

Stepping Stones Family Handbook 2026-2027



Play, learn, and grow in a place that feels like home.

www.steppingstoneshomedaycare.com

About Us

Stepping Stones Home Daycare was established in 2009 and is owned and operated by a former elementary school teacher and mother of two children. We are a state-licensed home daycare conveniently located in Ashburn, Virginia.

Stepping Stones creates an environment that enables children to express their inner genius. The staff at Stepping Stones knows that every child is unique, and this is why our daycare creates an atmosphere that is conducive to each child's learning style. Stepping Stones maintains a safe, educational, fun, and rewarding environment for children by ensuring close supervision and giving every child the attention and motivation needed for positive and interactive growth. Children can play, learn, and grow in a place that feels like home!



We love to learn while having fun!

Stepping Stones Home Daycare provides full-time quality childcare services. Stepping Stones believes in allowing children to learn and grow at their individual pace. Stepping Stones utilizes a variety of educational themes, curricula, and age-appropriate activities to ensure that every child's experience is successful.

Hours of Operation and Contact Information

Stepping Stones is open from 7:00am* – 4:30pm Monday - Friday. Please be aware of the late pick-up policy and fees outlined in your child's contract and arrange for your child to be picked up on time each day. Stepping Stones can be reached via phone or text at 703-828-7449.

Families can email Misty directly at misty@steppingstoneshomedaycare.com.

*Please be respectful of our ratios and time preparing for the day prior to 7:00 am. We are ready to welcome your child once the clock strikes seven.

Absences

Please send a text message or email if your child will be out for the day or unusually late. We worry about children who do not arrive at Stepping Stones when expected, and knowing your plans for the day helps us plan our day.

Our Programs

Ratios: Stepping Stones follows a point system implemented by the Virginia Department of Education because we maintain a mixed-age group of children. Our typical ratio of teachers to children is one to four.

Infant Program: The first year of life is a critical time for brain, social, and emotional development. We provide a nurturing and loving environment that fosters the learning process, allowing each baby to observe their surroundings, retain information gained from their experiences, and form attachments with others. Activities are planned for each child based on the child's individual developmental needs. Along with receiving personalized care, infants are given opportunities to observe and interact with toddlers and preschoolers with a teacher nearby. Each infant is on their own feeding and sleeping schedule when they first start at Stepping Stones, based on their demands, and each infant develops uniquely. Most infants fall into a schedule of a morning and afternoon nap by 6-8 months old.

The Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is used as a guide to your child's growth and development. Family responses on the ASQ will determine programming and activities for your child.

Toddler /Preschool Programs: The toddler and preschool age groups are diverse, and each child is different. We recognize and encourage these differences, and we implement a variety of strategies that allow each child to begin defining their sense of independence while dependent on the adults caring for and teaching them.

We follow a daily routine that is consistent yet flexible. Children quickly learn to anticipate what will come next in their day and begin to demonstrate initiative. Daily lessons are planned to ensure support for the children's current interests and developmental progress. Observation and assessment provide key insight into the needs of the individual children and serve as a foundation for goal setting and lesson planning. Toilet training is also incorporated into the daily routine for older toddlers who demonstrate interest and developmental readiness. Teachers and families work in partnership to develop a toilet training plan for their child that is consistent between home and school. Our toddler and preschool program forms a solid stepping stone into a four-year-old preschool classroom.

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Curriculum

Stepping Stones employs a Virginia state-approved curriculum for the entire school year. Activities are academically appropriate and engaging for toddlers and preschoolers.

Art

Process art activities are used throughout the year. Process art puts the primary focus on the process from start to finish of the project rather than the finished product. Process art is more enjoyable for young children than traditional crafts and gives children a sense of satisfaction with their own work. Most artwork goes home on Thursdays. A note will be put in the Brightwheel informing parents to check their child's bag. Please remove the artwork and return the folder the following day.

Assessments

In addition to the ASQ, formal assessments are conducted at the beginning and end of the year for children over two years old. Families will receive their child's progress reports via email at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Your child's progress report will be based on daily activities and observations.

