community mastery board is our venue for group awarenesses, both positive and negative. In our weekly Change Up meeting (required of all learners) we create a set of agreements in response to the changing needs of the program. Over time, these agreements become tenets of community. Each learner has an equal voice and opportunity to bring awareness to the entire community. This is done by writing up an awareness and placing it on the Community Mastery Board under the category "awarenesses". The awareness will be discussed at the next change up meeting and a response will be implemented. We come up with the implementation together. After a week of implementing the response, we revisit the issue and if the implementation is working, then we will all

begin practicing this response. If not, we create a new implementation to try for one week. Successful implementations will move from:

Implementing to Practicing to Mastered

*Awarenesses can be added digitally on the website:
https://www.cottonwoodalc.org/forms-for-enrolled-families Password: **agile**

Parent Forums - Monthly community parent meetings where families can come together to build community, share awarenesses, discuss chosen topics, hear program updates, and more. Parents can view the Community Mastery Board and add their own awarenesses under the 'forms for enrolled families section on our website.

https://www.cottonwoodalc.org/forms-for-enrolled-families Password: **agile**

Conflicts Between Peers - The Cottonwood ALC environment is highly social. Conflicts are common. Learners are asked to work address conflicts when they come up with a commitment to keeping the greater culture healthy. If they want help communicating, we encourage them to ask. They may ask a Facilitator or other learners to help mediate difficult conversations. Sometimes these mediations are formal, such as Peer Mediation. Sometimes they are informal and on the spot.

Peer Mediation - Each year, learners receive training in peer mediation and non-violent communication. They go through training at the beginning of the year (both formal and informal) and follow a mediation structure to help navigate conflicts between peers. There is often a Facilitator present during Peer Mediation, in case the learners need assistance moving through a difficult issue. Sometimes Peer Mediation is easy and quick. Sometimes it is long and can feel unfulfilling. We encourage both learners and peer mediators to stick with it in the later case. Living in a small community is no easy task, but learning how to care for self and others within a community requires consistency.

Peer Mediation - Peer mediation is the practice for resolving conflicts between learners. At Cottonwood we support one another in the development of strong communication skills. By talking honestly to each other not about each other, most conflicts are resolved directly by the learners themselves. When a learner has attempted to resolve the situation by communicating their needs to the person(s)

they are in conflict with unsuccessfully, then a peer will act as mediator in order to resolve the conflict. Steps to follow in order to call a peer mediation include:

1. Attempt to resolve the conflict by talking to the person(s) involved in a calm and clear manner.
2. Request the support of another learner in helping to resolve the conflict.
3. Request for Mediation

Peer Mediation Contract

I agree to:

- Remain quiet while others are speaking, and not interrupt
- Take notes if I want to remember something I want to say, instead of interrupting
- Keep my words free from swearing
- Listen to others
- Do my best to be a part of finding solutions for our conflict
- Tell the truth even if some of the truth might be embarrassing or hard
- Be open to being kind to others, especially if they are struggling with saying something they contributed to our conflict.
- Be open to accept kindness whenever I can

form courtesy of Brave Conversations LLC

Graduation Process

At the core of self-direction is self-knowledge. It is not up to the facilitators to "determine" that you are ready for graduation. It is up to <u>YOU</u>. Your graduation year at Cottonwood is an incredible opportunity to dive deep, to learn more about yourself than ever before, and to emerge with portfolio-worthy evidence of your awesomeness.

To graduate:

1. Declare your readiness and intention to graduate to the facilitators and directors at Cottonwood by submitting a letter of intent to your facilitators and the executive director.

2. Assemble your support team with whom you will hold regular (at least bi-monthly) meetings. Think hard about the team you choose. Who will

encourage but also hold you accountable? Who has the skill set that will be most beneficial to you?

3. Create a capstone project proposal. This will be your manifesto. Identify your support team and clearly state the project you intend to work on for your final year. Keep your statements clear but open to iteration, change in direction, and the sea change of revelation. When you think about this idea, it should be a sandwich of familiarity, excitement, uncertainty, and wonder. Push yourself to make this initial proposal grand but tangible. Take hold of the idea, but be open to where it could send you.

