



2025-2026 Parent Handbook

Welcome to First Steps PDO at First Baptist Church of Benton! We are so excited that your family has chosen to enroll in our Parents Day Out Enrichment Program for the 2025-2026 school year. We want you to know that this center, staff, students, and families have been earnestly prayed over. We hope that your family ends this year feeling that your child's life has been enriched by participating in First Steps PDO.

Staffing

We want to assure you that all of our staff members have been thoroughly vetted and background checked. Those records are kept on file in the office. The center has supplied ample and continuous training to ensure that your child is receiving the best standard of care. We have at least one person on site at all times who is certified in CPR/First Aid. We have an AED in the facility with the appropriate pediatric supplies. The staff taking care of your children have completed specifically designed training for our program. Our staff training has 5 modules:

1. Orientation
2. Essentials of Student Safety & Supervision
3. Essentials of Social-Emotional Development
4. Essentials of Classroom & Behavior Management
5. Essentials of Curriculum & Early Childhood Learning

During the Summer of 2025 Ms. Jennifer completed 50 hours of state approved training for Early Childhood Educators and Program Directors. These courses covered a wide variety of topics including: Curriculum Development & Implementation, Safety, Social Emotional Development, Staff Leadership, Behavior Management, Child Development, and Instruction for Children under 6. If you would like to see the full training transcript, please contact the office. This training was taken and our new staff training module was created to perfectly fit our program!

Our employees are all 18 or older and have at minimum a high school diploma or GED.

Staff Safety Measures:

Random Drug Screening: We implement a random drug screening policy that all staff agree to when hired. All employees are screened at the beginning of employment and then no less than every three months during the program year.

Clear Bag Policy: Staff members are only allowed to bring clear bags into the facility. This policy ensures that no one is bringing unsafe items into the facility.

Walkie-Talkies: Each staff member has a walkie-talkie on them at all times. This allows our staff and director to be in almost instant contact at any point during the day.

No Cell Phone Policy: We have a very strict no cell phone policy. Staff are not permitted to bring their cell phones into their classrooms. The focus of each classroom teacher is completely on caring for and interacting with their students.

Teacher Child Ratios: We follow TN state guidelines for teacher-to-child ratios. Your child will never be in an overcrowded classroom. Those ratios are as follows

Age Group	Adult:Child Ratio
Preschool Two	1:7
Preschool 3	1:8
Pre-K3	1:9
Pre-K4	1:12

Facility Safety Measures

Controlled Access Doors: All exterior doors in our facility are controlled access that require a code or key fob to enter. Doors are locked at all times during the day while children are on the premises.

Fire Safety: Fire extinguishers are placed in every room/area of our facility and our staff have been appropriately trained on how to use them. Our facility also does monthly fire drills. Our staff have been well trained for exactly what to do in case of a fire and how to safely evacuate the children.

Weather Safety/Natural Disaster: We have a weather safety plan in place should our facility ever be placed under a tornado warning.

Intruder Protection: Our facility has a very strict pick-up policy. Anyone picking up a child is required to have their Brightwheel security code. If they do not have this code, they will not be allowed to pick up the child. This is to ensure that your children are as safe as possible. To further protect our children we have a “code black” system in place in the event that we have someone on the premises or in the facility that presents a danger to our students. This system includes reinforcing classroom doors and moving children to the safest area of the classroom until authorities can arrive and secure the facility.

Camera System: We have cameras throughout our facility. These cameras are monitored by the director during the program day so we know what is happening in all areas of the facility at all times. Cameras cover all indoor areas. Cameras are wi-fi based and use cloud storage. Due to the internet in the area, these can have intermittent periods that recordings are incomplete. The main function of these cameras are to be a second set of eyes and ears for the director during the day. This also allows our director to monitor the facility on the rare occasion that she can not be present.

Food/Choking Safety: In addition to training our staff in CPR, we also have choking prevention devices available. These devices are placed over and in the mouth of a choking child and have a suction effect to help dislodge the foreign object or food. We have a cordless landline phone installed in the cafeteria in the event that we need to contact emergency services.

Brightwheel

Brightwheel is our facility management system. We utilize Brightwheel for ALL communication with parents. This is how you will pay tuition/fees, see your child's daily report and photos, complete enrollment paperwork, etc. Please make sure that you are always logged in to Brightwheel. This is how we get in touch with you for everything!

