



Kishami Academy, LLC

Teaching you into a better future

Student Handbook

Student Handbook

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Welcome to Kishami Academy. We are glad that you have chosen us to help your neurodiverse student in attaining their best selves for a future that they will soon begin to imagine and explore for themselves.

Our **philosophy toward learning** is that we, as the staff, are constantly researching and learning so that we can improve ourselves and best help the students who come our way. We apply what we learn, and if we find it doesn't work, we will try something new. In this way, we are considered a type of research school. One way that Kishami is different from other schools is based on research like: differentiated seating, gym equipment in the classroom, one-room classroom, many breaks throughout the day, student chores to help the school keep clean. Another way that Kishami is different from other schools is that we focus on higher academically inclined autistics who benefit from the head teacher being autistic, and many of the staff being neurodiverse: we can best understand what is happening in the thinking processes because we have been there ourselves.

We are a school that is **focused on autistic students**: We will look at the I.E.P. and 504 plans that are brought from previous schools, however we do not create them or follow them ourselves. This is because our school is set up to meet the students where they are and guide them, through personal responsibility and choices, to become what they can envision for themselves. You will often hear staff refer to our school as being an I.E.P. only better: we meet the student where they are, challenge them to improve, and push them as quickly as they want to be pushed into their best future selves. We reassess the overall executive functioning and academic skills twice a year, but are never held back by a label, grade, or goal.

Kishami Academy will never discriminate against a student for race, color, sex, gender. Identity, orientation, religion, politics, language, national or social origin. We are a school for autistics and accept students from 10-17 years of age. Students who reach 18 at Kishami are allowed to stay until 21 years of age if they are still benefiting from the program and making forward progress toward their future, then we will work with the family to see what is the next best step for them.

We are focused on autism-specific teaching approaches which include a lot of individual learning, meaning we have to see if our school is the right place for each student who attends. A student does not have to be autistic or neurodiverse to attend. We can offer a trial attendance, up to 18 weeks, to see if the school is beneficial for the student's growth. During this time we will work with students using approaches we have found helpful. We have found that some students are not independent enough for our limited resources and we cannot offer personal one-on-one care, nor can we work with students who cannot move forward in making personal choices to assist in their own education. The final evaluation is looking at how the student affects the overall learning environment of the school.

We have two **school mottos**:

“I make no excuses” means that a student has to put forth individual effort while taking responsibility for their own actions and the results of their decisions.

“I am in charge of my learning and my life” means that they are the only ones who can choose to learn, to control their reactions and their emotions, to come back to the table after a meltdown and learn from the situation, and to make decisions that help them in everyday growth and development.

General information about Kishami Academy

School Hours

Monday 11-3pm Full-time students

Tuesday-Friday 9-3pm Full-time student / Half-time students 9-12pm

Monday - Friday 3-4pm homework, illness catch-up, tutoring, or individual learning time

The **School Calendar** is on kishamiacademy.org where you can find upcoming events.

Contacting Kishami Academy: text only: 661-236-6116. Kishami will have two contact threads through which information is transmitted to the parents. These are separated into two groups 1) to separate divorced parents from each other and 2) to separate those who like to chat more from those who just want the information. You can also email at kish.w@kishamiacademy.org.

Attendance is important, and not just because it is a requirement of the law: public schools are linear and missing one day means missing the introduction to a concept and falling behind immediately -- because of this being absent just ten days is equivalent to falling behind an entire year! At Kishami Academy, mathematics is individual and your student will not fall behind when being absent. However, many discussions concerning autism, social behaviors and expectations, science experiments, or field trips cannot be repeated for a student who was absent. Time lines on many research and exploration projects cannot be adjusted. If a student is working through the Bridging program, consistent attendance is necessary for the changes in the brain to take effect and show a difference.

Yes, Kishami academy has **homework**: 20 minutes of reading that is proven by a parent initials in the planner and a written sentence summary from the reading. This is required 365 days a year. This reading is usually the student's choice, though occasionally we will have an all-school reading project. Reading is important because it helps your student recognize correct spelling, hear/read correct grammar, understand sentence and plot structure, it enlarges their pool of reference and connection material, and increases their imagination. Yes, they can listen to audiobooks. However, it would be best if they could read the book along with the audio narrator to increase their vocabulary, speed, and comprehension ability.

Meals and snacks: Your student needs to bring their own lunch, or lunch making materials. We often (but not guaranteed) have lunch meat, cheese, bread, peanut butter, and jelly at school. We have a fridge, microwave, Keurig, rice cooker, and hot water for student use.

We allow snacking, but that is provided by you. We prefer snacks that are higher in protein and low in sugar so that they assist in mental skills instead of working against the student's ability to focus.

