



# Policy and Procedures Parent Handbook

Updated 7/18/23

## **Our Mission and Philosophy**

At **First Steps Preschool**, we believe that parents and educators work as a team to allow children to experience the very best in early childhood developmental practices. We believe that purposeful play is a child's work. Our early childhood program emphasizes learning through independent and guided play developed through interaction with other children and adults. We provide your child with opportunities to grow and to mature in all areas of development: spiritually, emotionally, socially, physically, and cognitively. Our goal is to offer your child the opportunity to utilize skills he/she will require, not only within the world of academia; but also throughout a lifetime. We believe life-long learning is a continuous cycle of dynamic learning experiences at school and home. We believe it is our ministry to enrich every aspect of your child's development as he or she takes those "**First Steps**" into a world of lifelong learning.

## **Our Curriculum**

Creative Curriculum is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum that features exploration and discovery as a way of learning, enabling children to develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical thinking skills. Creative Curriculum provides a framework for educators at all levels of experience plan and implement a developmentally appropriate, content-rich program for children with diverse backgrounds and skill levels.

## **Enrollment**

Enrollment is open to all children six weeks of age until entering kindergarten or age 5, regardless of race, gender, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, or social orientation. Our desire is to serve all families.

## Special Needs Children

We realize our facility may not be appropriate for all children and their particular needs. Families of a child with special needs may schedule a conference with the center's director. The director will determine whether your child may enroll in our center on a trial basis. After an appropriate trial period, the director schedules another conference and determines whether the specific needs of your child are being met with consideration to the daily care of the other children attending our school. If it is determined that we cannot accommodate your child's needs, within our current staffing requirements and schedule, you will be required to find other childcare within a reasonable amount of time. The allotted time-frame will be at the discretion of the director.

**Step 1: School visit and Tour** - Monthly evening tours are scheduled. Please contact us to schedule a visit and a tour of our facility. Feel free to bring your child with and see what opportunities are here at First Steps Preschool. Allow for approximately 30-45 minutes, so we have adequate time to discuss your child's specific needs, our program policies, and to address all of your questions.

*NOTE: We highly recommend that parents visit any center they are considering prior to enrolling. It is almost impossible to tell if a program is right for your child without seeing it in person.*

**Step 2: Waiting List:** We currently have a waiting list. After you have completed a preschool tour and information session, you may place your child's name on this list by filling out the waiting list form and paying the \$100 fee (**non-refundable**). We will notify you when a space becomes available.

**Step 3: Enrollment Packet** – Once your child is accepted for enrollment in the preschool program, please complete the enrollment packet. All enrollment forms are due prior to your child's first day. The supply fee is assessed to your account annually on September 1. The first week's tuition is due on your child's first day. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact our office:

First Steps Preschool  
(863) 683-9049  
preschool@firstumc.org

## Child Care Enrollment Forms

In your enrollment packet includes following forms:



- Your Guide to Licensed Child Care
- Influenza Fact Brochure/Signature Required
- Application for Enrollment
- Emergency Medical Release
- Emergency Contact Form
- Consent for Emergency Medical Treatment
- Policy and Procedure Handbook Signature Page (Acknowledging receipt/review)
- Physical Form (All children must have a physical examination every 2 years)
- Immunization record (valid till their expiration date)
- Car Safety Pamphlet (In September and April, DCF requires a parent/guardian's signature regarding the receipt of this brochure.)

**ALL FORMS MUST** be **completed, signed, and submitted.** **NO** child is accepted for care without the proper forms on file.

Periodically we will ask you to update records and necessary information, failure to complete and update information in a timely manner may result in temporary dismissal of your child from the center. Tuition continues to be collected until the necessary paperwork is completed. Failure to complete paperwork within a week will result in the permanent dismissal of your child.

# Calendar

Our preschool operating hours are 7:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday thru Friday.  
(Refer to preschool calendar for school holidays)

Our curriculum for programming begins at 9:00a.m. Monday thru Friday.

