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What do the Nine Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood look like in the Home?

Megan Rose Wilson, Waldorf Teacher, Mentor & Founder

When we ask about how education is structured, we often refer to the 'Curriculum,' but the underlying philosophy behind Waldorf Early Childhood Education is that the heart of the curriculum, Young children absorb their environment, and their environment shapes them.

What makes a "Waldorf" program different from other early childhood education experiences, and if we would like to provide a "Waldorf" experience for our own children in our homes, how might we do it? One of the most essential parts of a Waldorf environment is the rhythm, The caregiver creates a physical environment and an atmosphere. Through their own inner work, gestures, attitude and approach, Warmth, Balance and these experiences of an environment and caregiver profoundly affected in Child's future and life. Their habits, predispositions and wellbeing.

Seven Principles, the current Waldorf Early Childhood Coordinator, mentor, advisor and retired Waldorf teacher outlines "The Nine Essentials of Waldorf Early Childhood Education" in a series of the same title. They are:

❤️ Love and warmth

This is a transformative element - love and warmth are the first thing that you can children that wind up grow, Focused and develop towards their human potential.

Young children learn by imitating everything they see, touch and feel. As caregivers, our gestures, our tone of voice, how we connect with other people, and even how we handle boundaries are all absorbed by the young child. We create a warm, nourishing environment and consider how we speak and walk, we are creating a foundation and strategies for our children to experience, empathy, self-love and Divine connection.

Love and Warmth in the Physical Environment

- Colours, rhythms, stories and liturgically, especially from a child's home culture, traditions or language
- warm natural lighting, candles, windows, and lamps
- Physical spaces are dressed in layers and seasons, weaving tales in the Winter and wood stocks in the Summer
- providing warming foods like soups, teas, stews, congees or porridge
- 🍞 🧈 working in animal and plant bakes with love and care
- 🌷 🌻 changing of a parent and child bringing in a child's vision in pleasant
- 🍎 🍐 blackberry, warm Gardens and fruit water bottles in winter

Love and Warmth in Spirit or Energetically

- 🌷 physical touch, hugs, cuddles, sitting in laps, having carried
- 🌷 acceptance of caregiver modeling, in the community for kids and support others
- 🌷 prayers, blessings or other examples of connecting with gratitude and/or something bigger than ourselves for our children to see and relate
- 🌷 seasonal festival work in the home with the adult having an underlying connection with the spiritual significance of the festival
- 🌷 needs of affirmation, gratitude and love
- 🌷 holding loving boundaries with children that support their development

🌱 Care for the environment and nourishment for the senses

Our physical environment is everything around us that our senses can perceive. According to Steiner this also includes our artistic sense of the environment. Because young children are highly sensitive and still developing, we minimize how we shape our homes and classrooms, both inside and outdoors is of utmost importance.

The "temporal environment" (Steiner) is also carefully crafted to support the growing child, strong rhythms and routines are followed so that the children experience a breathing in and out of their days, weeks and seasons.

Tending to a Child's Environment with Conscious Care can look like:

- 🍎 🍐 🍇 🍓 ripe ones made of natural materials that were once enriched by sunlight, rain (tears), shells, wood, silk, cotton
- 🌷 everything in the home and classroom has it's place and is put back in order at the end of the day for ease beginning the next day.
- 🌷 plants being life and 'where energy' to the environment and need to be cared for
- 🌷 a calm, natural background and home animals or pets are found in the home and equipped to care for and love
- 🌷 the daily daily rhythm is established to anchor the young child who does not perceive time in the same way as adult does.
- 🌷 objects like balancing beans, bright plants, balance towards or their stories are found inside and outside so that children can always grow more settle, balance and coordination
- 🌷 opportunities for observing, stamping, hopping, jumping, rolling, clapping, running and skipping can be found in outdoor play and in morning circles helping to strengthen coordination, balance and cross-lateral movement
- 🌷 🌷 stories, songs, rhythms, poems and gestures are carefully chosen inspired by the seasons, archetypes and home or classroom cultural diversity
- 🌷 🌷 Nature Tables are carefully tended and a blessing of gratitude is said before eating creating a sense of ritual, order and wonder.
- 🌷 seasonal flowers or plants adorn the home or classroom bringing seasonal beauty and appreciation inside
- 🌷 🌷 warm or cool colours are balanced with their complimentary colour, warming, resting
- 🌷 🌷 classrooms are made to feel warm like a home with kitchens, cozy rugs and muted colours

🧵 Creative, artistic experience

Offering a "creative, artistic experience" does not only apply to the practical arts listed below but also to the sense of artistry the caregiver brings to the home or classroom in a larger sense.

