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Tenderhearts Preschool

Where Children Love to Learn

**PARENT HANDBOOK 2022-2023**

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**THPS Parent Handbook**

**History and Philosophy**

Tenderhearts Preschool has provided a high-quality preschool curriculum and extended day care for children of Dracut and surrounding towns since 1999. The preschool is owned and operated by Barbie Bergstrom. The Program is located at 1484 Mammoth Rd Dracut, MA 01826 in a beautiful neighborhood setting.

The preschool’s philosophy, teachers, and curriculum support a developmental and predominately play based approach to learning, which is incorporated in the daily activities and schedules. The teachers utilize the MA EEC guidelines and core standards for preschool experiences when developing the curriculum. An emphasis is placed on exploration, inquiry, discovery, and play while learning about topics, which are meaningful and interesting to young children. Activities are designed to foster the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive growth of young children Classrooms are divided into learning program areas with developmentally appropriate activities available for a single child or small groups of children to enjoy. Areas such as blocks, art, sensory, dramatic play, music, literacy, math and science challenge children to learn about themselves and the world around them.

Our qualified teachers are facilitators, helping children plan, select, and explore materials in ways that are developmentally appropriate and support their growth and development in all areas. Teachers are selected based on their extensive experience and education in the field of Early Childhood Education. They are creative experts in their field, who care about young children and are dedicated to providing an exciting and nurturing place in which youngsters can grow and thrive.

Tenderhearts Preschool welcomes and encourages diversity in its population and programs. The affirmative action and nondiscrimination policies of the preschool extend to the preschool admissions, administration, and educational programs. Tenderhearts Preschool welcomes all regardless of race, religion, cultural heritage, political beliefs, marital status, sexual orientation, national origin or differing ability. Tenderhearts Preschool serves and acknowledges all types of families in its programming. The preschool is licensed and operates within the requirements and jurisdictions of the Department Early Education and Care (EEC).

This handbook is designed to acquaint all members with our goals, current policies and procedures. We reserve the right, in our sole discretion, to set goals and/or modify these policies and procedures and to promulgate new ones. These policies reflect licensing and accreditation standards, and agreements made between parents and the Preschool to make THPS the best possible environment for children's growth and development. Parents will be given seven days’ notice of any changes in policy. Changes are posted on the Parent Board.

**Tenderhearts Preschool Faculty**

Director/Teacher Barbie Bergstrom (978)884-9489

Teacher Ashley Conti (978)400-1506

Teacher Elaine Hanvey (978)376-3890

**THPS Groups** (Total Capacity each day is 10)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  **Age** | **Group #** | **Group Name** | **Size** | **Adult/Child Ratio** |
| 2.0 – 3.4 Years | 1 | Sunshine Room | 6 | 1:6 |
| 3.5 – 5.0 Years | 2 | Rainbow Room | 6 | 1:6 |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**Criminal Record and DSS Background check -** All employees of THPS must agree to a CORI/DCF and SORI check prior to employment and then again, every two years or as indicated by EEC. Once the CORI/SORI checks are complete, fingerprinting is also required. Volunteers are also subject to a background check.

**Program Plan and Goals for Children -** We anticipate that children in our care will have opportunities to:

* Develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively
* Gain confidence and build self-esteem by practicing and developing self-help skills
* Becoming more independent, and being a valued member of a group
* Strengthen communication and cooperation skills
* Practice self-regulation skills and strategies, while being guided in problem solving and conflict resolution techniques
* Feel special, included, and accepted while their home culture and language is reflected in the classroom environment
* Participate in tasks that are open-ended, engaging, and meaningful, both indoors and outdoors
* Gain knowledge about themselves, others, and the world around them
* Have experiences, which will challenge, inspire, and engage them while playing, learning, and interacting with others
* Develop skills that will help lay the foundation needed for future school success and support the development of a lifelong love of learning.

**Goals for Families -** We are dedicated to ensuring that:

* Families will feel welcomed and respected in our program.
* Parents will feel encouraged to give input regarding their child’s growth and development. - Teachers and parents form a collaborative relationship.
* Parents feel positively about their child’s education and care.

**Curriculum Development Plan -** Our program curricula are child led and play-based, utilizing themes, projects, and content units to encourage learning. We strive to provide an exciting, natural environment with opportunities for discovery, exploration, and inquiry. Developmentally appropriate activities are designed and implemented for each content area, emphasizing creativity, collaboration, skill building, and active exploration. A balance between teacher-initiated and child-initiated activities is maintained while focusing on the interests and likes of the children.

