

The Children's Center Parent Handbook

**236 E. Spruce Street, Missoula, MT
www.missoulachildrenscenter.com**

To the Parents:

Thank you for considering The Children's Center in choosing an early care and education program for your child.

The Children's Center is a program licensed by the State of Montana. Services include an Early Preschool Group for 2 and young 3 year olds and a Preschool program for 3 1/2 to 5 year olds. Sometimes Kindergarten children are included in the Preschool group.

We believe children need nurturing, support, and encouragement, a feeling of belonging, an acceptance of their emotions, guidance towards appropriate social skills, interaction with others and a positive self-concept. The goal of The Children's Center is to provide an atmosphere that will enhance social, emotional, physical and intellectual skills for children in a safe and happy environment.

We offer a wide choice of activities to meet the individual needs of each child, with a variety of creative and educational activities. There is a balance of quiet and active periods. There are many opportunities for children to learn and play as we try to prepare them for Kindergarten and the exciting world in which they live.

We follow a structured play, theme-based curriculum and believe that the learning of social skills is an important aspect of our programs with an emphasis on making good choices and natural consequences.

We help children develop good language skills, observe, question, create, solve problems, satisfy curiosity, explore, interact and experience their world through art, music, movement, books and hands on experiences. We have a Daily Schedule that promotes a routine to establish consistency and a sense of security. Our formal periods are short in duration so the child's interest will be maintained. Transitions between activities are designed to make changes easy and stress-free.

Each staff member has a real interest in your child's growth and well-being. We can only open the door for them to participate. Your encouragement and interest in their time spent here will help establish a positive attitude towards school and the wonderful world of learning. We are all on the same team. Let's work together to make this a meaningful experience for you, your child and the staff of The Children's Center.

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WHAT IS A "STRUCTURED PLAY" PRESCHOOL ALL ABOUT?

At preschool we want to set a firm foundation for the rest of a child's education to be built upon. To do this we want to see school as a fun place to be, where learning is exciting. A place they can ask questions and try new things. Below are listed four areas that we concentrate on.

1. A love for books is important. If children learn to love books while they are young, they will be readers for life. A child who reads gets to travel to many places and meet many kinds of people. It develops creativity and wonder in their world. They learn that many things are possible and that they should not be afraid of the unknown.
2. A good base of social skill is important. If they can develop good social skills, children will be better able to get along in the world. They need to learn what kinds of interactions are appropriate in different situations. They need to develop a solid sense of who they are and to know it is okay to be different. Our differences are what make us unique and worthwhile.
3. A love for the arts is important. The arts are the enrichment of life. Music makes life more meaningful. It sets the moods, helps us to express feelings and reaches into the roots of our being. Visual arts enrich our surroundings. Children can learn to express themselves using the visual arts. Drawing promotes thinking and planning skills and boosts creativity. They learn to verbally express their likes and dislikes in an acceptable manner.
4. Motor skills are developing rapidly at this age. Preschoolers are learning about their bodies and what they are capable of. They are learning about the differences in the looks and abilities of others. By being encouraged and praised, they in turn do the same for others.

All of these things can be learned in a warm, caring, fun and playful environment where learning isn't a chore, but something that just happens. Learning is a fun part of their everyday life. If we as staff go home feeling good about our day, chances are the children in our care will too.

(Adapted from an article taken from Kids Just Wanna Have Fun . . . So Do the Teachers by Linda Todd.)

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Schedules

Our program is set up on an academic year schedule, with an early September start for most children new to our program. Occasional mid-year openings are filled as they become available. We are closed on all major holidays, Spring break, Winter break and two days in August for setting up the new school year. A copy of our schedule for the current year is available from the Executive Director and will be provided for you at the beginning of the school year. Days and hours of operation are subject to change upon thirty days' notice. The Children's Center is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Children **cannot** be dropped off before the Center opens and must be picked up by 5:30 p.m./closing time.

The Early Preschool Program for 2 and Young 3 Year Olds

This stage of life is an important time for growth and development. It is a time when children gain better control of their bodies, develop language skills and begin to realize that there is a world beyond themselves, that is interesting and worthy of exploration.