There are four parts to the graduation process at Cottonwood ALC. For some learners, all parts will be part of the larger capstone project. For others, these four pieces will become four distinct projects.

1. Self-Knowledge Challenge
2. Service Challenge
3. Professional Challenge
4. Self-Reliance Challenge

Full Graduation Process: [Cottonwood ALC Graduation Process](#)

Learner Conduct

The learning center aims to:

- Balance the freedom and responsibility of the individual with the needs of the group.
- Provide an environment where the young person will experience encouragement, affirmation, and community.
- Ensure for each learner's physical and psychological safety.
- Enable each learner to develop a high standard of moral integrity gained through growth in self-discipline.
- Help learners grow into mature, responsible adults.
- Maintain a high standard for learner behavior that reflects positively on self, family, learning center, and community.
- Nurture each learner with love, respect, and fairness.

The learning center expects each learner to:

- Treat others with dignity and respect.
- Treat themselves with that same respect.
- Respect both work and property of others and to bring only necessary materials to the center.
- Have consistent attendance and punctual arrival. In the event that a learner fails to observe the above expectations, the following notes describe the usual approach and procedures for working with the learner.

The learning center reserves the right to modify these procedures:

- In the event of minor misbehavior, learners and facilitators discuss the issue cooperatively to resolve the problem. At times an individual's minor misbehavior may be considered by the center community because of its impact on the life of the rest of the group.
- Chronic misbehavior is reported to parents by the facilitators and the Executive Director is informed. A parent/facilitator conference will be scheduled to discuss how to best support the child and the situation.
- Major misbehavior, especially that involving injurious behavior, is taken to the Executive Director. The Executive Director and parents, along with the facilitator(s), and learner, as appropriate, meet to resolve.
- In the event of major or chronic misbehavior a learner may be excluded from the program, suspended, or expelled. Cottonwood ALC expects full parental cooperation with the above policy. All rules apply before, during and after the program, and at all times on the center's sponsored outings.

Major Misbehavior
The learning center considers the following to be major misbehavior:
- Interference with the rights of others, including physical abuse (such as hitting, punching, kicking or biting), verbal abuse (such as teasing, taunting, threats or intimidation), bullying (such as physical aggression, social alienation, verbal aggression and intimidation)
- Damage to, abuse of, or stealing any center or personal property
- Possession, use, or sale of drugs listed in the current Federal Controlled Substances Act
- Possession, use, or sale of alcohol, tobacco substances, or inhalants

- Possession, use, or sale of weapons or explosives
- Use of obscene, vulgar, suggestive, or intimidating written or verbal language
- Repeated disruptive or uncooperative behavior
- Conduct committed off-campus and outside center hours that is illegal or negatively reflects on the learning center
- Misuse of computer/Internet/email privileges

Cottonwood ALC reserves the right to dismiss any learner at any time if in its sole judgment the learner's continued presence at the center is detrimental to themself, to others, or to the community as a whole.

Weapons Policy

No weapons of any sort – including play or pretend guns, knives, and similar items are permitted on our campuses, without the direct approval of the Executive Director. Active and Retired (in good standing) Law Enforcement Officers are exempt from this policy.

Unlawful Harassment Policy

Cottonwood ALC opposes and prohibits without qualification unlawful harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, marital status, sex, gender identification/expression, sexual orientation, or disability. Harassment is a form of unlawful discrimination as well as disrespectful behavior that threatens the safety and well-being of members of the center community.

Anti-Bullying Policy

Bullying is a form of dangerous and disrespectful behavior that will not be permitted or tolerated. Cottonwood ALC recognizes that learners should have a safe, orderly, civil and positive learning environment and that bullying has no place and will not be tolerated at the learning center.

Cottonwood ALC defines bullying as:

- *Bullying*: the repeated use by one or more learners of a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination thereof, directed at a target that:

  - Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target's property;
  - Places the target in reasonable fear of harm to himself or herself or of damage to his or her property;
  - Creates a hostile environment at the center for the targeted learner:
  - Infringes on the rights of the targeted learner at the center; or
  - Materially or substantially disrupts the educational process or the orderly operation of the center.