Our curriculum is based on the *Massachusetts Guidelines for Preschool Learning Experiences and the Massachusetts Standards for Social and Emotional Learning*. With the children’s interests in mind, the teachers use these documents to inspire their planning in the areas of Literacy, Math, Science, Language Development, Dramatic Play, Art, Music, Sensory, and Block Building. Children are given several activities to choose from each day and a variety of activities is available throughout the week. They are encouraged to try new things, extend projects, brainstorm solutions to problems, and to share their ideas, plans, and observations with others. Many activities are adaptable to the different development levels and offer an appropriate level of success and challenge to the children, building a collaborative.

**Typical Daily Schedule**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 7:00–7:45 | Arrival and Breakfast |
| 7:45–8:30 | Morning Free Play |
| 8:30-9:00 | Circle Time |
| 9:00–9:30 | Bathroom/AM Snack |
| 9:30–10:00 | Small Group Time |
| 10:00-10:45 | Large Motor/Outdoor |
| 10:45 – 11:30 | Large Group Time |
| 11:30–2:45 | Lunch/Nap |
| 2:45 – 3:00 | Bathroom/Brush Teeth |
| 3:00–3:30 | PM Snack |
| 3:30–5:00 | Free Play/ Outdoor |

**Arrival and Pick Up Times -** Please make sure your child stays with you at all times until a teacher is made aware that he/she is present.

**Morning Arrival -** THPS opens at 7:00AM, upon entering, please put your child’s belongings in their cubby. When you are ready to enter the classroom, begin by having your child use the bathroom and wash their hands. Feel free to communicate any pertinent information to the classroom teachers at this time.

Please make sure to say goodbye to your child and not sneak out. The teachers are available to assist when needed during this separation. If your child has a special need or disability, the program will work out a plan with you to make arrival and departures as easy and convenient as possible.

**Afternoon Pick Up -** THPS closes each day promptly at 5:00PM. Please plan to arrive with enough time to transition your child out of the program by 5:00. Afternoon pickups take place either in the classroom or on the playground. Some children benefit from a “five-minute warning” once their pick-up person has arrived. Feel free to check in with the teachers about your child’s day and gather your child’s belongings from the cubby and mailboxes, during these last few minutes.

Once you have reunited with your child, his/her supervision is now your responsibility. Please do not allow your child to open the door and leave ahead of you. We reinforce that only adults open the outside doors.

Should you be delayed beyond your expected pickup time, please notify the preschool so your child and the staff will know when to expect you. Your child will be released ONLY to you or to those people you have indicated on your authorized pickup list.

Please make every effort to inform us of any changes in pickup in advance. Inform your child's teacher during drop-off of any changes to the pick-up that will occur that day. Adults authorized by you on a particular day who are unfamiliar to the staff should have picture identification with them. We will not be able to release your child unless this procedure is followed***.*** Please be sure to update your authorized list as needed.

**Outdoor Play**

Outdoor play is an integral and valued part of our day at THPS. Our outdoor space has opportunities for the development of physical, social, language, problem solving, symbolic, and cognitive skills. While outside the children interact with and explore nature, open spaces, and learn to take reasonable risks.

We strive to go outside twice a day and appreciate when the children are prepared for the ever-changing weather. Having the right clothing and gear makes outdoor play enjoyable all year long. The program’s staff will communicate with families regularly about appropriate and necessary outdoor clothing and gear.

**Birthday Celebrations**

We are pleased to celebrate children's birthdays or similar special ethnic and/or cultural days. Please inform us in advance of these events and we will be happy to assist you. Birthday parties are usually celebrated with a special food item at the end of lunch. Please be aware that many parents wish to limit their child's sugar intake and we encourage alternatives to sweets. Parents are welcome to join us for this special celebration. See your classroom teacher to make plans.

**Holiday Traditions and Celebrations**

Tenderhearts Preschool celebrates most major holidays. We regard the exploration of different cultural traditions and religious beliefs as an important part of education. We believe that learning about others’ background, cultures, traditions, and beliefs helps to build a sense of community, understanding, and respect.

Families are invited and encouraged to share their cultural and religious traditions within the classroom. If interested, families are encouraged to make arrangements with their child's teacher, who can help families plan an appropriate experience for the children. You are more than welcome to participate in **ANY** activities that are planned.

**What to Bring**

The following CLEARLY LABELED items should be in your child’s cubby at all times:

1. 2-3 complete sets of clothes (underwear, socks, pants or shorts, shirt).
2. Seasonal jacket or sweatshirt
3. Raincoat and rain boots on Rainy Days
4. Extra pair of shoes/sneakers, water shoes during early fall, late spring, and summer

During the winter months, children need a winter jacket, snow pants, insulated, waterproof boots, waterproof mittens, and hats.