We believe that children this age need help in communicating their feelings and needs to the other children with whom they want to play, as well as to the adults who teach and care for them. They need reassurance and encouragement as well as comfort and understanding.

Our staff members have the personal qualities and professional training that is necessary to care for and teach young children. A sense of humor and a commitment to the children's healthy development is essential as well as the ability to let them "do it themselves." An understanding of growth and development mixed with patience and caring are essential to working with this age group.

The program includes lots of time to play indoors and out, an introduction to books and story time and open-ended art projects with the emphasis on "doing" rather than a final product. There are many opportunities to promote language skills, greater body control, fine motor skills, sensory development, and social skills in a theme-based curriculum. Many choices are available to meet individual needs and levels of readiness.

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Toilet training is part of the curriculum as well. As children learn this skill, they will also learn appropriate hand washing and self-help skills such as dressing and taking care of their personal belongings.

Breakfast, lunch and snack times are also important social and learning times. Children model adult table manners and are offered, but not forced, to try new foods. Tooth brushes are available after lunch to promote good dental health habits.

Nap time is very pleasant and restful. The children have their own mats, shades are drawn and calming music is played. A staff member is in the room or close by at all times. Children are encouraged to bring a blanket, pillow, and stuffed animal for nap time. Nap time is part of our daily schedule and it is required that the children stay on their nap mats at this time. Children do not have to sleep, but we cannot force them to stay awake.

Transitions

This is all part of growing up and getting ready for preschool. Children will transition into the preschool group as they mature and acquire the necessary skills. Transitioning normally takes place in the Fall. Occasionally, a child is not quite ready in the Fall, even though his/her chronological age makes him/her eligible to move. When this occurs, transitioning is delayed for a short time until the necessary growth has been made and all involved feel comfortable with the transition process.

Preschool Readiness

The Children's Center has two groups, the Early Preschool Program and the Preschool Program. The determination as to which program a child shall attend is made at the discretion of The Children's Center, on a case-by-case basis. As part of its determination for readiness for Preschool, the Center considers such matters as: (1) the developmental age of the child; (2) whether the child is completely "potty-trained" and can use the facilities independently on a consistent basis away from home; (3) is able to communicate needs; (4) has an expanded attention span; (5) can easily separate from parents and can walk in without needing to be carried; (6) has self-care skills such as dressing, care of personal items and (7) has appropriate language development; and (8) the results of the developmental assessments that are done during the school year by the teachers.

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The Missoula Public School District uses September 10th as the cutoff date for children entering Kindergarten. They must be 5 years of age by that date to enter school. The Children's Center will take this date into consideration when moving children into the Preschool Program, but will try to be flexible depending on the factors mentioned above.

A child is initially moved from Early Preschool to the Preschool Program on a trial basis and it may be necessary to move the child back to Early Preschool for a period of time. We respectfully ask for parents to be patient with this process and to allow their child to grow and mature and make the developmental gains necessary for a successful transition into a more structured environment.

Readiness for Kindergarten

One of the main goals of our Preschool Program is to prepare children for Kindergarten. The curriculum and the lessons all focus on this goal. Developmental assessments are done two times during the school year and a child's progress is charted. Areas of weakness or delays are addressed early in the school year and goals are set with the parents upon discussion with the child's teacher(s).

Adjustments are made to the curriculum to meet the needs of each child and by the time a child reaches five years of age, he/she should be ready to graduate preschool and go on to Kindergarten. The teachers and Executive Director discuss this progress often throughout the school year and work together with the parents to make sure individual goals for each child are moving along towards completion by the end of the preschool year. After completion of The Children's Centers programs, your child will most likely be more than ready for school. The Children's Center will make a recommendation on Kindergarten readiness for each child. We always have the best interest of your child in mind.

The Children's Center reserves the right to refuse enrollment or re-enrollment of any child. Our staff is more than happy to offer suggestions for alternatives to our programs.

Family Involvement.