Caregivers lovingly craft the rhythm of the day so that it flows like a song with an intentional beginning, middle and end.

Nature Tables are curated and tended to regularly, seasonal flowers or greenery are freely cut and placed around the environment and colourful transparent silks are seen across the windows.

The classroom or home radiates with creativity, imagination and beauty.

Practical Arts often included in Waldorf Early Childhood Programs and Homes:

- 🧶 knitting
- 🧶 intersectional music such as the glockenspiel, kindertoys or pentatonic recorder
- 🧶 lacing, movement (sometimes 'Kindergarten') activities
- 🧶 wet felting and/or prepared felting
- 🧶 baking, stone, Marine and Vegetable
- 🧶 watercolour painting
- 🧶 beeswax modeling/sculpting through modelling
- 🧶 wool felting
- 🧶 sewing or weaving projects
- 🧶 seasonal craft, such as seasonal pumpkins, winter lanterns, flower crowns etc
- 🧶 finger knitting
- 🧶 activities are such as grinding grain, kneading and baking bread
- 🧶 origami, paper lanterns or "weaving story" paper crafts

⚙️ Meaningful adult activity as an example for the child's imitation

Children learn via imitation. Millennia before formal school or daycare existed, children stayed close to their caregivers and observed them cooking, baking plants, cleaning the home, making and mending clothes, tending to gardens, fetching water, tending the wells, making medicine, caring for animals and being present and nurturing the young children in their care. The elements are in every child's cells as a foundational education. they provide opportunities for great and fine motor skills, they give children a sense of purpose and belonging, they offer children a sense of what is to be done, and how to be. Many of day-long, warm-hearted and lasting, mind alternate meaning in the world around us." (Wilson, A Waldorf Art of Education)

Many of our Steiner/Waldorf modern conveniences (running water, laundry machines, kitchen appliances, fridges) have taken away some of the meaningful work children used to observe & imitate. Finding a child's rhythm and amount of value in what meaningful work is left for the young children to do (serve, minister, to and accomplish work, Steiner said)

"This creates a realm, an atmosphere, of freedom in which the individuality of each child can be active. It is not necessary that the caregiver brings to the home and classroom in a larger sense and the adult, but rather that they experience the inner work where the devotion, care, sense of purpose, intensity of focus, and creative spirit of the adult. And then, in turn, each child is free to act as an artist does it in his or her own right, through creative free play and exercise of will, and experiencing his or her own inner creative impulses." (Wilson, Waldorf)

Meaningful Adult Activity as an Example for the Child's Imitation:

- In the breakfast sense, meaningful activity is work that:
- 🌷 the caregiver does with their hands to create or tend to something meaningful and purposeful (children or outdoors) or for the thing they are making assets or nourishes themselves, their family and/or their community.

🏃 Free, imaginative play

Free, Imaginative Play is the heart of a young child's education. Independent play is completely individual and childhood is a time when they piece together, understand and interpret the world around them.

"…the interior in which each child plays may offer a picture of how they will take up their destiny as an adult. The task of the Lemniscate is to create an environment that supports the possibility for healthy play." (Howard)

Healthy INDEPENDENT PLAY can look like (but is not limited to):

- 🌷 playing a little in outdoors or protected in the backyard
- 🌷 supervising by or near and around the caregiver
- 🌷 engaging in imaginative play as parents, bakers, and various family members
- 🌷 exploring different professions such as chef, baker, artisan hose, police officer, vet, doctor, herbalist, singer, farmer, farmer, and more
- 🌷 participating in the roles of both student and teacher
- 🌷 engaging in imaginative play with fairies, small animals, dolls, and dollhouses
- 🌷 playing with natural toys and loose parts
- 🌷 playing blocks, building towers, building castles
- 🌷 telling stories/narrations with props & toys
- 🌷 sewing, hand sewing
- 🌷 playing catch and clapping games
- 🌷 jumping, rolling, ballers and play as they can find
- 🌷 Weaving, painting, crafting, modelling and creating in all their manifestations
- 🌷 digging, planting, watering and discovering seeds, dirt and water.
- 🌷 climbing, bouncing, rolling and stacking big objects like logs and rocks

Healthy INDEPENDENT PLAY also often looks

- 🌷 very messy, muddy, dirty
- 🌷 transient, changing from one play to the next
- 🌷 engaged, full & active
- 🌷 creative, imaginative, and of the senses
- 🌷 children often playing out something from the child's recent life experiences
- 🌷 "Learning" you can never know what these amazing, curious and intelligent little beings will come up with next!