Brightwheel App: The Brightwheel app is used for all children. Brightwheel promotes communication between families and teachers. This app is used for attendance, supply reminders, and daily reports for all children. Families will receive login information for Brightwheel prior to the first week of school. Current families should be able to use login information from the previous school year. Supply reminders are typically sent home on Fridays.

Stepping Stones Daily Schedule

7:00 AM Daycare opens

8:00 AM Breakfast

8:30 AM Freeplay /Small group work

9:15 AM Outdoor play (weather permitting)

10:00 AM Snack

10:15 AM Circle time (Curriculum) / Art / Learning Activities

11:00 AM 30-minute TV time

11:30 AM Lunch

11:50 AM Story and songs

12:00 PM Naptime

3:00 PM Afternoon Snack

3:15 PM Free play

3:45 PM Outdoor play (weather permitting)

4:30 PM Daycare closed

*Schedule will vary based on activity transition times and weather.

2026-2027 Schedule of Holidays and Closings

8/10/2026	First Day of School at Stepping Stones
9/4/2026 - 9/7/2026	Labor Day Holiday
9/21/2026	Holiday (Rosh Hoshanah)
10/12/2026	Holiday (Indigenous People's Day)
11/9/2026	Holiday (Diwali)
11/25/2026 - 11/27/2026	Thanksgiving Holiday
12/21/2026-1/1/2027	Winter Break
1/18/2027	Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
2/5/2027	Holiday (Lunar New Year)
2/15/2027	Holiday (President's Day)
3/9/2027	Holiday (Eid)
3/22/2027 - 3/26/2027	Spring Break
5/6/2027 - 5/7/2027	Closure due to personal event. Subject to change. Dates will be finalized 4/1/2027.
5/31/2027	Memorial Day
6/16/2027	First day of Summer Break

Weather Related Closings

In the event of inclement weather, Stepping Stones will follow Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) for delays and closings. Please subscribe to LCPS notifications for alerts regarding delays and closings.

Stepping Stones will follow Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) for any changes in delays and closings that impact the teacher calendar.

Weekly Newsletter

Please read the weekly newsletter at the end of the week. It can be tempting to only look at the pictures and not review the content of the email. Most of the time, the content is curriculum-based and correlates to what we are learning at Stepping Stones. However, occasionally, there is important information and reminders about upcoming dates and activities. All photos will be uploaded to a Stepping Stones Google Photos account so families can download originals at their leisure. Look for a link at the end of each newsletter for access to photos. Photos will be removed at the end of the school year to create space for the next school year.

Vaccination Updates

Immunization updates are an important part of your child's record and are mandated by VDOE. Obtain a copy of your child's updated immunization record at each well check. Immunization records need to be updated in your child's file every 6 months for children under 2 years old and every 2 years for children over 2 years old. For convenience, you are welcome to have your child's vaccination record faxed to Misty at [801-730-4034](tel:801-730-4034).

Billing

All families are on the same billing cycle, and invoices are emailed every two weeks through Parachute/KidKare. Most families use auto-pay for convenience and to ensure their payment is received on time. KidKare will email reminders until payment is received. Families using FSA can print payment reports directly through KidKare. The Stepping Stones Tax ID should be printed on the report.

Staff Training and Schedules

Our teachers participate in in-service training annually, which covers developmental and academic topics. We also maintain CPR/First Aid certifications. Our teacher schedules are consistent, but will sometimes vary.

Parking

Please use on-street parking for drop-off and pick-up. To keep neighbors and Loudoun County Zoning happy, please do not park in front of mailboxes or driveways and ensure your car is parked in the correct direction. Additionally, quick pick-ups and drop-offs are recommended. Because Minerva Drive is a busy road, it is recommended that families park on the side of the street where their child's seat is

closest to the sidewalk, so families are not standing in the street for extended periods of time.

Gates

For safety reasons, exterior gates need to be locked upon entering and exiting Stepping Stones. This means all gates should be locked every time they are opened and closed. Children are safer if gates are locked all the time.

