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## **Chapter 6**

# **ADMISSIONS AND PARENT EDUCATION**

One of the most exciting experiences in the life of a Waldorf School is to encounter the steady stream of children who find their way to the school, their class, and their teachers. The journey to the school seems to be through the most varied and interesting circumstances.

The process of Admissions is there as a helpful guide in making the choice of sending one's child to a Waldorf School as conscious as possible for the prospective parent, and for the school. A clear process also helps the teacher to receive the child into their class with knowledge and forethought so that the needs of the child can be met.

The circumstances and staff available in each school will determine who will carry out the different functions of the Admission's process. However, what is important is that the overall procedure has been covered with care and attention so that the class teacher and the full circle of colleagues can welcome the child into their care. It is not just the individual teacher but the faculty as a whole who together will carry the joys and difficulties that each destiny encounter brings to them.

### **Telephone Inquiries:**

After an initial exposure to the existence of the Waldorf School, prospective parents will in most cases make further inquiries over the telephone. This initial direct contact with the school is of great importance. It will establish a “warmth” connection between the school and the prospective parent. Have concise, consistent, clear information available. Be prepared to answer briefly what Waldorf Schools are all about, what grades you have, the cost, the length of the day, etc. Be interested, patient and friendly, establish a sense that the school is accessible and available for further exploration. Inform the parent of upcoming events at the school that might be of interest to them, and invite them to call back if they have further questions. Keep a card file on all inquiries for further reference, follow up calls, and mailing list of school events. Include the name, address, telephone number, name and birth date of the child, what grade they are interested, and what year they are seeking admission. They should also be asked how they heard about the Waldorf School.

### **Information Packet:**

After the initial telephone contact, send out a packet including your school brochure, a letter detailing the admission’s process with financial information, the latest school newsletter, a calendar of events and any other information on Waldorf Education that might be helpful to prospective parents.

### **Informal Interview and Tour:**

If the initial contact and packet of information have piqued the interest of prospective parents they will call back and at this point an informal interview and tour of the school can be arranged. This initial visit is best conducted without the child. This visit provides an opportunity for both prospective parents and for the school to get a sense for each other. Topics to cover might be first to get a picture of how they heard of your school, and how much they already know about Waldorf Education and what educational values and environment they hope to find for their child. If parents are new to Waldorf Education, the admissions person will explain briefly the history, educational philosophy, and aims of Waldorf Education, covering topics such as the role of the Class Teacher, the threefold nature of the child and how it relates to the change in consciousness and is reflected in the curriculum. Also give a brief picture of the history of your

own particular school, school organization, school community and parent participation. Allow for many questions; the best conversation is if you can find a common point of interest and engage the prospective parent in a good discussion. Also get a brief description of their child, his/her educational history, and family history. While touring the school in progress, you have a great opportunity to talk about the pedagogical method in praxis, from grade to grade. The mood and social experience of the teachers and children at work speak volumes and make the visit to the school truly enjoyable and memorable to most visitors.

**Application:**

At the conclusion of a mutually successful admission interview the prospective parents would send in their application along with school records and a non-refundable application fee. The application form should provide basic information such as the child's name, birth date, sex, year and grade for admission, parents' names, address, phone (home and place of work) and schools previously attended. It is also helpful to know of siblings, their birth dates and school of attendance. It is wise to ask the parents, as part of the application process, to write a biography of their child including developmental and health history and any unusual circumstances in the family history.

Upon receipt of the application and records, the admissions person would meet with the class teacher to give a picture of the child and family, and if the teacher wants to proceed with the process the family will be invited back for an interview with the class teacher. Now the child would be invited to visit the classroom and be observed by the teacher (given that the child is in a grade higher than the 1st grade).

**Class teacher Interview:**

Before the meeting with the prospective family the teacher would have read through the application and school records, and familiarized him/herself with the general situation of the child. The interview would, in general, give a fuller picture of the child's developmental, health and educational history, a sense for the family life, history, and values. It would also give a clear picture of the child's relative skill level, an evaluation of the child's spatial orientation and dominance. Record comments and observations. Also, share with the parents the areas of

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concern in one's own class and answer questions pertaining to curriculum and school life.

The format of the class teacher interview will have to reflect the age of the child. Most of the new children entering each year come through the kindergartens which places a big workload and responsibility on the kindergarten teachers who work with these new families in preparation for a first grade commitment.

Some helpful guidelines for admission interviews for the different age groups are as follows:

### **Preschool and Kindergarten —**

1. Give a description of the child from birth to change of teeth according to the Waldorf theory of child development. The importance of imitation, play, rhythm and physical environment for the young child, and how these elements are nurtured in the daily and weekly activities in the kindergarten.
2. Get a full picture of the child's biography and social experience prior to the kindergarten.
3. Engage the child in play and conversation to determine development in both areas.
4. Have the child draw a picture.