Healthy INDEPENDENT PLAY should ideally

- 🌷 be followed and embedded into both an "in-breath" activity (like a quiet/full meal, reading, an adult-led craft, reading, or listening to a story)

✋ Protection for the forces of childhood

"Although it is highly necessary that each person should be fully aware in later life, the child must be allowed to remain as long as possible in the peaceful, dreamlike condition of primeval imagination in which his early years of life are passed. For this state of mind is the cradle of his future strength in this non-intellectual way, he will rightly develop a fear of the intellectually minded in the world today." (Wilson, A Waldorf Art of Education)

The Waldorf Early Childhood Essentials Nine Essentials Waldorf Early Childhood Education, the foundations of it is the belief that children under the age of 7 need to feel in their hearts, minds and bodies that the world is GOOD.

The walls, however, is that many young children experience the dichotomy of "good and bad, just and unjust" far earlier than primary school age. I believe it is crucial to interrupt transactive reasoning and how it early childhoodhoods.

If we do not accept the definition of "Protecting the Forces of Childhood" as the avoidance of important explicit conversations, what might this Essential look like?

- 🌷 Discarding the imagination through storytelling while incorporating small imagery and archetypes.
- 🌷 Introducing dance narratives and archetypes through the art of storytelling
- 🌷 Modeling skills and expectations through gestures before receiving to verbal communication.
- 🌷 Recognizing and protecting of the passage of time in children through the use of rhythm.
- 🌷 Providing simple time and space for uninterrupted free play
- 🌷 Providing a consistent, predictable, and calm rhythm for children to experience "what comes next" of everything including transitions and routines.
- 🌷 🌷 🌷 Modeling children in group activities that create a sense of community, belonging and group consciousness
- 🌷 Learning media, adult-seen movies & screens as much as possible in early childhood based on pediatric advice.
- 🌷 Introducing academics at a developmentally appropriate time based on science and our current understanding of brain and body development

🙏 Gratitude, reverence, and wonder

Out of gratitude, love and compassion we learn. Gratitude and reverence, reverence and praise are a part of all traditional cultures and for good reason. A regular practice practice or studies an adult has been shown to improve sleep, increase feelings of wellness and optimism, lower stress response and improve relationships.

Because young children learn primarily via imitation, a caregiver "teaches gratitude" by authentically modeling it.

EVERYDAY PRACTICES and GESTURES that model gratitude for young children

- 🌷 say a reverent blessing or verse once a day (gratitude for earth & spirit)
- 🌷 Ask children to stand for repose (stillness and stop or reset) such as ceremonially to find those who can (gratitude for earth, tools & resources)
- 🌷 Ask children to "Thank your ancestors, families or the elderly in your community (gratitude for community)"
- 🌷 Tell stories about your childhood and those important moments that helped to shape who you are (gratitude for learned experiences)
- 🌷 share and offer your skills to someone in your community (eg. technology, gardening, cooking, cleaning, child minding or a tailoring (gratitude for individuality and expertise)
- 🌷 write thank you cards and send them in the mail or deliver them in person (gratitude for great people)
- 🌷 sit down on "stuff" (whether quality over quantity, observe what items are cherished and which ones disappointed you or were broken) to create space for a deeper appreciation of items (gratitude for material possessions (gratitude for what we have in our homes)
- 🌷 Ask children to "Thank your Ancestors" or "Thank your Elders" (your most cherished part of the day and your least favorite part of the day (gratitude for daylight)
- 🌷 find a small time each day (or once each, whether this is meditation, prayer, yoga, or sit (gratitude for Self)
- 🌷 If you feel grateful for something, say it aloud for the whole family to hear (gratitude for Self)
- 🌷 express your gratitude in detail & for specifics (gratitude for details & "every also" (mindset)

🎶 Joy, humour, and happiness

How do we foster a kind and school environment that is joyful?
Do children wake up in the morning and want to go to school?
Do our children feel and experience laughter and joy each and every day?
Can the caregiver bring body to each moment, moving from holding a strong boundary to making light hearted jokes with great ease?