Our program recognizes the importance of families. We hope that you will become involved in our program by participating in classroom activities, joining

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us for lunch, joining us for field trips, and attending school events. Parents are welcome to visit their children at any time. Please do not hesitate to share information with teachers about your child's development or to seek information from teachers regarding your parenting concerns. There will be opportunities throughout the year for you to join and build the Children's Center community. We will have various fundraising activities and school parties and appreciate your participation. We will also have various projects that you can help with around the Center. We hope that you will participate in our program whenever possible.

Drop Off and Pick Up Procedures

The State of Montana requires your child to be signed in and out daily with parents/guardians in attendance. This means that you need to walk your child in in the morning and come inside to pick up your child in the afternoon. A staff member will sign your child in and out every day following contact with an approved guardian. Never leave or pick up your child without talking to a staff member. Inform us of any changes or special needs your child may have. We must have your permission to release your child to another person if you are unable to do so personally. Please inform us in advance either by phone, a note or in person in the morning. If the person picking up your child is unknown to our staff, we will require them to show a picture I.D.

Toys

Children are allowed and encouraged to bring a special doll or stuffed animal to nap with. However, we generally discourage children from bringing other toys to school. Please put your child's name on all toys to prevent confusion about ownership. Toys that promote aggression or are weapons are not acceptable and will not be allowed.

Dress

Please bring your child dressed ready to play. We encourage active and sometimes messy play. Nice dress clothes may get stained. Every article of clothing should be clearly marked with your child's name, especially outerwear and shoes.

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Please send proper clothing for the season changes. In winter your child will need a warm coat, hat, mittens, snow pants and boots. We are required by State regulations to take the children outside every day. It is important that we have the proper clothes to put on your child so that he/she can remain healthy and enjoy outside activities. It is helpful to bring an extra pair of shoes or cozy slippers for inside during the winter

Also, please send an extra change of clothes to leave at the Center. In case of a spill or potty accident, a child feels much more secure if he/she can put on his/her own clothing rather than something we scrape together that does not fit.

Naps

Young children need to rest. An early childhood program is very stimulating. Children attending the Center need more rest than if they were in a quieter or less active environment. We like to encourage all children to take a nap, but recognize that they may not always do so. Please provide a blanket and a small pillow to be kept at the Center for rest/nap time and take the blanket home weekly to be washed.

Field Trips

Occasionally the children will take field trips. You will be informed of a trip in advance. Please read and check your e-mail. If you do not wish your child to participate, please let us know. Our enrollment packet includes a form for you to sign that gives your child permission to travel with the group on foot under the supervision of our staff.

Food Program

Breakfast and afternoon snack is served to all children. We encourage the children to try new foods to help them develop healthy attitudes toward a wide variety of foods. We serve fresh fruits and vegetables, low-sugar cereal and whole grain crackers. The children are also involved in growing a variety of vegetables in our garden on the playground. To the extent possible, we try to incorporate these foods into our snack plans.

Parents will pack lunch for their child. The Center will provide milk or milk alternate. Please do not send your child to the Center with candy, soda, or gum. This often creates problems for the other children.

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The children determine what and how much they want to eat at meals and food is never withheld or used as a form of discipline.

If your child has any allergies, please let us know.

And Justice for All...

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202)720-6382 (TTY). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Treats from Home

To celebrate your child's birthday, you may send treats to school. Food that comes from home for sharing with the other children must be either whole fruits or commercially prepared foods in a factory-sealed container. This includes treats for any parties or gatherings we have at school.

Oral Hygiene

The Children's Center promotes good oral hygiene by providing healthy meals and snacks. In addition, we encourage the children to brush their teeth after lunch by providing toothbrushes and toothpaste for them to use.

Illness

The staff may exclude from the facility any child showing signs or symptoms of illness upon admission (a runny nose without fever is permissible). The Children's Center has the ability to do so at its discretion, for any reason it deems to be of sufficient concern for the wellbeing of the child or for safety/health concerns for the other children. If a child has any of the following conditions, he/she will be excluded:

- A) An upper respiratory infection with a temperature of 100.2 or greater.
- B) A draining ear infection.
- C) Diarrhea and frequent runny stools with abdominal discomfort.