### **First Grade —**

Acceptance of kindergarten children into first grade should not be automatic, but require a new application form from all incoming families. This gives both the school and the parents a chance to look at the connection they have to each other, and the readiness of the child for the first grade experience. Many schools do not yet have the first grade teacher available at that time of year to conduct all the admission interviews. The kindergarten teachers along with one class teacher would meet with the children and prospective parents. In addition to the biographical and family information on the child the teachers

would observe the child in relationship to:

**language development:** clarity recognized in child's speech and thought patterns; child able to engage in conversation with the teacher?

**physical coordination and spatial orientation:**

How does the child walk, posture in standing and sitting, gestures in handling objects? How are the handshake and eye contact?

Determine left/right dominance in eye, ear, hand, and foot. Can the child follow simple series of instructions, clap rhythms in sequence, hop, run, skip, and walk backward?

**artistic expression:** Can the child draw a recognizable picture, and perhaps, a simple form drawing? Can the child sing, match a tone?

**other:** How is the child's relationship to his/her parents and other adults? Can the child leave the parent to go with the teacher? Is the child free from wetting or soiling during the day?

## **Grade 2**

1. Do all the above.

**reading:** able to recognize letters,

**arithmetic:** able to solve simple problems with the four processes

**writing:** able to write simple words

**physical coordination:** able to recognize left and right

**artistic expression:** able to draw simple form drawings and line rhythms

## **Grade 3**

1. Do all the above.

**reading:** able to do some reading — for fluidity and comprehension

**arithmetic:** Some mastery over the times tables; can add with carrying, and subtract with borrowing

**writing:** able to do simple writing, a short dictation

**physical coordination:** able to jump rope, hopscotch, and rhythm exercises

**artistic expression:** can do mirror form drawing

## **Grade 4**

1. Do all the above.

**reading:** able to read a simple text and retell it, has some familiarity with parts of speech and punctuation

**arithmetic:** able to carry in addition and multiplication, single digit division, mental arithmetic, familiarity with measurement, word problems

**writing:** able to write a brief composition on a subject related to an experience they have had

**artistic expression:** able to draw a picture of a balanced human being and a form drawing

## **Grades 5 & 6**

1. All of the above with more complex content

**reading:** able to read fluidly with good expression; good comprehension of material read.

**arithmetic:** able to work with fractions using all four procedures

**writing:** composition and dictation to include basic fourth/fifth grade words

**artistic expression:** able to draw a picture of a balanced human being and a more complex form drawing

## **Grades 7 & 8**

Children entering the 7th and 8th grade require careful examination. They should be asked to demonstrate their abilities in reading, arithmetic, writing, physical coordination, and artistic expression asked in the lower grades. The class teacher should evaluate carefully if the student can fit in with his/her class of children. The social balance of the class needs to be considered and the teacher should be aware what this new child will bring with him or her when they enter the class. Often times a teacher will find a student who seems to fit in as if they had always been there.

It is a good practice that the class teacher and a special subject teacher, especially competent at dealing with the Middle School, participate together in the student evaluation, and that the parents' commitment to work with the school and continue with Waldorf education be affirmed.

If the student has not had foreign languages or work with musical instruments, extra tutorial support will be needed in the beginning to help the child in the transition period.

### **Admitting a High School Student:**

Prior to interviewing a high school candidate, the admissions person has the advantage of having school records, recommendations, an application form from the parents, an application form from the student that should include an essay, a piece of artistic work and the student's views on many issues.

Usually the family will come together to an interview. The first part of the process could include a general presentation of the Waldorf High School and the expectations of your particular school. This should be delivered in an upbeat friendly manner interspersed with dialogue with both the parents and the student. Next, the interviewer could give the prospective student some reading material and ask him/her to wait outside the office for a short while.

Alone with the parents the interviewer can probe more deeply into the student's background, gifts, difficulties, relationship with both peers and parents,

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with authority in general and finally reach an understanding about what the parents are looking for in their choice of High School. Then the parents are given reading material and asked to wait outside and the student is met alone. During this time the interviewer can ask frank questions about the student's personal interests, academic motivation, extracurricular pursuits, relationships with parents, peers and former teachers and his/her view on drugs and alcohol. The interviewer should be very clear on explaining the school's policies and give the student the understanding that he/she is free to make choices. If the Waldorf School is their choice then it is understood that a relationship of trust is established with regard to the school's rules. It is important with an adolescent to empower them to want to make the right choice for themselves in cooperation with their parents.

### **Acceptance:**

After completion of the class teacher interview and classroom visit, the Admissions Director and class teacher would bring a description of the child to the College of Teachers who would then accept the child as a group into the school. A letter indicating acceptance or not will then be sent by the school to the parents. The acceptance letter would include an enrollment agreement, to be signed by the parent and returned to the school with a non-refundable deposit, which would ensure that a place will be held for the child.

### **Enrollment Packet:**

In addition to the enrollment agreement the full enrollment of the child would also include:

- a. tuition and payment plans for the parent to choose and any other financial information relative to your school
  - b. health assessment form for their family doctor to fill out about the child
  - c. immunization waiver form if the parents do not wish the child to be immunized
  - d. emergency addresses and phone numbers in case of emergency
- [All of the above must be returned to the office prior to the first day of school.]
- e. Parent Handbook

### **Acceptance of Children with Special Needs:**



If during the class teacher assessment it becomes apparent that the child would require educational support beyond what the class teacher can offer, a second interview and assessment would take place with the school's care-group, who together with the school physician would outline the appropriate therapeutic and educational support for the child. If the school agrees that the child might benefit from this program, a conditional acceptance would be offered, with a trial period and reassessment of the child's progress after a period of time. The class teacher would confer with the care group, and keep written records of all agreements and expectations with the parents.