**Meals**

Tenderhearts Preschool participates in a USDA food program, and feed children only USDA approved foods. We provide breakfast, lunch and PM snack at no extra cost to families. Breakfast is at 7:30AM. Lunch is at 11:30 AM. Snack is at 2:45PM. We serve quality meals, which include meats, veggies, fruit, breads, and milk, as well as healthy snacks. At enrollment, we will discuss which foods your child likes and dislikes and any food allergies. If your child has a food allergy, I will need a doctor’s note, Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP), stating your child’s allergy and appropriate substitutions. If the allergy is life threatening, I will eliminate it from my program. Children’s allergies and symptoms are posted on my refrigerator, covered for confidentiality, and discussed with childcare assistants. I always like to include foods from children’s cultures, if possible.

**Naptime/Rest**

Your child will have a very active and busy day here, and will need some time to nap or rest. Our rest time is from approximately 12:30 until 2:30 PM. Children are asked to rest but are not required to sleep. Sound machines and/or soft music is played, and books and/or quiet activities are offered to those not asleep after the first half of rest time. The Dept. of Early Education and Care requires full day programs to provide a rest period and the preschool staff agree that young children need this quiet time. Just as we do not require children to sleep, we cannot purposely keep children awake. Your child's own needs will dictate whether he or she sleeps during the day. If your child is enrolled for the full day, you will need to supply a small resting blanket and crib sheet. Children may also bring a soft “sleeping buddy” if desired. All items should be labelled.

**Rest Time Items**

Full day children need a crib sheet, blankets are provided. Children are welcome to bring in a favorite stuffed toy for rest time as well.

**Items from Home**

Transitional objects often help children adjust to or feel safe in a new environment. Preschoolers often hold stuffed animals, dolls, and blankets dear. We ask you to consider several factors when helping your child choose appropriate items to bring from home.

1. Items should be able to fit into your child's cubby.
2. Items should not present choking hazards or encourage aggressive behavior (war toys etc.).
3. Please label all items.

**Suggested School Attire**

1. Please dress your child in durable, casual clothing, which can get messy. Young children are active explorers and need not worry about getting their clothes messy.
2. Please consider clothing that your child can manage independently, especially in the bathroom.
3. Dress your child for the weather and outdoor play. We love our outdoor time and will go out in any weather that is not considered dangerous. Drawstrings on hats, jackets and shirts are dangerous and are not permitted on the playground.
4. Socks and rubber soled tie shoes or sneakers are best for walking, running, and climbing. Please no flip-flops or backless shoes. They are hazardous on our playground.
5. Please provide a change of clothing for your child to keep here in the event of a mishap requiring a change of clothing.

**Toilet Learning**

Toilet Learning is not an enrollment criterion at THPS. The staff will be of assistance to the child and families and can offer strategies, suggestions, and resources.

Throughout the day, toileting will occur at regularly scheduled intervals and children will be encouraged to use the toilet as needed. Accidents do happen and will be treated with sensitivity. Children will be assisted in cleaning themselves and changing clothes. Soiled garments will be placed in plastic bags and sent home for cleaning. Parents are required to **replace spare clothes immediately.** Proper sanitary techniques and hand washing are stressed. The above toileting plan does not apply to children with disabilities. An individual plan will be made according to the child's abilities, parents' suggestions and professional recommendations.

**Child Guidance Techniques**

The teaching staff at Tenderhearts Preschool agrees that behavior management and self-regulation are necessary components of a child's education. We attempt to teach appropriate behavior through a system of modeling and logical consequences in which the child makes choices that are acceptable in the situation. We help children learn good social communication skills, modify the environment when needed, and include children in creating guidelines for their classroom in an age-appropriate manner.

Below is a menu of strategies used by teachers to assist children in these choices.

1. Have realistic expectations of children.
2. Structure environment to facilitate the atmosphere you wish to create.
3. Maintain a consistent, reliable routine and schedule in the classroom.
4. Set clear and simple limits.
5. Be aware of body language, facial expression, and tone of voice. Children's cooperation is greatly influenced by an adult's demeanor.
6. Be kind but firm in upholding classroom rules.