Tuition Payments

Tuition for each week is due BEFORE your child is dropped off. All payments must be made through your Brightwheel account. If your child's tuition is not paid by the due date, a late fee will be automatically added. If your child's tuition is not current by Thursday, you will not be allowed to drop off your child. Tuition is due even if your child is absent due to sickness or travel. If your family encounters an issue with payment and arrangements need to be made, please contact the office. If tuition is paid late 3 times, without discussion with the office, Autopay will be required. There will be options to pay monthly or each week. There will be no cash or checks accepted in the facility.

Withdrawal/Disenrollment

If your family decides to withdraw your child during the program year, the parent or guardian who signed the enrollment forms must submit a signed "enrollment termination" letter to the office. A two-week withdrawal notice is required, and the family is required to pay the two weeks' tuition. If a parent or guardian withdraws a child without proper notice and payment, they will not be able to re-enroll the student or any future children in the First Steps PDO program or future childcare programs by FBC Benton.

Student Dress Code

Your child will get messy during their day at First Steps PDO! Please do not send them in clothes that are "too nice to play in". We will have various sensory and art projects as well as outdoor play any day it's not raining. Parents are required to have a complete change of clothes in their child's classroom at all times. Please bring these in a gallon ziplock bag labeled with your child's

name. Preschool classes and children who are not fully potty trained, should have two pairs of clothes. Kids are messy, we often have to change clothes due to food/water spills!

Children are required to wear tennis shoes/sneakers. No shoes with heels, crocs, wedges, or rain boots. Every year we have injuries due to improper footwear on the playground. This type of footwear is not suitable for the playground.

If the forecasted temperature is below 50 degrees children will need a jacket for outside play. Please make sure jackets are labeled with your child's name.

Female students also need to wear shorts under dresses/skirts. This is to protect their modesty/privacy as they are often sitting in the floor and climbing on the playground!

PLEASE LABEL ALL OF YOUR CHILD'S BELONGINGS! We have 37 students to keep organized!

Supplies

Parents are responsible for providing diapers/pull-ups and wipes as needed for their child. Your child's brightwheel feed will be marked with any supplies needed. Parents with students in our Preschool classrooms also must provide a clean crib sheet and blanket at the beginning of each week. These will be used during nap/quiet time. Sheets and blankets go home each Thursday. Please send a water bottle or a water sippy cup each day, labeled with the child's name. Our facility does not have a water fountain. We have a bottle filling station. Parents/Guardians are responsible for keeping two changes of weather-appropriate clothes in the classroom designated storage area. We will send these home for switching at the change of the seasons. **Pull-ups must have side closures.** Please do not send your child in pull-ups that do not velcro. This requires removing their pants/shoes to put on a clean pull-up. Doing that 7-9 times 3-5 times a day is incredibly time-consuming for our staff.

Classroom Specific Supply list are provided on Brightwheel and on the website.

Arrival/Departure Times

Drop-Off: 8:30am-8:50am

Pick-Up: 2:15pm-2:30pm

In order to keep our building secure, children who are attending must be dropped off by 8:50 am on program days. Students who arrive after 8:50am will not be served breakfast. The doors will open at 2:15pm for pick-up. Pick-up time is 2:15pm-2:30pm. If you need to drop your child off earlier or pick them up later, arrangements must be made by calling the office. After 9:00 am, no one will be able to enter the building without calling in through the office. Late drop offs are only allowed for things such as medical appointments, car trouble, etc.

Late drop-offs are not allowed due to scheduling preferences.

If you need to pick your child up early, they should be picked up before 2:00pm. From 2:00pm-2:15pm our staff is getting students packed and changed for the end of the day. We will not have staff available to bring children out between 2:00pm and 2:15pm.

If a child is not picked up by 2:35 pm there will be a \$25 late pick-up fee. This fee will be due before the next drop-off.

Drop-off/Pick-Up Procedures

Drop-Off Procedures

We utilize a “drop-off line” just like the schools! Please read the drop-off line document for the traffic pattern and instructions. Parents/Guardians who are picking up and dropping off will need their Brightwheel security code at pick up and drop off each day to sign their child in and out. Please memorize this code.

Preschool Two families are allowed to walk their child to the drop-off zone each morning, but will not be allowed to enter the building.

All other classes MUST use the drop-off line. Adults will not be allowed to enter the facility.

Pick-Up Procedures

To pick up their students, parents will park in the parking lot, walk to the PDO entrance, and sign their child out with a director. Students will be called to the door for parents to walk back to their car.

Health & Wellness Policies

Fever: If your child has a fever greater than 100.6 they will have to be picked up. Children must be unmedicated fever free for 24 hours before they can return to the facility.

Vomiting: If your child vomits in the center more than once or has vomiting in combination with any other symptom they will have to be picked up. Please do not bring your child to the facility if they have had more than one vomiting episode or vomiting combined with any other symptom in the past 24 hours.

