



Policy and Procedures Parent Handbook

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

Updated July 2025

Our Mission and Philosophy

At **First Steps Preschool**, we believe that when parents and early educators collaborate, children experience the very best in early childhood developmental practices. Children learn best through purposeful play. Our preschool emphasizes learning through independent and guided play, along with skills that are developed through quality interaction with other children and adults. Our early learning educators provide children with opportunities to grow in all areas of development: spiritually, emotionally, socially, physically, and cognitively. Children are provided with the opportunity to build both practical and academic skills. We believe learning is a continuous cycle of dynamic experiences at school and home. The preschool 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

We use Creative Curriculum, which is a comprehensive, research-based curriculum. Our curriculum features exploration and discovery as a way of learning. Children to develop confidence, creativity, and lifelong critical thinking skills. It is designed to help educators at all levels of experience plan and implement a developmentally appropriate, content-rich program for children with diverse backgrounds and skill levels.

Our curriculum for programming begins at 9:00a.m. Monday through Friday. Arrival by 9:00 am is encouraged for children to fully participate in the curriculum and maintain a consistent schedule. Late arrivals due to doctor's appointments require medical notice, updated medical physical/immunization forms.

Enrollment

Enrollment is open to all children six weeks of age until entering kindergarten or age 5, regardless of race, gender, color, religion, political persuasion, national origin, ancestry, or social orientation. All families are welcome.

Preschool Tours, Waiting List, Enrollment

Evening tours are scheduled monthly. During the tour, we provide an overview of our preschool, highlights of our policies and practices, answer questions about enrollment. At the conclusion of the tour, waiting list and enrollment information are shared.

Waiting List: After completing a tour, your child's name may be placed on the waiting list by completing the waiting list form and paying \$100 (**non-refundable**) fee. You will be notified when a space becomes available.

Enrollment Packet – Once notified that your child has an enrollment placement in the program we will send you the enrollment packet. We ask that you print, complete and drop off all documents prior to your child's first day. The supply fee will be assessed to your

account in October. 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

The enrollment packet includes the 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)
- Distracted Driver Pamphlet (In September and April we are required by DCF to have an adult's signature regarding the receipt of this brochure.)

ALL ENROLLMENT FORMS MUST be completed, signed, and submitted.
Children may not attend until all enrollment forms are received.

The Department of Children and Families – Childcare Licensing requires all records to be current. Children with expired forms may not return until updated forms have been submitted. Tuition will continue to be collected until the necessary paperwork is completed. Failure to complete paperwork in a set time period will result in the permanent dismissal of your child.

Calendar

Our operating hours are 7:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday with the exception of holidays and Christmas break.

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).

(Refer to Preschool Calendar or VPK only calendar accordingly).

Tuition

Tuition is calculated based on 51 weeks per calendar year (in 2025-2026 tuition is calculated for 50 weeks). Monthly tuition charges are incurred on the first Monday of each month and is based on the number of Mondays in each month. Weekly tuition is due every Monday at 5:30 p.m. each week if paid weekly. If weekly tuition is not paid by Tuesday a \$5.00 late fee may be assessed daily. If monthly tuition is not paid by the first Friday of the month a \$5.00 per week late fee may be assessed.

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

There will be a \$25.00 fee added to all checks that are returned for insufficient funds. Payments may only be made with check or money order.

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 people listed in the child's file may pick up a child for dismissal. People 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 the 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 was not informed, a late fee of \$5 will be charged to your account. If your child is absent, please call the preschool office and let us know.

- Please have children finish eating breakfast before coming to school. Children may not bring breakfast with them to the center.
- The meal program includes morning snack, lunch, and an afternoon snack, as well as drinks throughout the day. A monthly menu will be emailed to you.
- Each classroom has a designated time for snacks and meals

Meals and Snacks

- Children should share family times together by having breakfast before they arrive at the Preschool.
- Snacks are provided in the morning and afternoon. They are designed to be nutritious, as well as attractive to children.
- Lunch is provided by our church kitchen staff.

NOTE

- Peanut butter, nuts, snacks with nuts and nut-products are not permitted to be brought in the Preschool due to severe allergies.

Nap Time

All preschool children will have a quiet time each afternoon. Children will not be required to sleep. However, all children will be required to lie quietly on their cots during this 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 should bring in a small cover, and a crib sheet. Please do not send in a cover larger than a beach towel. Bedding needs to be brought on Mondays and will be sent home every Friday to be laundered.