**Tuition charges are based on 51 weeks per calendar year. Monthly tuition is charged the first Monday of each month, and is based on the number of Monday's in each month. Weekly tuition is due every Monday by 5:30 p.m. of each week if paying weekly. If weekly tuition is not paid by Tuesday morning a \$5.00 late fee is assessed daily. If monthly tuition is not paid by the first Friday of the month a \$5.00 per week late fee is assessed.**

**There is a \$25.00 fee assessed for all returned checks due to insufficient funds. Payments can be paid by check, money order or electronic payments.**

**We will close approximately one week at Christmas. There will not be a tuition fee assessed for this week.**

We will be closed in observance of the following holidays: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Presidents Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday, and Christmas Break (closed Christmas Eve through New Year's Day). Additionally, there are two teacher workdays when school is closed (see preschool calendar for specific dates).

Please refer to the VPK calendar for non-instructional days for the VPK program.

## **Our Routine and Schedule**

Parents will record the child's attendance daily by signing in and out on our computer located at the preschool's front desk. Only authorized persons those listed on the enrollment form, **no one** may pick up a child for dismissal. Persons new to picking up a child for dismissal **will be required** to show photo identification. Any person not listed

on the emergency card may not visit the school without accompaniment of a parent or guardian of the child.

**Curriculum will begin in classes each day at 9:00 a.m. unless your child has a doctor's appointment; he/she needs to arrive at school no later than 9:00 a.m. If your child arrives after 9:10 a.m., and the Preschool is not informed, a late fee of \$5 is charged to your account. If your child will be absent, please call the preschool office and let us know.**

- The meal program does not include breakfast. Please have children eat breakfast before coming to school. Children may not bring breakfast with them to the center.
- The meal program includes the following: morning snack, lunch, and an afternoon snack, as well as drinks throughout the day.
- Families receive a copy of the monthly menu via email.
- Each classroom is on an individual schedule and we try to adhere to this schedule at all times.

## **Nap Time, Dress Code and Change of Clothing, Toys from Home, Jewelry and Toilet Learning**

**All** preschool children will have a quiet time each afternoon. Children are not required to sleep. However, all children are encouraged to rest quietly on their cots during quiet time.

Infants need a crib sheet and a sleep sack (as defined by childcare licensing). Blankets are not permitted in the cribs. Children over 1 year of age should bring a small cover, and a crib sheet. Please do not send in a cover larger than a beach towel. Bedding is brought to school on Mondays and sent home every Friday to be laundered.

**All children should dress in clothing appropriate for play. Always remember we learn through play. Shoes need to be closed toe, soft soled with a strap across the back to hold them securely in place, preferably tennis shoes.**

**FLIP FLOPS, CROCS OR BOOTS OF ANY KIND ARE NOT SAFE AND ARE NOT PERMITTED.**

Children who are not toilet-trained should have an adequate supply of diapers each day. Your child's teacher will keep you informed regarding your child's supply of diapers and wipes. **If your child is in the process of toilet learning, please bring a supply of wipes.** Staff records diaper changes on your child's daily report for you to check at the end of the day. Parents are reminded two times regarding your child's need for wipes/diapers. Your account will be billed an additional charge for any wipes/diapers provided by the preschool.

**Diapers sent to the preschool must be disposable. Cloth diapers are not permitted.**

Please provide a minimum of two (2) sets of complete change of clothing in your child's cubby. This includes underwear, socks, a top and bottom clothing item and preferably an extra pair of shoes. Label the inside of all clothing items with your child's first and last name on (A reminder that many children will wear the same size and identical clothing).

The preschool is not responsible for toys brought from home and not be brought to school. Toys from home can get misplaced, lost or broken. Children may bring a "snuggle item" for naptime.

**For safety reasons, children may not wear jewelry or teething necklaces.**

### **Toilet Learning**

Children develop physical skills at different times. Teachers and parents work together to plan on the "best approach" in working with the individual child. The goal is for the child to be comfortable and have a sense of pride and accomplishment. Toilet learning begins in our C6/C7 classrooms. Teachers will assist parents in toilet-learning children by maintaining a consistent schedule throughout the day. Your child will bring home a daily report advising of toileting schedule and other pertinent information such as, request for change of clothing, toileting concerns, etc.