Diarrhea: If a child has more than one episode of diarrhea or diarrhea combined with any other symptom they will have to be picked up. Please do not bring your child to the facility if they have had diarrhea more than once or diarrhea combined with any other symptom in the past 24 hours.

Lice/Bed Bugs/Scabies: If your child is found to have lice/bed bugs/scabies, they will have to be picked up. The child must be appropriately treated and egg/nit/bug free before they can return to the center.

If anyone in your household has symptoms of a contagious illness (stomach virus, COVID, flu, pink-eye, etc.) please do not bring your child into the facility until everyone is well. Illnesses such as these are extremely contagious and will spread to all students and staff which can result in the facility being closed unexpectedly.

Nutrition/Dietary/Allergies

We will provide a light breakfast and afternoon snack each program day. We make every effort for these snacks to be healthy with limited sugar and limited dyes. We do not guarantee dye free, but promise a conscious effort to eliminate unnecessary dyes.

If your child has allergies/restrictions, please make sure they have a nutrition form on file.

If your child has a life threatening allergy, they are required to have a “plan of action” on file. The director will work with you to make sure your child is kept safe at all times.

Lunch

First Steps does not provide student lunches. Parents are required to send a “ready to eat” lunch with their child each day. Please make sure that meals are completely prepared. We are not able to heat/cook lunches. Also, food items such as grapes, grape tomatoes, hotdogs, etc. should all be properly cut. Please remember that students are eating in a cafeteria setting with other students. They tend to be more distracted than they would be at home! Sometimes they don’t chew as well as they need to.

Birthday Celebrations

We love celebrating birthdays! Parents are welcome to send in treats to celebrate their child with classmates. We require that cupcakes be of mini size and have white icing. You are also welcome to send in cookies or other treats that your child enjoys.

Classroom/Age Transitions

As children age during the program year, they may be transitioned up into the age appropriate class as spots are available. Some of our classes also have developmental requirements. If your child is transitioning, you will be notified in writing by the program’s director. Staff will work alongside you and your child to make the transition as easy as possible. Children can not transition up in age until after their birthday.

Inclement Weather

In case of inclement weather that requires facility closure, you will be notified by Brightwheel. We will evaluate weather situations on a case-by-case basis. If we feel that it’s unsafe for our staff or children to be on the roads or in the building, we do have 5 built in weather days per year. These days can also be used on the rare occasion that we have widespread staff sickness and are unable to appropriately staff our classrooms.

Behavior Policies

Below you will find the behavior policy for each classroom. Our center truly believes that most negative behaviors have a cause, and we promise to work with your child to fix whatever is bothering them.

At First Steps PDO, we believe in discipline over punishment. Discipline is the act of teaching a child to make better choices, whereas punishment is the act of making them suffer for their mistakes. Part of our goal at First Steps PDO is to teach children to make good decisions the first time, instead of making them afraid to make a mistake.

Preschool Two	A child's negative behavior will first result in redirection/re-education. On the second time the behavior occurs the child will be redirected to the calm down spot and encouraged to participate in a calm down activity for two minutes. If the behavior continues to escalate, the child may "take a break" from the classroom for 5 minutes and spend one on one time with another staff member to reset the situation and figure out what the child needs.
Preschool Three	A child's negative behavior will first result in redirection/re-education. On the second time the behavior occurs the child will be redirected to the calm down spot and encouraged to participate in a calm down activity for three minutes. If the behavior continues to escalate, the child may "take a break" from the classroom for 5 minutes and spend one on one time with another staff member to reset the situation and figure out what the child needs.
Pre-K3 & Pre-K4	A child's negative behavior will first result in redirection/re-education. On the second time the behavior occurs the child will be redirected to the think about it spot and encouraged to think about their behavior for four minutes. If the behavior continues to escalate, the child may "take a break" from the classroom for 5 minutes and spend one on one time with another staff member to reset the situation and figure out what the child needs.

Rough Play

If a child is continuously pushing, bullying, or “rough playing” with other children, a parent/director/teacher conference will be scheduled. We understand that some siblings/children play rough at home, but others may not. When this type of activity is executed in the classroom, it can make other children fearful of the learning environment. Teachers will openly communicate about this issue via Brightwheel.

Staff Disrespect

Students in our Pre-K classrooms are expected to respect our staff. If students exhibit disrespectful behaviors such as refusal to do work, telling staff “no”, refusing to listen/follow directions, they will have consequences to match the behavior. This includes time-out and having a discussion with Ms.Jennifer about kind words and respect.