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- D) Chicken pox (until sores are dry).
- E) Thick mucous discharge from the nose which is green or yellow in color.
- F) Presence of ringworm, lice, scabies, impetigo, pink eye or other body parasites.
- G) Any other reason deemed sufficient by the Center staff.

Medication Administration Policy

1. At The Children's Center, we believe that children should be given medication, when needed, in the safest possible way for the child, parent and providers. Administering medication is based on parent consent and the child's health care provider recommendations. We encourage the child's parent or guardian to visit the Center to administer any medications.
2. This medication policy was developed so that medications will be administered in a safe and expedient manner that protects children and staff.
3. Prescription medication must be in the original child proof container that is labeled by a pharmacist with the child's name, the name of the health care provider who wrote the prescription, the medication's expiration date and the administration, dose, storage and disposal instructions.
4. Over-the-Counter (non-prescription) medications will not be administered by the staff and may not be brought on the premises.
5. A health care provider may state that a certain medication may be given for a recurring problem, emergency situation or chronic condition. The instructions for such a medication must include the child's name, the name of the medication, the dose of the medication, how often the medication may be given, the conditions for use and any precautions to follow. In this case staff will then administer any medication needed. It will be put in a Log specific to the child who needs it. Marked with the dose given, date, time, and staff member who administered the medication.
6. Medications will be stored at the recommended temperature, in a child proof container, in a place inaccessible to children. Medication will be administered in the area where it is stored.

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7. Expired medication will be given back to parents to dispose of in the correct manner.
8. The Children's Center will not provide or stock any medications. All medications administered at The Children's Center will be provided by the parent for their own child.
9. This policy applies to all children, parents, guardians and providers.
10. Parents will be notified if their child suffers any side effects from medication or if a medication error or incident occurred. A medication error/incident report will be completed by the staff person administering medication and co-signed by the Executive Director. In the event of an adverse effect or serious allergic reaction, staff will call (EMS) 911 if the child is in distress. Parents will be provided a copy of this policy upon enrollment of their child in our program. If parents refuse to sign the Medication Authorization Form, the medication will not be administered.

First Aid Procedure

If your child is injured while at the Center, all staff is trained in Standard First Aid and CPR. When a child is injured, we remove the child from the playground or the classroom and the injury is assessed by the Executive Director or Lead Teacher. If it is a minor injury such as a scrape, bruise or small cut, the first aid includes a lot of TLC, cleansing of the affected area, and a band aid or a frozen sponge is placed on the wound to take the hurt away. An Incident Report (Ouch Report) is written by the person who witnessed the injury and a copy of it is taped to the child's cubby so the parent will see it at pick up time. If the injury is more serious, the parent will be phoned and asked to come to the Center to make a decision regarding further medical attention. Of course, if a major injury or sudden emergency occurs, 911 will be called immediately as well as the parents. If the child has ingested a poisonous or toxic substance, Montana Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 will be called at once.

Medical Release

Parents must give The Children's Center permission to get necessary medical treatment in case of an emergency. Saint Patrick Hospital is the likely hospital to

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be used since it is only a few blocks away. Transportation would be by a staff member's vehicle, only if we cannot wait for an ambulance to be summoned by dialing 911. This release is part of the enrollment packet. We also need to know the name, address and phone number of your child's physician.

Allergies

Parents need to inform the Center of any allergies your child has concerning foods, medications, insect bites, etc. This needs to be in writing from your child's physician. All HIPPA regulations will be followed in regards to confidentiality.

Pet and Animal Policy

The Children's Center believes that introducing children to appropriate pets and other animals is beneficial to their development and helps them appreciate our diverse environment. The Center may choose from time to time to have pets as part of their program and, if so, shall work to ensure that safety and cleanliness issues are addressed. With prior approval, appropriate pets and other animals can be brought to the Center. However, The Children's Center shall determine in its discretion if the pet/animal is appropriate and control the time/duration selected for visitation. Also, to encourage proper hygiene, if the children physically touch any pet/animal, they shall be required to wash their hands afterward.

Cold Weather/Outdoor Play Policy

It is very important that children have the opportunity to play outdoors every day. During cold weather months (November-March), all children should have the following winter clothing in their cubbies:

1. Warm Winter Jacket
2. Snow Pants
3. Insulated Boots
4. Waterproof Gloves or Mittens
5. Winter Hat (covers ears)

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Please do not send scarves as they hang down and can get caught in the play equipment.

