

PARENT GUIDELINES

The Little Oak Learning Curriculum is for children up to the age of five. It is rooted in a fundamental belief in play based and child centred learning. It presents a core set of story and nature centred ideas upon which families and children can base their investigations, their explorations, their play and their learning.

Each child, like all of us, is on their own journey of learning about the world and how to connect with it. As a family you will adapt, change and develop the inspirations and ideas here, to provide your child with the best experiences.

The Winter Curriculum is aimed predominantly at early learners. Extension activities where and when necessary will grow from the child's existing knowledge. The curriculum has been designed as a tool for you to develop your own rhythm which weaves through your family life. Here you will find a collection of ideas and inspirations from which you can build a rhythm and environment which suits the needs of your child and family.

At its heart The Little Oak Learning is a stepping stone in building a rhythm full of learning, love and life, that holds and nurtures your family as you move through this season together.

How to use this curriculum

The curriculum is made up of three documents:

- Parent Guide (to be printed on paper)
- Stories and Resources (to be printed on cardstock)
- Planning (to be printed on paper)

The entire annual curriculum is split into four seasons and this season is WINTER.

Each season is made up of 6 two week units, lasting for twelve weeks, or roughly three months.

In the Winter Curriculum the units are:

- Hibernate
- Darkness & Light
- Celebrate
- Decorate
- Snow & Frost
- Warmth

Within each unit you will find:

- 2 weekly plans
- 10 daily plans
- An original story on story telling page
- Story background
- Story puppets
- Songs, rhymes and finger plays
- Nature walk activities
- Reflection activities
- Weekly art and craft activities
- Weekly Recipes
- Purposeful work ideas.

The weekly plans are your guide. You can use these as a schedule for how you spend your week or you can use the blank planning sheets to use the activities you wish.

The days are organised into a rhythm of

- Circle time (Story and Songs)
- Nature walk
- Reflection Activity
- Hands and Heart (Art and Craft, Recipe or Handwork)
- Purposeful Work

You can find a rhythm that works for you with your family. You may start by choosing only some of these activities and bringing them into your daily rhythm. You may not be able to take a nature walk every day, but able to do Circle Time each day. You can pick and choose and find something that works for you. There are a lot of activities within this curriculum and I advise taking it slowly, at a pace that works for you. Building up your rhythm slowly will be much more beneficial than trying to fit everything in and feeling overwhelmed. That is not to say that all of these things can't be done in each day, but you may already have certain commitments and change takes time.

The beauty of rhythm

When we live with our own sense of rhythm, we live naturally and with ease. Rhythm already surrounds us; another year older, the seasons change, we turn the page on the calendar, day becomes night, night becomes day, we go from morning to afternoon to evening. The rhythm is already there, all we have to do is notice it and flow with it. How do we do that? Simple acts which recognise those changes of time - rituals, traditions, celebrations, actions, on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly cycle.

Children are still very much in tune with these natural cycles. They are deeply rooted in the rhythm of life. It is our role to provide them with security and comfort and a sense of flow as they move through their days, weeks and months. Children are not the only ones who benefit and feel a sense of security from such flow. Adults too will find that adding these

simple acts to the days, months and years, will centre them, ground them and leave them with a sense of gratitude and fulfilment.

Seasons

The Little Oak Learning Curriculum recognises each season and their equal importance. The activities within each curriculum are celebrations of the season and how our lives change during each. The Darkness and Light Unit is designed to be done over a time when you may locally have a lantern procession. Celebrate Unit has been kept very open so could be used at Christmas, Solstice or any other winter time celebrations you may have.

Weeks

Each week the unit is a celebration of the season and what we see at that time. The creatures we see during the season are those which appear in the stories. We have weekly activities, such as every Monday is bread making.

Days

At a young age day and night is the rhythm children recognise most. They are able to have a strong sense of this flowing rhythm of getting up each day, and going to bed each evening. It is up to us to create rhythm in between these times. We create 'anchors' throughout the day which give children (and us) a sense of what's happening, where we are up to in the day and what will be happening next. Meal times are three anchors throughout the day which happen anyway (we all need to eat), and so can become a key part of the daily rhythm. In the Little Oak Learning Curriculum we have added a Circle Time, Nature Walk, Reflection Activity, Hands and Heart Activity, and Purposeful Work as possible ways for your day to flow.