# Medical

## Medicine

**With the exception of diaper cream, medicine is not be administered by Preschool staff. This includes over the counter medications, such as Tylenol, sunscreen, eye drops, etc. A parent may administer prescribed medication may be administered by the parent during the day.**

## Health

The health of all our children is of the utmost importance to us. It will be our policies to have administrative staff (this will include opening staff personnel) decide whether a child is too ill to attend school for the day.

If your child has remained home due to an illness, please call the preschool and let us know that your child will not be in before 9am. Your child may not return to school until he/she **has been free of symptoms (fever, vomiting, and diarrhea) for 24 hours without the use of medication.**

If your child becomes sick, we will call and ask that you come to pick up him/her. The following criteria determines whether your child must go home.

- Fever of more than 99.8 degrees
- Inflammation/ Redness of the eyes
- Vomiting
- More than one incidence of diarrhea
- Unknown rash

All children who exhibit symptoms of a contagious disease are separated from other children until they are picked up to go home.

Please notify the preschool if your child has a communicable disease, such as measles, mumps, chicken pox, hand foot and mouth, RSV or head lice. Your child may return to our



school only after a period of absence equal to the longest incubation period for the disease, a consent form from your family doctor, along with the discretion of the Director.

Be advised that there may be children enrolled in the preschool that have a medical/religious exemption form from the State of Florida and therefore may not be immunized according to the Department of Health guidelines.

## **Positive Guidance and Discipline**

Children experience a variety of social situations that help them develop life skills for problem solving, self-discipline, and motivation for developing empathy for other children. At First Steps Preschool, we practice positive guidance in our learning environments and build an encouraging setting for every person in the school.

Redirection and positive guidance helps young children understand that they can learn from their mistakes, and it starts with showing them how. To give this help successfully, teachers establish relationships with every child – especially with children we find difficult to connect and understand.<sup>1</sup> We guide behavior by establishing predictable routines, setting clear rules with children and modeling kindness and respect.<sup>2</sup>

If a child is having difficulty and leads to disruptive behavior, the teacher redirects the disruptive behavior. Redirection strategies include changing the child's attention to something more positive, changing the setting, taking time to cool down or have a sensory break. The child and teacher work together on resolving the disruptive behavior. The director and associate director are available to support the children and teacher in their work.

A child is never be subjected to the withdrawal of snack or any other food items as a form of discipline. A child is never be left unattended, physically punished, or verbally harassed.

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<sup>1</sup> NAEYC <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/summer2021/discipline-guidance>

<sup>2</sup> NAEYC <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/understanding-and-responding-children-who-bite>

Please note that in the event a child does not respond to the redirection and positive guidance approach and continues to display disruptive behavior, the director will contact the child's parent to pick-up the child. The child is dismissed for the remainder of the day. If the disruptive behavior persists and there is concern for the child's safety or the safety of other children or staff, the director may dismiss the child from the preschool.

We believe that self-management of behavior and socialization conflict resolution are necessary life skills. Every effort is made to help your child learn and utilize self-management skills that will help him/her to attain personal and academic success!

*The Department of Children and Families requires all staff as mandated reporters to report any suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.*

### **If a child bites**

Biting is a typical behavior often seen in infants, toddlers, and 2-year olds. As children mature, gain self-control, and develop problem-solving skills, they usually outgrow this behavior. Some children bite instinctively, because they have not developed self-control. To address the biting behavior, we have the following steps:

1. If you see the biting incident, move quickly to the scene and get down to children's level. Respond to the child who did the biting. We stay calm and use clear signals to communicate that it is not okay for one person to bite another.
2. Next, offer a choice: "You can help make your friend feel better, or you can sit quietly until I can talk with you." Help the child follow through on the choice if necessary.
3. Respond to the child who was hurt by offering comfort through words and actions: "I'm sorry you are hurting. Let's get some ice." Perform first aid if necessary. The child who did the biting can help comfort the bitten child—if both parties agree. Help the child who was hurt find something to do.
4. Finally, talk to the child who did the biting. Maintain eye contact and speak in simple words using a calm, firm tone of voice. Try to find out what

happened that led to the incident. Restate the rule, “*Biting is not allowed.*” Model the use of words that describe feelings: “*Kim took your ball. You felt angry. You bit Kim. I can’t let you hurt Kim. No biting.*” Discuss how the child can respond in similar situations in the future.

5. Provide items to bite, such as teething rings or clean, wet, cold washcloths stored in the refrigerator. This helps children learn what they can bite safely, without hurting anyone else.<sup>3</sup>
6. An “accident form” is filled out documenting the incident.
7. The parents are notified either at pick-up or via phone/email.
8. If the biting behavior continues, the child will be shadowed to help prevent any biting incidents. The classroom staff will observe the biting behavior to determine what is causing the child to bite (teething, communication, frustration, etc.). The administrative staff may also observe the child, if the classroom staff is unable to determine the cause. A plan is created based on the observation of the behavior. The child is given positive attention and approval for positive behavior.
9. We will regularly meet with the parent/guardian of the biter to discuss underlying reasons and common strategies to ensure consistency between the home and preschool.

### **If a child has been bitten**

Biting is always taken seriously, and staff do their best to ensure that it is stopped as soon as possible. We will not disclose to parents the name of the child who has bitten. It is unnecessary to know the child’s identity.

1. First aid is given to the bite. It is cleaned with soap and water. If the skin is broken, the bite is covered with a bandage.
2. An “accident form” completed describing the incident.
3. Parents are notified either at pick-up or via phone/email.

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<sup>3</sup> NAEYC <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/understanding-and-responding-children-who-bite>

### **If biting becomes excessive**

- If a child inflicts three bites in one day in which the skin of another child or staff member is broken or bruised or the bite leaves a significant mark, the child is dismissed for the remainder of the day.
- If a child bites more than three times on two consecutive days, the child will be sent home and remain at home for 24 hours. We understand that this may not be convenient for your household, but sometimes for the wellbeing of the teachers and the other children in the room this is the only option available.
- If biting becomes a habit for your child and ongoing positive guidance is not effective, a meeting is scheduled with your child's teacher(s). The parent, teacher and director will evaluate the plan's effectiveness and make changes as needed. Changes may require a different environment which could result in a withdrawal from the preschool.

## **Media Usage**

**For the confidentiality and safety of all of our children and their families, we have a strict policy against non-staff members' taking any pictures or video of any children on the FUMC campus.**

The use of television, videos, DVDs, or any other type of electronic viewing material is discouraged. We highly encourage hands on experiences for the children. However, segments or short clips of material may be used for instructional implementation if approved by the director.

Pictures taken here at school by staff or professional photographers will not be displayed on social media without the written consent of all parties photographed.

Children may be photographed at the preschool by staff and these pictures may be displayed in our center or in our printed communications.

# Emergencies

## Drills

Childcare licensing and CPA require that we conduct a monthly fire drill. Drills are scheduled at a different time of the day each month. The fire alarm will sound, so that in the unlikely event that we have a fire, the sound of the alarm will not cause the children to panic. We will also practice a tornado drill twice annually and a lock-down annually. This will include having the children go to designated safe areas away from windows and doors.

## Emergency Form

All students must have a current **Emergency Form** on file in the center. This form lists authorized persons who can pick up your child and contact in case of a medical emergency or natural disaster.

This form also lists any allergies your child has had diagnosed. If your child requires any life-threatening prescription medication, such as an EpiPen you will need to complete the following:

1. Completed First Steps Preschool Authorization to Medicate Form and the detailed treatment form.
2. Provide an Authorization for Medication/Treatment Form completed by your child's physician.
3. Provide the prescribed medication in the original container with appropriate prescription label.