- Cyberbullying: Cyberbullying is bullying through the use of technology or electronic devices such as telephones, cell phones, computers, fax machines, and the Internet. It includes but is not limited to: email, instant messages, text messages, and Internet postings whether on a webpage, in a blog, or otherwise.

- Hostile Environment: A hostile environment is a situation in which bullying causes the learning environment to be permeated with intimidation, ridicule, or insult that is sufficiently severe or pervasive to alter the conditions of a learner's education.

- Retaliation: Retaliation is any form of intimidation, reprisal, or harassment directed against a learner who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses bullying, or has reliable information about bullying.

- Target: The individual against whom bullying, cyberbullying or retaliation has been perpetrated. Reporting Bullying If you feel a child is being bullied, please notify center personnel immediately. You will then meet with your child's guide and either our Executive Director to review your concerns before the center begins our investigation.

Care and Concern Process

In the event that a learner fails to observe the above expectations, the following notes describe the usual approach and procedures for working with the learner.

Grace and Courtesy amongst our student body is essential to our center environment. It is the mission of Cottonwood ALC to provide all our learners with a safe and productive social and academic environment. If a child is experiencing behavioral challenges, either the parents/legal guardians or the classroom facilitator may initiate the Care and Concern process. It is designed to help us work as a team to enhance and ensure the child's well-being.

** Phase One: Initial Care and Concern Discussion – This meeting will include the classroom facilitator, the Executive Director, the parents or legal guardians, and the student (when appropriate). The nature of the concern will be communicated, and a school and parent action plan will be determined by the involved parties.

** Phase Two: Continuing Care and Concern Discussion – These meetings will continue as long as all parties are in agreement that progress is being made, action plan items are being supported and followed, and placement at Cottonwood ALC remains appropriate.

** Phase Three: Final Care and Concern Discussion – Once the plan outcomes have been met and the concern has been resolved, the Care and Concern Process will be considered completed.

This process will enable us to respectfully and compassionately address and resolve concerns, while ensuring a vision-appropriate student body for all our students.

Legal Policies

Learning Center Safety
Cottonwood ALC requires certain boundaries to maintain safety for all center community members. The learning center may choose to bar a learner's attendance for a definite or indefinite period of time, including, but not limited to the following situations:
- Possession of a weapon or firearm on center grounds
- Having or using illegal drugs or alcohol on center grounds
- Threatening or engaging in physical violence

Violation of learner Agreements

Learners sign agreements as part of their enrollment/ re-enrollment process. Signing these agreements indicates their commitment to adhering to those expectations.

If a learner is not able to adhere to the learner Agreements, a Facilitator will initiate dialogue with the learner to get on the same page about unmet expectations. If the learner is not able to resolve the matter and recommit to the learner Agreements, the learner's parent/ guardian will be contacted and a family meeting will be set-up to discuss the next best action for the center and the family. The learning center retains the right to bar a learner's attendance for a definite or indefinite period of time if the learner is not able to consistently adhere to the learning center's basic learner Agreements.

Self-Directed Resources for Families

At Cottonwood, we believe the future of education looks local, community-focused, democratic, nature-inspired, and project/play-based. Our community learns based on the principles of choice and freedom, where kids are free to explore and create their own curriculum within the context of a supportive learning environment.

In agreeing to join Cottonwood as a family, you understand what Self-directed Education is by reviewing the following materials on it, supporting you to trust your learner (and selves!) in their journey at Cottonwood this year.

Self Directed Education Philosophy Foundational Resources:

https://www.self-directed.org/sde/
https://www.self-directed.org/sde/drives/
https://www.self-directed.org/sde/conditions/
https://www.self-directed.org/sde/why/

Read Alfie Kohn's "Unconditional Parenting," the most aligned book with our approach at Cottonwood ALC.
https://www.amazon.com/Unconditional-Parenting-Moving-Rewards-Punishments/dp/0743487486

Subscribe to Teacher Tom's Newsletter. Teacher Tom is a play-based, preschool educator. http://teachertomsblog.blogspot.com/

Listen to this podcast by Alfie Kohn, http://www.tiltparenting.com/2018/10/23/episode-131-alfie-kohn-on-why-children-thrive-when-we-practice-unconditional-parenting/