More specifically, teachers:

1. Start each day or transition by reviewing the school/classroom rules.
2. Give five-minute warning before transitions
3. Praise and model appropriate behaviors.
4. Distract or divert attention from inappropriate behavior.
5. Give the child two appropriate actions from which to choose.
6. Recognize the child's feelings and stress the use of words to work out problems. Model responses for children.
7. Make consequences of behavior clear and logical. (If a child is not following safety rules in the sand area, give him/her the choice of following the rules or finding another activity. If safety remains an issue, close sand play to that child for a brief period and help him or her find another activity.)
8. Remove child and discuss quietly how child can return to regular activities. Let child make a plan as to how they can better the situation if it is possible.
9. Help child gain self-control by offering to hold him or her. Suggest three deep breaths.
10. When all else fails, a short separation from the group may be the most appropriate response to a child out of control. We try to let the child determine when they are ready to return to the group if possible. A timer may also be used, but separation should not last longer than five minutes.
11. Consult with parents on the child's behavior; propose and try to set up a consistent plan between home and school to modify or change the behavior.

Tenderhearts Preschool upholds professional standards for behavior management, which include the following restrictions:

1. No corporal punishment, including hitting or shaking.
2. No cruel or severe punishment, humiliation, or verbal abuse.
3. No denial of food as punishment.
4. No force feeding
5. No punishment for soiling, wetting, or not using the toilet.

**Curriculum, Developmental Screenings, and Progress Reports**

We believe that children learn best in an environment where they feel safe and nurtured and have opportunities to explore, be creative, think, and problem solve. THPS strives to offer children a curriculum that enhances their growth in all areas and piques their interest. We do individualize curriculum based upon the needs of each child and keep their needs in mind as we plan and carry out activities. We encourage you to become an active participant in your child’s learning.

Teachers complete developmental screenings on each child within 45 day of enrolling, and then complete comprehensive assessments at least every 3 months until the age of 3, and then every 6 months until the age of 5. Progress reports are completed for each child every six months and we appreciate your input in planning for future growth of your child.

At THPS, we are dedicated to the authentic assessment of each child. The purpose of authentic assessment is to discover children’s skills, competencies, readiness levels, and concept formation.

**Authentic Assessment:**

* Is ongoing, systematic, and embedded in the classroom’s curricula.
* takes place in the natural learning environment
* Focuses on the whole child and takes into account their cultural, language, and developmental needs
* is used to form the teachers’ curriculum planning and instruction
* helps the teachers to identify children in need of referral services

The teachers utilize a variety of methods while assessing the children in their classroom including:

* Highly developed observational skills
* Anecdotal records or note taking
* Checklists
* Utilize Teaching Strategies Gold -a State supported online assessment system aligned with the MA Early Childhood DOE Core Standards for Early Learning.

Teachers utilize these tools on an on-going basis throughout the entire year to gain an understanding of their students’ skills and developmental levels. The teachers allow their assessment of children to inform their planning, thus being able to use what they know about the children to plan for the group or for individuals.

**Sharing Assessment Results**

The teachers at THPS communicate the results of their assessments in many ways. Informally, the teachers will communicate with parents through phone calls, e-mails, and face-to-face conversations on an on-going basis. The teachers can gain useful information from parents, as well as sharing what they are learning about the child at school. Formally, our assessment system allows us to establish a partnership with the families throughout the year. We communicate our findings through:

* At least two parent conferences (once in Fall & Spring)
* Two written reports generated through the TSG system and addressing the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of the child as well as a portfolio of work throughout the year.

The initial parent conference takes place during the fall semester and focuses on the adjustment and transition to a new classroom. Families and teachers share information about the child’s social and emotional development as well as cognitive and physical attributes and set goals for the rest of the school year.

The teachers will invite the families to another parent conference during the spring semester. Families will receive a developmental report prior to this conference detailing the child’s growth and learning in all areas including social, emotional, physical and cognitive. During this conference, the parent/guardian and teacher will discuss the report and the child’s overall development. The child’s portfolio will be used to support and document the child’s progress and experience at THPS. The child’s portfolio will build throughout the year and will be given to the child and parents at the end of the academic year.

Parent conferences are not limited to just two a year. Additional conference times may be arranged by request from either the child’s family or the teacher.

**Parent Meetings and Special Events**

Parent meetings and special events are held at regular intervals throughout the year to discuss program information and parent issues, and for social occasions. The Director and the teaching staff plan dates and times with consideration given to families and holiday schedules. All meetings/events are announced well in advance and parents are encouraged to attend our events; they are an opportunity to have fun, meet other families, and talk with teachers.

**Confidentiality**

All records are kept confidential and filed in the director’s locked office. Only THPS teachers, the child’s parents, and those designated in writing by the child’s parents may have access to the child’s educational or health records. Parents have the right to see their child’s records, request a copy and request to have it amended.

Pictures taken at our school and/or events, if they include children other than your own, must not be posted on any social media sites such as Facebook etc. Please be considerate of other families when posting pictures and comments on any social site.