**Any life threatening medical conditions need to be brought to the attention of the director.**

## **Disaster Preparation**

As part of our policies and procedures, we are required to have an evacuation plan in place. If for any reason we need to evacuate the building, parents are notified via email and a note taped to the front door of the center. The note would contain the following information:

- Where we have evacuated to
- A cell phone number where we can be reached

We evacuate to the main sanctuary or the fellowship hall on the church campus.

As soon as we verify that all children and teachers are safe, we begin to contact parents via email. Please confirm that your family has registered for this vital safety and emergency procedure program and that all contact numbers are current.

Staff continues to provide care for the children until they safely dismissed to their respective families.

## **Lock Downs**

If it should occur that authorities require us to have a lock down for the safety and security of our children, we will abide by the following procedures:

- When all children are accounted for and in their assigned classrooms, then all doors/windows are securely locked.
- The administrative staff will quickly verify that all windows and doors are securely locked.
- **No one** (including parents, guardians, or staff) is permitted to enter or exit the center during this time.

When authorities have provided clearance, persons are permitted to enter and exit the center. Families are notified at pick-up when the lock down procedure was conducted.

## Communication

Communication between First Steps Preschool and our families is of the utmost importance. Therefore, we will be using the following items to support clear and meaningful communication with you, the parent.

**Newsletters** will be sent home monthly with information covering any upcoming events and materials we will be discussing in our curriculum.

**Daily Schedule Forms** will be sent home with our infants, one, two and three years old students. Pre-Kindergarten students will have a daily agenda.

**Incident/Accident Reports** - Anytime that your child needs medical attention (band-aid, extra TLC) or has had an incident we need to notify you about you will receive an incident/accident report. A photocopy is available of the incident/accident report upon request.

**Visitations** - Parents are free to visit at any time. Parent and child visit in the front lobby. If your child is having difficulty adjusting to our program, we encourage you to keep your visits at a minimum until your child feels comfortable in his/her new surroundings. Parents who wish to bring and/or join their child for lunch are able to do so, but must eat lunch in the Courtyard.

***Unless there has been a prior relationship between staff members and families, preschool staff members are not permitted to “babysit” outside the Preschool for our families. We also request you do NOT use social media to contact our teachers. They are not permitted to accept “friend” requests or give their personal cell numbers out to parents. Communication between parents and teachers should remain professional. Please refrain from conversations that do not pertain to your child’s care here at the Preschool.***

## **Celebrations**

We will have a Grandparent Luncheon, Fall Festival, Thanksgiving Luncheon, Christmas Program, Easter Celebration, Mother's/Father's Day Breakfast and Graduation Ceremony once each calendar year to bring our families together for celebrating and socialization.

**Twice a month between September and May we will have Chapel Services. Families are invited to attend Chapel Services. Children are encouraged to bring a nonperishable food item to be donated.**

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and your child. The staff at First Steps Preschool believe that those called into the ministry of child care, are given the opportunity to serve the Lord in one of the greatest areas of ministry.

In His Peace,

***The Staff of First Steps Preschool***





**Please read and initial all the following statements, then sign and date at the bottom of the page. Your initials and signature are authorization that you received the following and you will agree to adhere/follow all of the policies and procedures of First Steps Preschool.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I have completed and returned Enrollment Packet documentation.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I received and read the Guide to Licensed Childcare**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I have received, read and will abide by the *Positive Guidance and Discipline Policy* of First Steps Preschool and understand all preschool staff are mandated reporters for suspected child abuse or neglect (this policy is included in the Policy and Procedure Manual).**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I have received, read and signed the Influenza Fact Sheet**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I have received, read and signed the Child Assessment Notification Parent/Guardian Consent Form**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I have received and read the Policy and Procedure Manual of First Steps Preschool at First United Methodist Church.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I understand there may be children attending First Steps Preschool that are not immunized.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I understand that my child may be photographed. Please let an administrator know if you do not want your child's photograph posted.**

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_