

## THE NATURE OF PLAY

At Good Shepherd, we recognize that exploration, curiosity, and wonder are natural and desirable impulses in preschool children. Children use play to understand and make sense of experiences, ideas, and feelings. We believe that having the opportunity to interact cooperatively and creatively with peers feeds a child's imagination, nurtures life-long skills of cooperation and conflict resolution, and supports progression towards literacy and mathematical reasoning. In understanding that play is an essential element of a child's healthy development, the academic program and environment of Good Shepherd School prioritizes the opportunity to learn through play and creative experiences.

Our goal as a school is three-fold: to ensure that play serves its optimal role in development, to maintain an environment that is safe and secure for every child, and to consciously and deliberately teach life skills. We take a pro-active stance in teaching children necessary skills to express a full range of feelings in healthy and appropriate ways. We structure the school day around consistent routines that allow and encourage opportunities for learning through play both during structured instructional experiences and times of free play and exploration. We offer a curriculum that uses developmentally appropriate stories and activities to reinforce the Christian ethic. Classrooms are designed to be engaging environments with ample space for movement and activity. Teachers invite cooperation and participation while supporting the principles of harmony and fairness. Teacher-student engagement is rooted in respect and a spirit of encouragement. When necessary, teachers intervene constructively during times of conflict resolution, coaching children through respectful problem-solving, empathetic conversation, and appropriate expression of feelings.

Within the context of allowing play to support the development of virtue and character while ensuring the safety and security of our students, we do maintain one specific rule regarding play that involves weapons and/or guns. Toy guns and/or weapons are simply not allowed at school. Play involving the creation of guns or other weapons is redirected and the bringing of weapons to school for learning experiences such as Show and Tell is prohibited.

At Good Shepherd School, we take the mutual and interactive approach of believing that children learn respect by being respected, learn love by being loved, and learn trust by being trusted.