When the children are dressed appropriately for cold weather, they can play outdoors and enjoy being outside. Parents are responsible for providing your child with enough warm clothes to keep them warm during outside to play. The duration of the time outside depends on the temperature and the discretion of the Executive Director. We assure you that we always have the health, safety and best interests of your children in mind when making these types of decisions.

If the weather is extremely cold and windy, the children will do active games and large motor activities inside instead.

Guiding Behavior

We use a Positive Approach to Guiding Behavior. There are many opportunities for the children to learn appropriate and acceptable behavior. We teach problem solving techniques that involve helping the children resolve conflicts on their own in a non-violent manner. The focus is on what they can do instead of what they cannot do. An environment that is set up for success helps to promote and maintain acceptable behavior. Children learn natural consequences for their actions and how to make the best choices. Feelings are expressed in appropriate ways to their friends and the adults as well. Clear limits are set and rules are followed to ensure the health and happiness of everyone involved. Encouragement helps build good self-concepts. Children discover and begin to understand reasons for their actions and ways to deal with frustration. We work on social skill development and appropriate ways to deal with “bumps in the road of life.”

Under no circumstances will we use physical punishment as a means of controlling behavior.

Occasionally problems arise that might require cooperation and teamwork from the parents. The staff might find it necessary to contact the parents in order to help the child learn appropriate behavior and problem-solving techniques.

If we are not succeeding and a child's behavior is disrupting the program or threatening the well-being of the other children, the Executive Director will ask that the child be removed. While we realize that each child's needs are unique, we sometimes are unable to accommodate needs that compromise the integrity of the program. Every attempt will be made first to work with the child and family to guide him/her through various developmental stages.

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The Children's Center reserves the right to remove any child from the program at its discretion.

Mandatory Reporters

Any staff member who suspects that a child may have been abused or neglected shall report their concerns to the county office of the Department of Public Health and Human Services.

Board of Directors

The Center is a private, non-profit organization with a Board of Directors. A list of volunteers is available upon request. The Board consists of community members and some parents who are interested in assisting the Executive Director with various aspects of the Center operations. If you are interested in volunteering for a seat on the Board, please let the Executive Director know.

Policy Regarding Non-Discrimination & Celebrations

The Center strives to treat all individuals equally and it does not discriminate based on race, creed, religion, color, national origin, physical or mental disability, marital status, age, sex or any other characteristics which may be protected by law.

Over the course of the year, we find many ways to celebrate together in the classrooms and as a school community. The Center celebrates cultural and religious diversity, choosing to celebrate certain events and holidays as a fun means to educate the children. Should you have a particular tradition or holiday which you celebrate as part of your cultural background, feel free to bring this to our attention so that we can consider including some form of program into our curriculum. We invite children and families to talk about or share their own home holiday traditions and experiences as they wish. The Center reserves the right to determine appropriate content for its educational programs.

Complaints Regarding Employee Conduct

If a parent of a child at the Center has a complaint regarding conduct by one of its employees, the conduct should be reported immediately to the Executive Director. Any such complaints concerning the conduct of the Executive Director can be submitted in writing to the Children's Center Board of Directors.

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Enrollment

Our program is designed to provide full-day care and education. A limited number of two, three, and four-day per week enrollment slots are available in each classroom. Our program is a full year program and continues through the summer. During the summer, we take more field trips and focus more on an outside learning environment. Because we are a full year program, schedules continue for the full year, including the summer. Each Spring, we ask that parents of enrolled children let us know their child's schedule for the upcoming fall so that we can plan accordingly.

The Children's Center maintains a waiting list for parents interested in enrolling their children in our programs. Siblings of currently enrolled children are given preference for enrollment from our waiting list. Parents should submit an application for sibling enrollment as early as possible to ensure there is a spot available. Due to the limited space in each classroom, we will do our best but cannot guarantee enrollment for siblings.

The policies outlined in this handbook are subject to change at the discretion of the Board of Directors.