**Access to Your Child’s Record**

Your child’s teachers and the THPS administrative staff have access to your child’s record. It is the policy of the program not to allow anyone outside of the appropriate program staff and the child’s parents or guardian to have access to any portion of a child’s record including health records. If you would like access to your child’s school record, please send an e-mail or voice mail to the director to inquire about a time to view these records. If the situation arises, parents can designate, in writing, those with whom they give permission to share the child’s file or information with. The Program will keep documentation on who has accessed the child’s records, and who has made any edits to the file.

**Amending Your Child’s Record**

As the child’s parent or legal guardian, you have the right to add information, comments, data, and any other relevant material to your child’s file. You may request a deletion or amendment of any information contained in the child’s record by requesting a conference to discuss the request. The program will have one week to give a decision on the request and the reasons in writing. If the decision is in favor of the parent, the changes will take effect immediately.

**Referrals**

Any concerns regarding a child's health, development or behavior will be brought to the immediate attention of the parents. The child’s teachers will assess the areas of concern and document through observation, anecdotal records and other appropriate methods. A meeting with the parents will be requested to discuss their observations. With the parents' consent, the Program will assist in arranging for a consultant evaluation or other services available through the University (for employees) or ask parents to contact their public-school system for evaluation and support. Private resources can be sought if preferred and available. The Program’s goal is to serve the best interests of the child and make every effort to maintain the child and family within our community. Any referrals will be followed up by the Program, with the parents' consent.

Families applying to the Program are asked to provide as much information as possible about their child's needs to enable the program to accommodate the child to facilitate full participation in this program setting. If, after exploring the options, it is determined that the Program, even with reasonable accommodation, is not the best placement for a child, the parents and director will work together to find appropriate referrals.

**Area Referrals**

**Medical Services:**

Lowell General Hospital Main Number: (978) 937-6000

Boston Children’s Hospital Main Number: (617) 355-6000

 Emergency Department: (617) 355-6611

Children’s Floating Hospital Pediatric diagnostics (617) 636-7242

Mass Eye & Ear Comprehensive Ophthalmology (617) 573-3202

 Otolaryngology (ear, nose, throat) (617) 573-3954

 Audiology/Hearing (617) 573-3266

Mass General Hospital Main Number: (617) 726-2000

Pediatric Dentistry Group 1560 Beacon St., Brookline (617) 731-5437

Pediatric Dentistry 1908 Beacon St., Brookline (617) 277-5200

**Social Services:**

DTA 131 Davidson St Lowell (978) 446-2400

MA EEC 360 Merrimack Street, Building 9 (617) 472-2881

 3rd Floor, Lawrence, MA 01843

Food Pantry 1934 Lakeview Avenue Dracut (978) 957-8600

DCFS 2 Omni Way, Chelmsford, MA 01824 (978)275-6800

**Early Intervention:**

Anne Sullivan Center 126 Phoenix Ave

 Lowell, MA 01852 (978) 453-8331

South Bay EI 148 Warren St

 Lowell, MA 01852 (978)452-1736

**Individual Education Plans**

Children identified with a special need will have an IEP or IFP from their early intervention program, school system, or a private credentialed source. The Program will assign one of the child’s teachers to implement the recommendations in our school setting and at the invitation of the parent, be the school liaison at the IEP meetings.

**Program’s Professional Development Plan**

THPS supports and encourages the ongoing professional development of our staff. Four times a year we set aside full days for this purpose, and it is necessary that the Program close during this brief period. All staff members are required to engage in and complete 20 hours of professional development trainings each year.

**Program Evaluation**

Parents are invited and encouraged to participate in our program evaluation by completing an evaluation form mid-year and each spring. These forms are anonymous and are used to help us respond to parent perspectives.

**Registration and Enrollment**

The Program accepts children ranging in age from 2 years (limited toddler space) through 5 years. Registrations are accepted on a rolling basis when space is available. Parents will be scheduled for an intake interview, where they will be given a tour of the preschool and a meeting with the director to go over our program goals and answer any questions.

At the end of the intake interview, the parents are asked if they wish to continue the enrollment process. A contract and a non-refundable registration fee of $65.00 per child and advanced payment of two weeks tuition are processed to hold the child’s place. The registration fee is used for your child’s nap materials and supplies for the year; the holding fee is used toward your child’s first and last week of tuition.

Parents are invited to bring their child to visit the Program during the day while children are present. If either of the parents or legal guardians has not visited the program, we request that they take this opportunity to do so. New children and parents are offered and encouraged to visit several times before the start of school.

Lastly, parents need to process the enrollment documents for their child’s file and process the Ages and Stages Parent Questionnaire. These documents are required prior to the first day of school and this information is shared with the child’s teaching team.