Dress Code and Change of Clothing

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. Due to safety, flip-flops, crocs and boots are not permitted.

A complete change of clothing is needed and will be kept in your child's cubby. This includes underwear, socks, a top and bottom clothing item and preferably an extra pair of shoes. All clothing items should be labelled on the inside of items with your child's first and last (Please remember many children will wear the same size and identical clothing).

Toilet Learning

Toilet learning begins in the C6/C7 classrooms. Teachers assist parents in potty-training children by maintaining a consistent schedule throughout the day. Children who are not completely toilet-trained should have an adequate supply of disposable diapers each day. (cloth diapers are not used in the preschool). A daily report will be sent advising of the toileting schedule and other pertinent information such as, request for change of clothing, supply of diapers and wipes, toileting concerns, etc.

Children who are three years old **MUST** be potty-trained to be promoted to the next class. We do not have the facilities to change children who are three years old and older. Occasional accidents are okay, but children must be completely potty-trained.

Toys from Home

Except for a naptime "snuggle" item, personal toys from home should not be brought to preschool. The preschool is not responsible for home toys that are lost or broken.

Jewelry

Jewelry may not be worn by the children; this includes teething necklaces.

Medical Information

Medicine

Except for diaper cream, medication may not be administered by preschool staff. This includes over the counter medications, such as Tylenol, sunscreen, eye drops, etc. 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. Administrative staff (this will include opening staff personnel) decide whether a child is too ill to attend school for the day.

If your child remains home due to an illness, please call the preschool and let us know that your child will be absent. Children must be **symptom-free (fever, vomiting, and diarrhea) for 24 hours without the use of medication** before returning to preschool.

If your child becomes sick while at preschool, we will call and ask that you come to pick up him/her. The following criteria will be considered in determining whether your child must go home.

- Fever of more than 100.4 degrees
- Inflammation/ Redness of the eyes
- Vomiting
- More than one incidence of diarrhea
- Rash of unknown origin

All children who exhibit symptoms of a contagious disease will be separated from the main population of children until they are picked up to go home.

Parents are asked to notify the center if their 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 isolation period for the disease, a “return-to-school” note from your child’s physician, **and** the discretion of the Director.

Note to families: There may be children enrolled in 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.

Guiding Children's Behavior

At First Steps Preschool, we practice NAEYC's teaching on guiding children's behavior through *helping children behave in positive ways by setting clear limits, modeling cooperative behavior, and dealing respectfully with challenging behaviors.*

Guiding children's behavior is something done throughout the day, not just when a child acts in a way that is unsafe or unacceptable. You guide behavior by establishing predictable routines, setting clear rules with children, and modeling kindness and respect. You are also attentive and aware of what is going on. Together, these actions help children feel noticed, confident, and secure. Children experience your attention and guidance as a caring embrace holding everything together. They know you're on their team.¹

Some strategies that NAEYC suggests including (but not limited to):

- *Treat the child the way you want him to treat you and others.*
- *Help a child feel secure by setting clear, realistic limits for behavior.*
- *Manage your emotions so that you can help children manage theirs.*
- *Be realistic about what you can expect from individual children.*
- *Partner with families.*
- *Help children learn to self-regulate.*
- *Establish clear and consistent routines.*
- *Make it clear that the problem is the child's behavior, not the child.*
- *Use a tone of voice that is firm, serious, and calm rather than angry (when addressing a child's behavior. Anger is scary, and when children feel scared they cannot learn anything.)²*

By guiding positively children's behavior, life skills for problem solving, self-discipline, and intrinsic motivation and developing empathy for other children are nurtured. A child is never subjected to the withdrawal of a snack or any other food item as a form of punishment. A child is never left unattended, physically punished, or verbally harassed.

¹ <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/pi2e-guide-childrens-behavior.pdf>

² <https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/pubs/pi2e-guide-childrens-behavior.pdf>

If the child is not able to control his/her behavior and continues to be disruptive for the class, the parent/guardian will be notified, and the child be sent home for the day. Persistent inappropriate behavior requires a parent conference, and a behavioral plan will be discussed. If at any time the director feels that a child's behavior may put his/her safety and that of any staff or another student in harm's way, then the director may dismiss the child from First Steps Preschool.