**Re-enrollment:**

The other process in the life of admissions in a school is the yearly re-enrollment of the present student body for the following school year.

The timing of this process is closely linked with the setting of the budget and the determination of tuitions for the coming academic year. Class teachers can get a sense from their class parents during the mid-year parent/teacher conferences what their intentions are for the following school year. This estimation will give the Board of Trustees a preliminary picture of what enrollment numbers might look like. However, it is always an act of faith to set a budget based on projected enrollment, because the reality of each classes' enrollment will not be certain until the first day of the new school year!

As soon as tuitions are set a new enrollment agreement is sent out to all families, and returned after 2-3 weeks along with a non-refundable deposit of around 8% of the full tuition costs. This deposit will secure a place for the child in the class and will give the school a picture of the commitment for the coming school year. The College and Board should receive monthly up-dates on the enrollment picture, based on children re-enrolled and new applications received in each grade. Families applying for tuition assistance will be re-enrolled pending a satisfactory agreement being reached on tuition assistance, and a new agreement will be issued when the financial aid process has been completed.

**Exit Interviews:**

To include an exit process, in the life of the school, where we strive towards parting with families with as much consciousness as we receive them, is

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important. This process is called the exit interview and is intended to bring clarity and conclusion to the relationship. It is a time to tie up loose ends and to cultivate positive feelings.

The parents will be informed in the cover letter with the new enrollment agreement that if they are not re-enrolling their child they should contact the class teacher personally and inform the school administration in writing. A letter will be sent by the school confirming receipt of such a notice and that a place will not be held for the child. Each family with a child leaving will be asked to meet with a designated faculty member for an exit interview. The College Chairperson or another College member will also participate in the exit interview where there is a possibility of bad feelings or stormy questions around withdrawal.

The interviewer should record, in a friendly manner, the parent's views about:

1. a brief history of the child's tenure at the school; the year entered, teachers, significant absences.
2. How has the child progressed, where is he/she in comparison with peers, what are his/her strengths and weaknesses?
3. The family's relationship with the school, how they have experienced the school's strengths and weaknesses.
4. Their reason for leaving the school.
5. Future plans for the student's education; where will he/she go and what kind of a school will he/she attend?

An outline of these and other questions should be given to the parents in advance and the notes of the interview should be kept as a record of the College, who must be informed of the interview.

### **New Parent Orientation:**

At the beginning of the new school year all new parents are cordially invited to attend a parent orientation. This is an opportunity to get a better picture of what life as a parent in a Waldorf School is all about. Faculty and office staff give an overview of the organizational life of the school, who is in charge of what, where to bring questions and concerns and how to participate in the life of the school. Representatives of the parents would also share the activities carried by

the parent body such as the Christmas Fair, the Auction, and other social and fund raising events. After the children have been welcomed into their classes it is also important to welcome the parents into the community of adults, who all make their contributions in one way or another to make the Waldorf School possible.

### **Parent Education and Outreach:**

In most cases when prospective parents bring their children to a Waldorf School it is out of a feeling that this educational approach is right for their child. An on-going parent educational program serves the purpose of deepening their understanding of the educational aims of Waldorf Education. Parents must be nourished and sustained in order to have the stamina to make it through many years of financial and moral support that they will give to their particular school.

The most immediate format available would be the regularly scheduled **class evenings** where the class teacher gives an overview of child development and the curriculum for that year. Special teachers are invited to these evenings to share examples of work done with the children in that class. It is also an opportunity for parents to get a taste of the artistic activities that the children engage in through exercises in painting, modeling, eurythmy, and speech.

Other occasions throughout the school year that help build a sense of joy and school community in the educational experience are: **class plays, school assemblies, musical evenings and all festival celebrations. Study groups, parenting workshops, Anthroposophical Core Courses, and a lending library** are essentials for those parents who want to probe deeper.

In addition to these in-house events, a yearly schedule of public events such as a **winter lecture series, workshops, open houses and exhibits** serve a twofold purpose of both attracting new enrollment and interest in the school and offering the parent body rich and stimulating events throughout the year.

An **enrollment committee** consisting of both parents and teachers has a vital role in helping to organize the calendar of public events. A more informal way of introducing the school to prospective parents is to invite them to an **Enrollment tea**, where a teacher and host family would be available to answer

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questions and share their experiences in a Waldorf School both from the teachers' and the parents' perspective.

Organizations within the local community like the Lions, the Rotary, the Real Estate companies and the public libraries usually appreciate having a speaker and/or a display of the children's work. A well-planned program utilizing the teachers in a fair balanced manner can make your school known throughout your local community and help prospective parents become aware of Waldorf Education as a strong and viable educational choice for their children.