Flexibility and Planning

You don't need to use all of these as part of your family rhythm. If you are new to the idea of a family rhythm you can start slow. You could try having Circle Time each morning, followed by a Nature Walk before lunch. You may then wish to keep all afternoons free as you find your own rhythm. You could add a daily Reflection activity or a twice weekly Hands and Heart activity, as you feel ready to add more.

Be kind with yourself and your expectations. It's helpful to have a vision of how you want your time with your young child to look, but only when you are kind with yourself and taking it at a pace that works for you.

Modelling

Within many of the activities 'modelling' is mentioned. All children learn by watching the adults around them. Modelling is simply being mindful of this and doing the things we want

our children to learn to do. Whether that is taking a moment to speak about our gratitude each day, going about our house jobs with a sense of pride, or building up our vocabulary when talking about stories, everything we do is a model to our children. This is the main way that children learn and taking time to notice how we are doing things ourselves is the best way we can spend energy when it comes to caring about how our young children are learning.

Circle Time

Creating a Space

When telling stories I encourage you to create a calm and quiet space. This may just be the centre of a living room floor, or otherwise a favourite chair, a cosy kitchen corner or a snugly bed. The space can be made cosy with blankets cushions etc. If you are telling the story to more than one child, make sure everyone can see by sitting in a circle. Choose a space which will be easy to return to each day and which will be known as the space where circle time happens. It helps to have minimal distraction in the space. This will support you and your child in focusing and being present.

Telling Stories

Storytelling can be a little daunting when we haven't done it before. However, we tell stories every day without even realising it. We tell stories to strangers, to our friends, our family and our children. Storytelling is how we all connect, how we make sense of the world, and it's no different for children. Children love to be told stories because it helps them to navigate situations, understand relationships, time, situations and emotions.

The stories we tell children in their early childhood are the foundations for their later reading and writing skills. By listening to stories children learn about such things as settings, characters, story order, narrative, as well as emotions, 'right and wrong', kindness and empathy, imagination and relationships. Children (and adults) use stories to make sense of what is happening in their world. On listening to a story they are able to reflect and connect situations with their own lives.

Puppetry

Simple puppetry has been chosen for the storytelling in this curriculum as it gives children more flexibility in what they take from the story. Unlike a television programme or some books the puppets provide a softer form of storytelling allowing children to go as deep into the story as their inner self wishes. Children are able to read into the story what they wish, rather than being given a lot of information, some of which they may not feel ready for. This kind of story telling gives the child space to use their imagination. It enables the child's imagination to be flexible and to expand as they grow.

Just One Story

One story has been chosen to be told each day for two weeks. This may seem like a long time but children will benefit from having repetition and time to explore the story within. You can simply tell the story and continue with the circle time, or you can use some of the prompts provided in the weekly plans to 'extend' the story if you wish. If your child seems content with simply listening to the story then allow them to just take it in, without questioning. They will still be learning, within.

Using a Gentle Voice

We can support this form of storytelling by telling stories in a calm voice with gentle intonation. This also gives the child freedom to use their imagination and go inwards to interpret the story how they wish, rather than hearing the adult's interpretation.

Telling Stories from Heart

Learning stories by heart gives us the freedom to focus on our children and moving the puppets as we tell the story, rather than trying to remember what happens next and the wording. When learning a new story to tell we can write some very simple prompts on a card to glance down at whilst telling the story the first few times. After a few days you will know the story by heart and will begin to take joy in telling it.

Focus

On the Planning each Unit has a focus during story time. Each focus has been chosen to support and develop children's early literacy skills such as speaking and understanding which will later support their early reading and writing skills. For example, if your child is able to talk about the characters in a story this will support them when they are reading story books and later when they are writing stories. If your child is still very young (under two) it is best to focus on just taking time together to tell the story and not push further with questions and prompts. Your child will be learning so much by listening to the stories and interpreting them. If your child is older you can extend story time by asking some of the suggested questions. These 'focuses' can be used in your time together outside of circle time. For example, if the focus is 'who questions', you may wish to keep this in mind for the two weeks and naturally slip 'who questions' into everyday life.