Once or twice a session, your student will choose a recipe and a day to cook it on. This will help with cooking skills, how to be a host/ess, and clean up. Every student is required to take at least one taste of a meal that is prepared by another student. This shows respect and honor to the person who did all the work, and helps students explore the world of food without being forced to eat more than a taste. Our hope is that they will find new foods they like, but if they don't they at least tried. For tasters, one taste = 100% grade. For the cook, the grade is based on following directions, attitude, focus, ability, and accepting they have to do the assignment without argument.

Our **inclement weather** policy is this: If you don't feel safe driving all the way to school, then don't. When we have half or less of the class present in the building, we have one-on-one sessions, independent work, some social skills practice, and then a lot more freedom to explore the specific areas in our school. I will contact the parents in the morning with a "Road Report" to let you know how the roads were when I came to school between 6-7am, this will hopefully aid in your decision.

Kishami Academy is full of autistic and neurodiverse people, because of this our **visitor protocol** is simple. You have to request a time to visit through the head teacher, and schedule the visit for more than a week in advance. If the visit results in an adverse reaction by any student, further visitations will be limited.

Kishami Academy's Basic Rules

Our **Code of conduct** is based on the rules of Reality. We discuss these often in school.

- 1) You WILL NOT be rewarded for bad behavior.
- 2) Being told "NO" is a part of life -- get over it.
- 3) You are FREE to make your own choices... you are NOT FREE of the consequences.
- 4) Life is not fair.
- 5) The world does not revolve around you. We are in this together.
- 6) Respect is EARNED, it is not just given.
- 7) The world owes you nothing--you must work for it.
- 8) Fits and tantrums will get you nothing--stop wasting your time.
- 9) You are in charge of ONLY YOU. Your future is in your hands.

Our **dress code** is simple because we understand that autistics need clothes that they can function in:

- 1) The belly should be covered.
- 2) Clothes should cover the hips and groin.
- 3) Wearing onesies and pajamas are okay if they follow the above.
- 4) Shoes are needed for field trips, chores, and outdoor activities, but can be kept in the locker. Bare feet, slipper socks, and slippers are okay in the classroom.

We will, as students age and get closer to the ability to move into the outdoor world, discuss how clothes are a first impression, and how what you wear often determines how you behave. There comes a point when you have to wear different clothes every day, and you have to dress up in clothes that are not as comfortable. The students have a choice to practice this in school, or to wait until they are in the world and have no choice. We are a school based on individual and personal choices for growth.

Rule 6 above is about **Respect**. Yes, you have to earn it, but respect is often granted upon first meetings and toward those in authority as long as they keep it. We expect our students to respect our staff, our volunteers, and our guests. If they have a problem with one of them, they need to come and talk to the head teacher, and they are NOT to disrespect them because they want to. An example of this: saying to another staff member that “I don’t have to listen to you, you aren’t the teacher.” Another big disrespectful thing to look out for is laughing at people if they get hurt or frustrated.

Our staff is chosen for their neurodiversity, their education, and their passion to help students reach their full potential. Chasing off our staff through disrespect is one way to be disrespected yourself and possibly dismissed from the school.

One way that we show respect toward our students is that even though we have permission to use their images on social media, we try very hard to not include faces. If their face is visible, we show respect by checking with students themselves before posting their images. This is a demonstration of respect towards others and reminding students that social media posts should always have the permission of everyone in the photo.

Another issue of respect concerns **Bullying**. This is covered in Addendum 1 of the Enrollment Contract. At Kishami Academy we will first name the behavior and discuss it in class as to why it could be bullying, and how to better handle such situations. If this does not alter thoughts and behaviors, there will be a parent-student-school conference and a deadline on changed behavior. We also ask that every parent notify the school if a student has talked about something that has made them uncomfortable or scared. We cannot address situations if we do not know about them. It is important for autistics to learn and discuss what they do and what happens to them so they can understand and be ready for such events in their future.

Discipline

Kishami Academy is for teaching autistic students skills they will need to help them succeed in the future. We work as a unit with the parents. Parents are often informed of an event as soon as it has happened, via text message, or they are engaged during pick-up to discuss the issue. Unlike **student discipline** in public schools, we do not separate the issue from the class because we all need to learn. We talk about situations, without naming people, and discuss how to approach the same situation in the future. If we see a behavior again, we will talk with the students involved and have a discussion with the parents on what they can do to help at home. The next step is a parent-student-teacher conference and discussions on how to adjust and grow. Finally, a discussion will be had on whether they are actually learning anything at Kishami Academy or are they using it for their own emotional playground to hinder others.

Due to the way Kishami Academy operates, any type of **search-and-seizure** necessary of the student's belongings, will involve the parents being called in early, or assisting in locker clean-out at pick-up. If this ever becomes necessary at Kishami Academy, the student will lose locker privileges. Reasons for this type of drastic action would be notification of weapons or drugs by other students or parents.