**Documentation for Enrollment**

The child’s file includes the documents below and is kept in the Director’s office. The program is licensed by MAEEC and regulatory authorities may access these files for licensing purposes. You may also list others you wish to have access. Otherwise, no information will be shared without your written permission.

The following documents are required for enrollment:

1. All enrollment forms, filled out signed & dated by the parent(s) or legal guardian(s).
2. Physician’s Medical History and Physical Exam form including documentation of any allergies, proof of immunizations, lead screening and results for children under 4 years old. The date of the physical exam must be less than 1 year old. Regular immunizations plus Hepatitis B vaccine, chicken pox vaccine or dates of illness are required for all children entering preschool. If parents have a religious exemption, please submit a letter indicating such. The physician must document any health exemptions. Names of individuals authorized by parents to have access to health records, if applicable. If child is under-immunized because of a medical condition or family beliefs please provide documentation.
3. Current health info and emergency contact information filed on the emergency card.
4. Any special documents or information referring to legal custody, family arrangements, health conditions, etc.

**Paperwork**

All paperwork must be completed before your child may start care. Each year, forms must be updated by September first. Any child who does not have updated paperwork (including physical, shot record and lead test) will not be allowed to attend until received.

**Transportation Plan**

Tenderhearts Preschool does not provide transportation. Parents are responsible for transporting their children to and from preschool. In an emergency (and if determined by Police, EMT’s, and first responders) a child could be transported to the hospital by ambulance.

**Visiting**

The preschool has an open-door policy and we encourage you to visit at any time. You are encouraged to participate, make presentations to the children, and/or have lunch with your child. If you would like to share a tradition, hobby, or skill, please discuss it with your child's teachers.

Until children are accustomed to visits, they will often change their behavior when their parent is present. Visiting parents should try not to interrupt the classroom routine and should encourage their children to continue to abide by the rules of the classroom. If you are unclear about the routine or rules, please ask the teachers for clarification. If your child is having difficulty with your visit, teachers will make suggestions to ease the situation. We want your visit to be pleasant for you, your child, and the class, and we will make every effort to assist you.

Your child may not want you to leave at the end of your visit. This is very common and stress may be avoided by preparing your child prior to the visit. On the day you plan to come, explain to your child when you are coming, how long you will stay, when and where you are going when you leave, and when you will return. The separation problem will diminish quickly if you are very positive about your planned visit and follow through with your routine each time.

**Tuition Policy**

**Full Time Weekly Tuition Part Week Daily Tuition**

Preschool Class (2.0 – 3.6) - $285 Preschool Class - $65

Pre-K Class (3.6– 5) - $265 Pre-K Class - $60

Yearly registration Fee- $65 Yearly registration Fee- $65

**Full-time and Part-time Slots**

1. Current part week students are given first consideration for full time openings
2. Part-week preschool/child care is available as scheduling permits, for schedules of 1, 2 or 3 full days. Part-week tuition rates are quoted above.
3. Alternate full day, part week schedule requests may be submitted and will be accommodated when scheduling permits. Other schedules may be accommodated if available. Tuition is calculated according to schedule.

**All Applicants to THPS**

1. All applicants will be asked to sign an enrollment agreement.
2. A two-weeks, non-refundable advance payment will be required to be paid with the initial contract and will be applied to the child’s last two weeks of care at the program. If you withdraw without four weeks written notice, you forfeit the advanced payment. All new members are required to make this non-refundable advance payment when they submit their agreement. Families using their last two week’s tuition will incur a debit of any difference between their initial advanced payment and their current agreement.
3. Tuition is not decreased for holidays, vacations, early release days, training days, or absences.
4. All accounts will be billed weekly. Tuition is due each Friday for the following week. If a payment is not received, services may be withheld until payment is made and the account is brought up to date. THPS accepts cash, check or online payments.
5. Should the Program Referral or Termination policies be applied by the program, the tuition rate will be pro-rated and any adjustments will be returned promptly.
6. Any withdrawal requires a written notice, four weeks in advance. Withdrawal without this notice will result in collections activity as well as forfeiture of any advanced payment.

**Other Expenses**

1. THPS Events- THPS has several family events and one or two fundraisers. These will vary from year to year depending on the projects being funded and the decisions of the administration and staff at THPS.

**Late Policy**

*THPS’s late policy outlined below will be followed in non-emergency situations that result in children being picked up after the Program closes (5:00 PM). This policy is nonnegotiable.*

In the event of a late pickup that is not the result of an emergency; a late fee of $15 for the first 15 min or portion of and $2.00 per minute after that will be assessed. The teacher and parent will note the time of departure in the log and parents will be required to sign the log to acknowledge the time. A note requesting payment of the late fee will be sent the following day by the Director. Prompt payment is expected. If payment is not received within 3 days, your child will not be allowed to attend until received.