Expulsion Policy

If a child exhibits behaviors that harm other students or staff on a continual or uncontrollable basis, the child may be expelled from First Steps PDO. If a child injures another child or staff purposefully (biting, shoving, hitting, etc) and it becomes an ongoing issue with a pattern of behaviors, a conference will be called between the parent/guardian and director. A behavior plan will be put in place to protect the staff and children. If the harmful behavior continues the parent/guardian will be given a “pre-expulsion” warning. If the behavior occurs again after the pre-expulsion warning, the child will be expelled from the program.

Expulsion Policy Steps of Action

1. The child exhibits harmful behavior and receives three strike warnings on 4 or more program days.
2. A family and child meeting will be called with the program directors to discuss harmful behaviors.
3. At that time, if the child exhibits harmful behaviors at any point during the day, they will be suspended from attending First Steps PDO for one entire day, and a pre-expulsion warning will be given.
4. If the harmful behaviors continue, the child will be expelled from First Steps PDO.

Incident Reporting

If your child has an accident that results in an injury or mark, you will receive an incident report with the details of the situation and photos through Brightwheel. If the injury is more than a simple scratch/scrape, you will be notified by phone as soon as care has been administered to your child. As a facility standard, if the child rebounds and is able to return to normal play/function we do not call. If you would rather be called in the case of any injury, please let a director know. If you have questions about an event that occurs at the center, please immediately reach out to the director by calling the office at 423-375-5020.

Educational/Developmental Assessments

All students will receive a mid-year assessment in December and end of year assessment in May. These assessments are helpful in seeing all your student has learned during the school year, and help you as they prepare to move on to “big school”!

Complaints/Grievances

If a parent/guardian has an issue with their child’s teacher or the program please contact director Jennifer Wood. A meeting can be set up to discuss your concerns and we can work to find a solution. Please never attempt to handle these issues in front of the children in our classrooms. Our office is open from 7:30am-3:30 pm Tuesday and Thursday. She can also be reached by emailing director@firststepspdo.com. The quickest way to reach Ms.Jennifer is through Brighwheel. You have the option to send an “admin only” message that only she can see!

The First Steps Parents Day Out program is governed by members of First Baptist Church Benton. PDO Parents have the right to request to be put into contact with the current chairman of the PDO Board and contact information will be provided immediately with no questions asked.

Emergency Procedures

Safety is our top priority. We have multiple procedures and policies in place, but there are things that we have no control over. Below you will find an outline and summary of additional safety policies. It is very important that you are signed up and active on our class Dojo system.

Severe Weather/Tornado: We have a plan in place in the event that First Steps PDO is ever placed under a tornado warning during the program day. This involves having each class move into a designated safe area in the most interior areas of the building. The children will also place their nap mats over their heads to protect from possible falling debris. In the event of a tornado warning, please do not try to enter or exit the building. This will only pull staff from guiding your children.

Fire: We have an extensive fire plan in place with multiple exits planned for each area. Our classrooms are also equipped with fire extinguishers. In the event of a fire, children will be evacuated from the building and moved to a safe outdoor area away from the structure. Our facility is equipped with multiple smoke/co2 detectors. In the event of an actual fire, you will be contacted as soon as all children are accounted for.

Intruder/Lockdown: In the event of an unauthorized visitor or person presenting a threat to our facility. We will enter a full lockdown. PARENTS WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE BUILDING DURING A LOCKDOWN, UNTIL THE BUILDING IS CLEARED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT. In each classroom we have bars to secure the doors and our teachers have been shown the safest place for the children to shelter in place. In the event of a lockdown situation, parents will be notified as soon as possible. During a situation like this, our top

priority is child and staff safety. In the case of an emergency situation, notifications will be sent through Brightwheel. It is imperative that you are logged into Brightwheel and receiving notifications on the days that your child is with us.

Please know that we are taking every precaution possible to protect your children while they are in our care. Our facility is equipped with security cameras covering all child-occupied areas. Our exterior doors have controlled access mechanisms, and we follow a very strict pick-up/drop-off routine. The safety of our students is top priority and something we take very seriously.

Child Abuse Reporting:

Everyone in Tennessee is a mandated reporter under state law. Any person with reasonable cause to believe a child is being abused or neglected must, under the law, immediately report to the Tennessee Department of Children's Services or to local law enforcement. The reporter can remain anonymous.

Call the Child Abuse Hotline to report child abuse or neglect in the State of Tennessee.

877-237-0004

As childcare providers we are MANDATED by law to report suspicious and unexplained injuries. If your child has an injury, please communicate it with us! If a child is a victim of abuse, and it is found that we did not report injuries, we can be held LEGALLY responsible.