As students are allowed to self-medicate, anything they do bring to school should also come with information from the parent about the medication, the need, and instructions for when the student is allowed to take the medication.

Technology, equipment and area use

Technology use is allowed in school for educational purposes. Teachers will assign or allow use of certain apps that will help in furthering the students education and academic skills. Students can earn **freetime** on the computers by exercising (P.E. is not counted toward this). Students have to be physically active for 10 minutes to earn 10 minutes of freetime.

We supply **physical equipment** for the students to use. This includes a treadmill, Gazelle, punching bag, barbells, and more. Students are instructed on the proper use of these tools, along with when they can use them: during 15 minute breaks, before or after school, to prevent the onset of a meltdown, to manage emotions, for part of their P.E. routines, or as instructed by a teacher during instruction to help reset the brain. Misuse of any of these tools will result in the loss of access to them for a set amount of time.

Specific area use. We are a one-room schoolhouse and have designated areas where the students can explore during their breaks, before or after school, or engage in through lessons and challenges.

Art: Students will be shown, or can ask, what supplies are free to use. The biggest rule in this area is to clean up after yourself. Each student has a bucket or a drawer where they can keep projects that are in the process of being worked on.

Engineering: Students need permission to work in this area, but with permission, everything is available for them to work with, improve, and explore (tear apart and reassemble).

STEM: Students must have permission to use supplies in this area at all times. This area is primarily for lessons and needs teacher supervision.

Stim: We have several boxes of sand and other stimulating materials that students can play with. They must clean up after themselves, but can use these materials as needed to help them regulate emotions and stress.

Quiet Room: This room is available for students to go into if they feel they may meltdown, cry, work on their big emotions, get away from the noise of the classroom, or any such thing they need to regulate. In the room are blankets, pillows, a table, cushions, a rocking chair, noodles, and a crash pad. Use of the room also means helping to clean it up at the end of the week.

Lego: There are many Legos to use and build with. Students may ask permission for a box to hold pieces for a personal building project for a limited amount of time (2 weeks or less). The Legos all belong to the Head Teacher and thus are for everyone to use. Any squabbling or arguments will lose the privilege of using these. Legos MUST stay in the Lego area, and all Legos MUST be put away and the rug vacuumed each Friday.

Puzzle: There is almost always a puzzle on the table for students to work on. All share the same puzzle. If there is no puzzle out a student may ask to choose the next one to work on.

Music: Students may use the keyboard with the headphones, they must turn it off when they are done. Students may use the boomwhackers, drums, and tambourines during breaks only, BUT they must ask the class first to make sure the sound can be tolerated by all. Autistic senses are never the same from day to day.

Library: Books are free to be read by students. They must stay at the school and students must show respect to the books as they are all part of the Head Teacher's personal library--some books may need parent permission to read. Books MUST be put back where you got them. Books must be "checked out" if they are going to be kept at a student's desk. To check them out to go home requires demonstration of respect, and an understanding that if damaged, it will have to be replaced (and quite a few of these books are old and out of print).

Games: We have a bookcase full of board games and a table where games can be played and left out for continued play at a later break. Games must be put away properly at the end of the day (except longer-running games like Monopoly).

Kitchen specific information The kitchen is the Head Teacher's kitchen, thus many things are off limits and need permission to use. There are places designated in the fridge for students to use and that hold community food. Each student will have a bin where they have their own dishes and snacks.

The short end of the counter and the shelves below it are community food, usually bread and peanut butter. If families want to make food or snacks to share, just be aware of any current school allergies. Student available equipment: the Keurig and microwave.

Infectious & communicable disease policy

It is important to keep anything that might be infectious away from the school. First because Kishami Academy only has one full-time teacher and If that teacher gets ill, the entire school shuts down. We also have immunocompromised students attending.

Precaution

--If a student is running a temperature, or has a sore throat that does not go away after breakfast, please keep them home.

Flu/Cold

--If there is the flu or a cold in the house, the student must stay away from school for 5 days from the end of any infectious/spreading symptoms: usually fever and coughing.

--If the student has the flu or a cold, they must stay away until at least 2 days after the infectious/spreading symptoms have ended.

COVID

-- If anyone in the family is exposed to COVID, there is a 5-day quarantine period. If no one in the home tests positive the student then may return to school.

--If someone in the home has COVID, the student is quarantined until 5-days AFTER the family member tests negative.

--If the student has COVID. Then after they test negative they should stay away from school for at least 2 days to be sure there is no relapse. If the COVID was harsh, the student may stay home for an additional 7 days to recover their energy and ability to interact with people. This would be up to parent discrimination.