All staff members are mandated reporters and required by the Department of Children and Families to report any suspected cases of child abuse and neglect.

Biting Policy

When a Child Bites

1. We show disapproval and very firmly and calmly say something like "We do not bite! Teeth are for eating!" We use gesture and facial expression to reinforce the message.
2. We will remain calm and firmly remove the child who bites away from the person (whether child or adult) whom he is biting. Depending on the child's stage of development, the child will be removed from the situation and redirected to another area of the classroom.
3. An "accident form" is filled out documenting the incident.
4. The parents are notified either at pick-up or via phone/email.
5. If biting continues the child will be shadowed to help prevent any biting incidents. The child will be observed by the classroom staff 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. The child will be given positive attention and approval for positive behavior. From these observations a plan will be made.
6. We will regularly meet with the parent/guardian of the child who is biting to discuss underlying reasons and common strategies to ensure consistency between the home and preschool.

If a child is 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" is filled out documenting the incident.
3. Parents are notified either at pick-up or via phone/email.

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 will be 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 well-being of the teachers and the other children in the room this is the only option available.
- If your child has a “biting issue” we will devise a plan to help curtail this behavior.

Special Needs Children

Families of children with special needs may schedule a conference with the center’s Director. The Director will determine if the preschool is an appropriate learning environment based on the child’s individual special needs. A director may decide that trial enrollment is appropriate. At the end of the trial period, a parent conference will be scheduled. If it is determined that we cannot accommodate your child’s needs, the parent will be required to find another childcare. The allotted time frame will be at the discretion of the Director.

Media Usage

For the confidentiality and safety of all our children and their families, non-staff members are not permitted to take any pictures or videos of any children on the FUMC campus.

The use of television, videos, DVDs, or any other type of electronic viewing material is discouraged. However, segments or short clips of material may be used for instructional implementation when first 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.

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

Emergencies

Drills

Each month we are required by DCF to conduct a fire drill. The drill will be scheduled at different times throughout 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. This will include having the children go to a designated area in the preschool. Staff will be instructed to keep all the children away from windows and doors. We will conduct a lockdown once annually as well.

Emergency Contacts

All students must have current **Emergency Contacts** on file in the center. This information lists authorized people who may pick up your child and whom to contact in case of a medical emergency or natural disaster (when a parent/guardian cannot be contacted).

This information also lists allergies your child has been diagnosed with. 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's 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 medication to be dispensed in the prescribed container with appropriate prescription label.

Any serious 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 will be notified via email, and we would leave a note taped to the front door of the center. The note will contain the following information:

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

We would evacuate to the main sanctuary or the fellowship hall here on the church campus. As soon as we are certain that all children are safe, we will begin to contact parents via email. Please ascertain that your family is registered for this vital safety and emergency procedure program. Please ascertain that all contact numbers have been updated and are in working order.

Staff will remain with the children and care for their needs until all children are secured with their individual families.

Lock Downs

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

- All doors/windows will be secured and locked, once it is established that all children are accounted for and in their assigned classrooms.
- Administration personnel will quickly double check to ascertain that all windows and doors are secured.
- **No one** (including parents, guardians, or staff) will be permitted to enter or exit the center during this time.

Once the authorities have given all clear, people will be permitted to enter and exit the center. Families will be notified at pick-up when the lock down procedure is 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 parents.

News will be sent via email with information covering any upcoming events.

Daily Schedule Forms will be sent home with our infants, one, two- and three-year-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 in which you need to notification, an incident/accident report will. A photocopy will be made for the family upon request.

Visits - Parents are free to visit at any time. 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. Anyone who wishes to visit their child **MUST** stop by the preschool office, sign in/out and receive a visitor's pass. Parents who wish to bring and/or join their child for lunch in the Church 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.

Preschool Chapel will be scheduled during the school year (September through May). All families are invited to attend Chapel. Generally, Preschool Chapel will be held on the second and fourth Monday, of each month. (These dates are subject to change based on the Chapel Leader’s schedule). Children are encouraged to bring nonperishable food items to be donated.



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 received, completed and returned Enrollment Packet documentation.**

_____ **I received and read the Guide to Licensed Childcare**

_____ **I have received, read and will abide by the 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.**

Child's Name _____

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____