Questions

Questions and conversation starters have been given within the story planning. These have been given to prompt discussions and develop language skills. We can support our children in developing rich language which will later support their reading and writing. Children must

first gain a thorough understanding of language and all its joys, challenges and complexities before trying to learn to read and write. You can use the questions and conversation starters as prompts. There is no right or wrong answer to these questions. These focus questions are designed only as prompts for an open conversation between the adult and children present. They are designed to be used as naturally as possible, within conversations. We can give our child space to speak and feel listened to by pausing before and after we say something to give them a moment to ponder and think about what they want to say in response.

Songs, rhymes and poems

Outside the comfort zone is where the magic happens.

Learning songs and singing them can feel daunting for some. Like drawing and painting, singing is not in everyone's comfort zones. Children do not notice if adults are singing in tune, just like they don't notice if our drawing of a caterpillar is anatomically correct. Children are creative beings for the joy of it and they expect the same from us. This is why you will find my out of tune song videos on the website. It is only when children see adults expressing feelings of shame around their own creativity, that children learn perhaps they too should be feeling some embarrassment. Reaching back into our inner childhood we can let out a joyful song and paint a messy picture, and more often than not we remember it's really quite fun.

Choose songs that you feel comfortable with.

I've provided a selection of songs, rhymes and poems to enjoy together over the season. You can watch the videos on the website to learn any songs you wish to learn. I'd recommend starting with something you feel comfortable with, or possibly even already know, such as Incey Wincey Spider, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. This will help to build your confidence as you incorporate circle time into your daily rhythm. You may then add another song for the week ahead, each day singing one you already know and the new song you have learnt. You'll build up your repertoire of songs over the season and when the season comes again next year you and your child will have songs you already know.

Learning songs

Whilst teaching I have learnt many new songs and I have always found the best way to learn them is by ear, rather than sight. I record the songs (or watch videos of them being performed) and pause after each line, repeating the line. I do this through a whole song until I begin to learn it. Only then will I write the words to help jog my memory when I am singing during circle time. Cards are provided with the season's songs, rhymes and poems on each. Use these as a prompt to support yourself during circle time. Children are never judging us. Only we are judging ourselves. Feel at ease in the love of the children you are

with, and watch how together you will grow to love the songs and stories during your circle time. In the weekly plans I have provided suggestions for the order of incorporating songs, rhymes and poems into your circle time. These are just suggestions and I recommend doing what makes you feel at ease and comfortable. As your confidence builds so will your song library. It is also recommended that you choose songs which reflect the seasonal highlights.

Seasonal Choices

Songs, Rhymes and Poems have been chosen to highlight and reflect the current season. Choose songs based on what is happening in your area at the time. For example, sing a song about bees once the bees start coming out and being busy, or about flowers once the flowers are showing.

Nature Walk

Regularity

As we journey through the seasons the simplest place to observe changes is in nature. This may be your back garden, a local park, a local nature reserve or natural space such as a woodland, beach or meadow. Make the most of what you have nearby. You may not be able to visit a natural place every day. Not everyone has a back garden or lives near to a park. If you are not able to visit every day make it a priority to go at least once or twice a week.

By visiting a natural space regularly, through each season, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of nature, living things and our environment. We build empathy and an understanding of how we effect the environment. Nature provides us with a rhythm and a flow as we are carried through each season.

Through the units many of the activities relate to the unit topic such as identifying flowers, butterflies and pond life. Read through the curriculum well before it is time to start using it and consider any adaptations you wish to make, such as, during the pond life unit, is there a local body of water near to where you live? Do you live near the beach? Can you adapt the activities to work for the water you have nearby.

Tools

Many of the activities encourage the use of nature study tools and books such as binoculars, magnifying glasses, field guides and identification cards. Your child can learn how to use these things at an early age to later support them in their nature study. Of course if your child is simply connected to a moment, using her eyes to look closely at the details of a leaf, there is no need to give her a magnifying glass. We can allow our children to be in the moment with nature, and when the moment is right we can introduce study books and tools.

Reflection

Reflection time has been planned as a time to teach children how to be in the present moment, meditate, and be still within their own body and mind. We use breath, movement and natural objects as tools for focus within these activities. These skills will support children when they find themselves in moments of overwhelm. These activities have been designed to be done alongside your time out in nature. Many of the activities include looking, listening and touching nature.