Chronic lateness will require a meeting with the Director. If you know you will be late, for whatever reason, please call the Program at **(978)884-9489.** Without information, the staff may be compelled to involve your designated emergency contact in the situation.

The director and teachers are aware that emergencies do occur and these situations, when brought to the attention of the staff, will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The staff appreciates your vigilance in picking your child up by 5:00 as they have evening commitments, childcare pickups, second jobs, classes, and long commutes.

**Weapons Policy**

In accordance with regulations criteria this policy is listed. No weapons of any kind are allowed on the premises or grounds of Tenderhearts Preschool; including any type of licensed firearm. The Dracut Police Dept. and/or city and state law enforcement are the exception. Any disregard to this policy is grounds for termination.

**Probationary Period and Termination Policy**

Upon entering the program, there is a probation period of four weeks for each new child*.* This allows for a period of adjustment for the child, the family, and program staff. If there is difficulty with adjustment or the child has needs that the Program is unable to accommodate, the parents will be consulted and appropriate procedures and referrals offered. These concerns and recommendations will be presented to the parents in writing and meetings will be arranged to explore alternatives.

The Program retains the right to terminate, at its sole discretion, the enrollment of a child throughout the probationary period. Any decision to discontinue service will occur within four weeks of entrance into the program unless the Program agrees to extend the probationary period in an effort to maintain the child at the Program.

It may also be necessary to review the placement of a current member within the context of some of the circumstances outlined below. Any termination will be documented in writing and depending on the issue, parents will be given a reasonable period of time (2-4 weeks) to make alternative arrangements.

The purpose of this termination policy is to acknowledge that, not every child is a good fit for every program. Some children become emotionally upset for extended periods of time due to separation anxiety or other issues. In these cases, during the probation period, we may try shortening the child's day and/or changing the scheduled number of days in an effort to help the child adjust.

**Reasons for termination include but are not limited to the following:**

1. Tenderhearts Preschool has a developmental approach to child guidance techniques. Our expectations are appropriate for the child's age and stage of growth. Some children may display aggressive or uncooperative behaviors, which pose a threat to themselves or others. For the protection of the child and other children, these situations must be addressed quickly. Consultation with the parents and available resources will be offered and utilized. If the child's behavior continues to be a safety concern, the Program will assist the parents by providing referrals.
2. The Program tries to fully orient parents to our program. Philosophy, policies, procedures, and curriculum are explained in depth during the intake interview, in this PARENT HANDBOOK, and during pre-enrollment visits. It is assumed that when the child begins school, the parents are comfortable with the Program's policies and agree with its philosophy. If it becomes evident that the parents do not agree with the Program's philosophy, policies, procedures, and/or curriculum, and a resolution is unattainable, the Program will require that the family seek a setting that is compatible with their practices.
3. The Program recognizes that some families live apart due to a variety of circumstances. The Program staff is sensitive to the needs of children in these situations and will make every effort to support them. It is also important that the teachers are able to have positive relationships with **all** parents or guardians interacting with the Program. The Program staff sees its role in partnership with parents, as nurturers and educators, and feels strongly that teachers and other staff should not become involved in any family controversy. The program will provide referrals to assure a resolution of any controversy affecting the operation of the Program or the teacher/child/parent relationship.
4. The Program requires that families living apart work out mutually agreed upon, or have legally provided plans for their child's care and that they present these plans to the Program in writing. Agreements must be in place so that we may all serve the child's best interests. If the custodial parents cannot agree on the care and treatment of their child, the Program cannot accept responsibility for that child until a plan is in place that is acceptable to both the custodial parents and the Program. If a written legal resolution is needed, the Program requires a document that clearly defines who is authorized to make decisions regarding the child's care and education. The Program would then require from the authorized person, a written plan and reasonable procedure to follow regarding the care and treatment of the child before accepting responsibility to care for said child.

**Food Policy**

The families at Tenderhearts Preschool will provide a morning snack for their child each day. The Program will provide breakfast, lunch and afternoon snack for each child. Please have all food items in a labeled lunchbox or container. This box will go home with your child every day. Please see nutrition addendum at the end of this handbook for nutrition information and suggestions.

The Program teaches conservation and recycling as part of our everyday routines. Parents can support this by using recyclable containers for lunches instead of foils, wraps, and plastic baggies. Please label the containers and we will be sure they are returned each day.