Pick Up and Drop Off

To create a safe and manageable way for children to arrive and leave our program, we will continue to implement the following protocol:

Our door is always locked. Please ring the Arlo doorbell upon arrival, and a teacher will greet you. Note: There is about a 10-second delay from the time the doorbell is pressed to the time it chimes. Your child is welcome to use the child-friendly doorbell, and parents only should use the Arlo doorbell. Please note that the child-friendly doorbell will not chime, so parents must use the Arlo doorbell to announce arrival.

Illness/Medication

We follow guidelines for illnesses set forth by the Virginia Department of Health (VDH). Children must be sent home if they have a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher, are vomiting, or have diarrhea. Additionally, unusual rashes or other signs of infectious disease, like pink eye, will warrant a phone call to a parent/guardian. Children must be fever, vomit, and diarrhea free for 24 hours, without medication, before returning to daycare. The timeline for returning may be extended for certain communicable diseases, like Hand, Foot, and Mouth (HFM). Any medication brought to Stepping Stones (prescription, non-prescription, topical) requires a completed form.

Prescription medication needs to be in the original container showing administration instructions. Long-term medication (more than 10 working days) requires a doctor's signature. Diaper rash cream or any other non-prescription topical medication requires a topical medication form. Forms can be found online in the forms section at www.steppingstoneshomedaycare.com. We will keep copies available for families at Stepping Stones if needed.

Separation Anxiety

The timing for separation anxiety can be difficult to predict, and some children never experience separation anxiety. Fortunately, separation anxiety is typically a phase in young children. If your child has a difficult drop-off, you are welcome to call or text to check on them. Children who get upset at drop-off usually settle down and start to enjoy their day within a few minutes after being dropped off. Here are simple strategies that families can use to help ease their child's anxiety:

-Have a goodbye routine. This can be as simple as a hug and an “I’ll see you soon,” or perhaps you and your child have a fun handshake or high five. Whatever the routine, ensure it is fun, short, and sweet, and use the same routine each day. Anxious children thrive on predictability.

-I cannot stress the “short and sweet” goodbye enough. After many years of watching children say goodbye to their families, I can attest to there being a direct correlation between the time a parent takes to say goodbye to their child and the time it takes for the child to settle once the parent has left.

-Sneaking out when your child is not looking is not recommended. While this goodbye method may be easy on the parent, it will only increase the child’s anxiety moving forward. Your child needs to know that you are leaving them even when they are upset. They will quickly learn that even though you have left them, you will return at the end of the day to pick them up.

-Consistent drop-off and pick-up times are recommended for all children. Even our youngest children are observant and quickly learn the general order of when children are picked up each day (e.g., after Jack and before Alexandra). Of course, things do happen, and schedules change, but keeping a consistent drop-off and pick-up time is ideal for all children.

-Avoid lengthy discussions about your child’s separation anxiety. Saying things like, “We are not going to cry today” or even talking about why your child is upset is often counterproductive because these conversations draw attention to the issue and can cause your child more anxiety. A simple acknowledgment of your child’s feelings when they are upset, like “I am sorry you are sad, but I can’t wait to see you later today,” can show understanding and set expectations with your child.

Biting

Biting is a common but upsetting toddler behavior. Toddlers bite for many reasons, including: attention, cause and effect, frustration, and limited language. It is important for families to understand that biting often occurs very quickly, within a second or two, and often without warning. If a child bites another child at Stepping Stones, teachers immediately intervene to provide attention and care to the child who was bitten and to help the biter understand that biting is an unacceptable behavior that hurts. Our primary goal is to prevent biting from happening, and we employ many positive, calm strategies to achieve this goal. If a biting incident occurs, parents of the biter and the victim will be informed through an incident/injury report.

Incident/Injury Reports

Per VDOE guidance, incident/injury reports will be sent home with your child if your child is injured and first aid is administered. Additionally, incident forms may be used if your child harms another child.