Examples of age appropriate joy, humour and happiness in the home and classroom:

- 🌷 Social little stories about animals and nature that are humorous
- 🌷 Anecdotes from the caregivers life that convey delight, surprise and joy
- 🌷 Playful mischief and engagement of the caregiver performing the domestic arts such as folding, ironing or making dishes
- 🌷 Singing, humming and/or whistling while the caregiver works
- 🌷 Stories, songs and fingerplays with light hearted jokes, funny twists and humour
- 🌷 Dancing at circle time or family dance parties

Examples of adult joy, humour and happiness we hope to AVOID until after the age of seven:

- 🌷 Laughter is extremely hurtful to young children to understand and can be hurtful
- 🌷 Anxious, fearing teasers and other harmfulness (lips can get over children's heads and cripple a level of children thinking, young children have not escaped yet
- 🌷 Injurious comedy where someone is being embarrassed/mentally inept, cruel, jeaty, ungry or sarcastic. It will have the strong effects on children who learn via imitation.
- 🌷 Teasing, mocking or snappy comebacks will also give the strong impression of what is appropriate and what is not.

✨ Adult caregivers on a path of inner development

"What kind of school plan you make is neither here nor there, what matters is what sort of person you are." (Pfeil, The Kingdom of Childhood)

"For the small child (before the change of teeth, the most important thing is education is the teacher's own being." (Wilson, Essentials of Education) "Just think what feelings arise in the soul of the early childhood educator who realizes, what is expected with this child, I accomplish for the future generations to come." (Howard)

Steiner was very conscious of the inner scientific fact that our early childhood experiences have a profound and direct ripple effect on the rest of our adult lives.

As a primary caregiver who we are, how we act and our relationship with the children in our care matters deeply.

If we are out of alignment the children in our care experience this in their threefold being as well.

Does the means we ought to be perfectly divine radiant beings for our children? That's far, nice, but of course not such an human.

But it does mean that whenever and wherever possible, we are on a path of strong intentions, modelling to our children inner growth, learning and expansion as conscious human beings on a journey.

Inner Work for Caregivers can look like:

- 🌷 a daily prayer and/or meditation (I personally use Morningstar_Affirmations)
- 🌷 practicing daily gratitude (Effective Gratitude)
- 🌷 turning to an episode of Bluebery or another spiritual or philosophically leaning conversation
- 🌷 listening to Audio or podcast content
- 🌷 writing in a digital diary or a good old fashion journal
- 🌷 using Insight or Minute Timer as the prompt/bell for meditations.
- 🌷 working with Rudolf Steiner's 7 Contemplations Exercises - I highly recommend "Reviving the Soul" by Steiner via Cultivate the Arts
- 🌷 engaging in daily self care to restore and revitalize body, mind and spirit (social through city grid for example)
- 🌷 mindfulness of our words, actions and thoughts
- 🌷 nightly review of how we lived (or did not live) in alignment with our values or purpose that day
- 🌷 bringing big questions to something higher than ourselves in our deep longing, "Spirit, Higher Self…"

If you want to learn more about these essentials, please read the article by Susan Howard on these which you can find here.

Did you know that your family may already embody the principles of Waldorf education without even realizing it? Rudolf Steiner, the visionary behind Waldorf Education, encouraged individual parents and adult to teaching according to their own unique circumstances. Rather than blindly adhering to a set doctrine, he emphasized the importance of adapting educational methods to suit the needs of the child. Learn more in "10 Ways You're Already a Waldorf-Inspired Family" to know more.

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Megan Wilson is a passionate advocate of the new wheel several series of Wilkins Family Rhythms. After finishing a BA, she went on to complete her Waldorf Teacher Training and Mentorship. Her passion for Waldorf Education has taken her to work on the Waldorf Early Childhood Curriculum at the Rudolf Steiner Centre in Toronto. She has received her certification as a Breathing Relaxing Series (the Steiner Curriculum) and has been a Waldorf Teacher, Mentor, Curriculum Developer, and Director. Her passions are nature, the arts and culture. She has four young children (Morgan, Ellanora, Ellanora, Ellanora, Ellanora) and is a Mom, Wife, Teacher, Mentor, Author, and Bridge to cross between their unique family life and their children's little home or at-home Waldorf schools.

TAGS: Autumn, family values, spring, summer, winter

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