Spot sitting

Spot sitting is the act of returning to the exact same place in nature and sitting, being present, and noticing our surroundings. The beauty in this activity is that as the view changes slightly with each week and season we watch a landscape altering, the sky looks different from when we last sat there, the light is different, more leaves have grown on a nearby bush, a few flowers have come into bloom. The natural world is constantly growing and changing, and dying and resting, and growing again and all we need to do is sit in the same spot each week to notice this happening before our very eyes.

Hands and Heart

Recipes

The rhythm we create will flow between home and outside. We have activities for inside the home and for outside the home. Children will feel a sense of rhythm between being outside and inside. Twelve Recipes have been included to give you activities inside the home. Meal times are three anchors within the day and meal preparation can also become a part of the rhythm. Children can help with meal preparation from a young age with ripping, mixing, pouring, and as they get a little older chopping (with age appropriate tools).

Art Activities

Each week you will have an Art Activity card in the curriculum. The activities relate to the unit theme and usually create an item which you can decorate your home with. Creativity is an important aspect of children's development and gives them tools for expressing themselves, communicating, exploring and developing ideas and using their imagination.

Drawing and Painting

Each week an idea is given for a drawing or painting activity. This is a chance for your child to practice painting with some adult guidance. If this is the only time that they paint each

week then give them the freedom to paint as they wish, rather than working on the chosen unit related idea. If your child has more opportunity for painting than once a week then you could experiment with painting the unit related idea.

Purposeful Work

The practise of allowing our children to take part in the daily chores of the household allows them a sense of community, family and belonging.

You may choose to simply give your child one job that they do every day that week, such as sweeping under the table or setting out the plates at lunch and dinner. Or you can have a different job each day for your child, depending on the routine of your household. Within the daily and weekly planning I have provided a different job most days to give variety and ideas. However I suggest that if your child has a job they particularly enjoy doing, then allow them to do that each day for the week. If they grow tired of it you can teach them how to do a different job suggested in the curriculum.

Learning a Job

You can support your child in learning the job by first showing them how to do it, then allowing them to help you do the job, then letting them do the job as you watch, then allowing them to independently do the job. There will be some jobs which your child may do alongside you such as sweeping, jobs your child will learn to do independently such as dusting or folding napkins, and jobs you will do together such as preparing snacks. At a very young age you will be able to 'do jobs' alongside each other such as sweeping, dusting, folding clothes. At such a young age your child may not be able to provide a lot of help in getting the task 'done', however they will feel involved, feel as though they are contributing and perhaps most importantly, feel a part of the family community. At this stage (under two) you can give your child a duster as you dust, or a small dustpan and brush as you sweep. Children love to have their own tools and to mimic the work of their adults.

Children are never too young to learn about helping and contributing to the family way of life. Tidying away before getting more toys out is a great example. If you set that expectation as a normal part of daily life then children will know no different and learn to tidy with you. With very young children we can tidy up toys by putting them away in a basket or box. Young children quickly learn which toys belong in which box, as long as there aren't too many toys and boxes. Rather than nagging, or asking, we can simply sing a song as we tidy and children will know that it is now time to tidy.

Modelling as an adult

As adults we can role model to children how we go about purposeful work in our home. If we go about our daily work as though it is something we simply take pleasure in, then that is what our children will learn about housework. However if it is something we rush and seem to want to have over and done with then our children will learn that purposeful work is not something to enjoy. Purposeful work can become a part of daily rhythm, something that we put time aside for each day, rather than squeezing in and doing quickly when we have a moment. Children do not think of tidying and purposeful work as something to be avoided, unless their adults do. It's worth taking

time to reflect on our own attitude to household tasks and whether we can create space and time to make these tasks a time for our children to enjoy.

A note about faith

When creating your own family rhythm you have the freedom and flexibility to include all that is of most importance to you. You may wish to alter some of the activities to bring faith into the curriculum. Some ways you could do this are during Reflection Time, such as when the activity is one of gratitude you may wish to give thanks to your God. I recommend keeping some of the Reflection time as a time of presence and meditation. You may wish to add prayer or other activities alongside this time.

A note from me!

I hope that these short guidelines have brought you confidence as you embark on your Little Oak Learning journey. I look forward to hearing about how the curriculum works for you, what you enjoy most and any ideas you have.

With Warmest Wishes,

Jill Wignall

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