Food

Food is an important part of the Stepping Stones day! We will be sure to inform families if their child did not eat well or is consistently declining a particular meal. Families always have the option of sending in alternate meals and snacks. Do not send in food containing peanuts if you are providing food from home. If food items are sent in from home for children over one year old, it is strongly recommended that your child can independently eat the items provided. We have a set schedule for meals and snacks that revolves around our daily routine. Breakfast 8:00-8:30am AM Snack 10:00-10:15am Lunch 11:00-11:30am PM Snack 3:00-3:15pm. If your child is going to arrive ten minutes or later after a designated snack/meal time start time, please ensure they have had their meal or snack at home. This helps us stick to our routine and ensures we have an adequate ratio of teachers to children in each room.

Labeling

The state of Virginia requires all bottles and sippy cups to be labeled with your child's name. Bottles (not sippy cups) must also be labeled with the current date. This also applies to unprepared empty bottles. Many families have used a dry-erase marker in the past on bottles for the date. Jackets and coats should also be labeled with your child's name or initials.

Naptime

Our mornings are busy and active at Stepping Stones, and we often observe eye rubbing and yawns during lunchtime. Children who only take one nap will head to their crib or cot after lunch and toilet time, at Noon. Most children are asleep by 12:30 pm, and naptime ends at 2:45 pm. We sometimes observe children waking up earlier than 2:45 pm, and they are often comfortable resting until their peers begin to wake up. However, if your child is restless, we will take them out of the nap room to enjoy quiet time in the classroom. Because of our mixed-age group and daily schedule, naptime cannot be modified. Additionally, in an effort not to disrupt the other children, with the exception of early dismissals, we will not wake your child earlier than 2:45 pm.

Clothing

Please check Brightwheel for supply notes at the end of each day, but especially on Fridays. We will send a note via Brightwheel if your child needs extra clothing, diapers, wipes, etc. Layering a sweatshirt or hoodie over short sleeves is recommended for days when it is cool in the morning and warm in the evening. Please review our daily schedule for outdoor playtimes and ensure your child has adequate outerwear or is dressed appropriately for those specific times. Closed-toed shoes are recommended,

but not mandatory, for outdoor play to prevent mulch from entering your child's shoes and to allow for maximum movement. Children who are potty training or potty trained should wear bottoms that are easy to pull down. Overalls or bottoms with fasteners are adorable but are not recommended. If your child brings home soiled clothing, please send in replacement items the **following day**. Children getting dirty during meals, art, and outside play is common and is a sign of your child having an active and fun day. We have a large supply of bibs for use while your child is here, so there is no need to send in bibs from home. It is suggested that your child come to Stepping Stones in clothes and shoes you would be comfortable with them playing outside at the park.

Behavior and Progress

We love keeping families up to date on their child's behavior and progress, and we welcome families to ask how their child's day was at pick-up. While families are welcome to check in during the day via text message, please understand our days are busy, and I will not always be able to respond in a timely manner. I encourage families to reach out via email or text, and I can respond typically during nap time, if not sooner. Additionally, we appreciate it when families let us know at drop-off if your child had a restless night of sleep, is teething, or seems to be in an unusual mood. This will help us better prepare for your child's day so we can ensure they are happy and their needs are met. Families are encouraged to check in via text or email during the day if they are concerned about their child's well-being after a difficult night or if there are concerns that their child might be ill.

Communication After Hours

If families have questions or concerns outside of Stepping Stones' normal operating hours, please use email rather than texting or calling. Email is the most reliable way of ensuring a timely reply to your after-hours message. The Stepping Stones phone number goes into do-not-disturb mode after hours and on weekends. The number can still be used after hours, and messages will be received during regular business hours.

Birthdays

We look forward to celebrating your child's birthday at Stepping Stones! Families are welcome to send in birthday treats on or around their child's birthday. Please do not send peanut products. Birthday treats we have seen in the past include cupcakes, donuts, and cookies. We enjoy a summer birthday celebration before the end of the school year for any summer break birthdays.

Emergency Procedures due to Pandemic

Stepping Stones will implement the following procedures under the guidance and direction of the health department, local licensing agency, and federal, state, and local governmental agencies. To ensure the safety of children, families, and staff, the director will monitor the situation and consider the guidance and suggestions from the authorities. Decisions made by the director will consider the safety of children, families, and staff. Program changes may include:

Unplanned Closures

On occasion, we may need to close due to circumstances beyond our control and without much warning. During these situations, we must strive to ensure the financial sustainability of the daycare, as well as work as creatively as possible to provide care and support to our families and staff.

Remote Learning Opportunities During Closure:

- Teachers will maintain ongoing communication with families and children.
- Online platforms (such as Zoom, Google, and ABC Mouse) will be utilized for activities in group settings.
- Phone calls, emails, and newsletters will be sent regularly.

Changes When the Program is Reopening:

When the program reopens, all required protocols mandated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will be initiated. Some examples of practices that may be implemented are:

- Temporary reduction of program hours: hours will be determined based on staff availability and family need. Reduced hours may also be considered to provide staff with enough time for extra cleaning.
- Enhanced health screenings and temperature checks upon arrival.
- Stricter child exclusions for signs of illness.
- Limitation of family members in the daycare: Rest assured, you will always have access to your children, but to reduce the number of people coming into the building, we have amended our drop off/pick up policy, see below.

Tuition Agreement

Tuition Payments Due to Catastrophic Event or Public Health Emergency (Pandemic)

Tuition Payments: Under normal situations, families are expected to pay tuition regardless of whether their child attends the program or not. Tuition payments secure a space for your child and ensure expenses are paid, which includes staff salaries. In the event that the daycare is closed due to a sudden catastrophic event, including but not limited to weather-related emergencies, terrorism, or public health emergencies such as a pandemic, tuition will be expected as follows:

- For the first 4 weeks of closing, families will be charged full tuition.
- Closure of 4+ weeks: Tuition will be billed at 75%.

If Stepping Stones is closed for an excess of 6 weeks or more, a reassessment of tuition billing will be conducted.

Hold Policy: If the program reopens and you are not comfortable with returning, contact the director to request a temporary hold on your child's spot. Determination is based on enrollment, staffing, and current waiting lists, and this may involve a monetary fee.

Thank you for entrusting Stepping Stones with your child!
We are looking forward to a fun year filled with learning and joy!

Stepping Stones Home Daycare



Play, learn and grow in a place that feels like home!



Infant Supply List (three to twelve months)



- Backpack or bag
- Two changes of clothing for the current season (please plan to replace soiled clothing the day after it goes home)
- Coat, hat, mittens (no fingered gloves) for cold weather days, labeled with name/initials (These items should be sent in later in the fall, when the weather turns cooler.)
- Diapers, wipes (a large supply is preferred – we will store whatever does not fit in your child's bin)
- Bottles, labeled with name and date (Date must be updated every day per licensing standards. A dry erase marker can be used to mark the date on the bottle.)
- Baby food, if applicable
- Sleepsack for naptimes (optional)
- Diaper rash cream and any other necessary medications (all topical creams and medications require a medical form, which can be found in the Forms section of our website)
- Bibs: Stepping Stones provides standard-sized bibs. However, some families elect to send in smock-type bibs or large pocket bibs for their children.

Other optional items: Teether, aspirator, pacifier

****Crib sheets provided by Stepping Stones**

Stepping Stones Toddler/Preschool Supply List (13 months - 4 years old)



- Backpack or bag - Art projects can be large, and many projects are sent home each week. A larger elementary-sized backpack or bag is preferred over a preschool-sized bag.
- Two changes of clothing for the current season – top, bottom, socks, and underwear if applicable (Please plan to send fresh clothing in to replace soiled clothing the day after the clothing is sent home.)
- Coat, hat, mittens for cold weather days - mittens are preferred over fingered gloves, especially for 1-2 year olds (These items should be sent in later in the fall, when the weather turns cooler.)
- Sunhat or baseball hat for warm sunny days (optional)
- Diapers, wipes if applicable (a large supply is preferred – we will store whatever does not fit in your child's bin)
- Sippy cup, labeled with name, if your child uses a sippy cup (we will help your child transition to the open cup if they are over two years old)
- Standard-sized crib sheet (if your child takes one nap per day), blanket, and a soft toy or security object, if so desired, for naptime
- Diaper rash cream and any other necessary medications (all topical creams and medications require a medical form, which can be found in the Forms section of our website)