**Nut Free Zone**

Due to the number and severity of nut allergies, we are striving to make the program a peanut/tree nut free zone. We request that no peanut butter or food items with peanuts/tree nuts be brought into the program. Items with the disclaimer of “manufactured in a facility that processes peanuts/tree nuts” are ok for snacks if the active ingredients do not list nuts. There is the possibility of a severe reaction if peanuts/tree nuts are ingested and for some children even the oil or odor can have an effect.

**Food brought into Tenderhearts Preschool**

Sharing treats during holidays, presentations and birthdays is part of our traditions but we ask that you please check in with your teaching team to schedule bringing in birthday, holiday treats or any other food items. All foods should have ingredient lists accompanying the items so we know if it is safe for everyone. We recommend mini portions which are just enough for a preschooler and teachers can help with recommendations for food alternatives should you be interested. We request that random treats for sharing, though well intentioned, not come into THPS.

**Toy Policy and Dangerous Objects**

THPS is intended to be a safe place for children to learn and play. During children's visits to the Program and at the beginning of the school year, teachers observe children to identify those who may still mouth toys. We request that parents of children who are still mouthing toys inform us of the possibility verbally and on their intake history form. The toys in room 3 are screened for choking hazards, and children who are identified “mouthers” are carefully watched and offered appropriate toys when playing outdoors or in other classrooms. If you bring an infant or toddler into the Program, please be aware that items that are safe and appropriate for preschool children can be a danger to younger children. We ask that you monitor your younger child closely while dropping off or picking up your preschooler. We also request that your child leave at home those things that might pose a risk to others.

In order to minimize the chance of injury, items that are proven safety risks will not be allowed in the Program. These include, but are not limited to: latex balloons (which, if swallowed or aspirated, are extremely dangerous), guns and other war toys (which are considered inappropriate and frequently lead to aggressive behavior), toys with very small parts or projectiles.

**Health and Illness Policy**

Please notify the Program as soon as possible if your child will not be attending school for the day, or for an extended period. Teachers should be informed of injuries or illness so they may provide the best care for your child and notify others if there is the possibility of contagion.

The Program requests that children not be brought to school if they are:

* Running a temperature of 1000 F degrees or higher, with or without other symptoms
* Expressing illness-related distress or discomfort
* Having symptoms of diarrhea or vomiting within the last 24 hours.
* Displaying excessive coughing or sneezing

These contagious conditions may infect other children and staff. Many other childhood conditions are contagious and require exclusion. These conditions include, but are not limited to, chickenpox, severe colds, conjunctivitis, impetigo, and strep throat.

If your child displays symptoms of any of these conditions during the day, the Program will request that a parent or authorized adult pick up the child as soon as possible. If parents cannot be reached, the Program will call the emergency contact.

Your emergency contact must be someone who is available in case of mild illness, is willing to care for your child under conditions such as a mild fever, vomiting etc., and has transportation to the Program.

Children sent home from school with vomiting, diarrhea or fever must be free of these symptoms for a full 24 hours without the use of medication before returning to school. This gives the child a rest period to recover and limits the spread of illness to other children and staff. Children with severe symptoms may need a doctor’s clearance to return to school.

Parents are advised of communicable diseases or conditions via e-mail, text messages and/or room mailbox notices. Please note these alerts and follow recommended precautions especially during flu season.

In the event there is an outbreak of a childhood disease for which there is immunization, the teachers will remove any under-immunized child from the group and contact parents. THPS will request that the child be excluded from school until the contagion has passed.

**Covid-19**

The Covid-19 Pandemic has brought greater awareness to appropriate measures needed to protect children and adults from the spread of illness. Proper hand washing and coughing/sneezing etiquette will help to control the spread of germs. We request all children and adults wash their hands upon entering the building. Adults and children over five, must wear a mask at all times other than eating, drinking or sleeping. During this time THPS will be following travel guidelines from CDC and our local DPH.

**Travelling out of Massachusetts**

From mass.gov: “All travelers arriving to Massachusetts are instructed not to travel to Massachusetts if they are displaying symptoms of COVID-19...

Some states have issued travel restrictions. The situation is rapidly changing. For national travel information, please visit [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov).”

**Allergies and Chronic Illness**

The Program takes every precaution to protect children with allergies from their allergens. Please inform the Program, in writing, of any food restrictions or allergies. These allergies should also be noted on your child’s enrollment and medical forms. If a child inadvertently comes in contact with an allergen, they will be monitored closely and their allergy plan followed. If symptoms worsen, parents will be contacted and 911 will be called.

Children with epi-pens for allergies should have a twin pack (Epi-pen Jr.) at the Program in case of a malfunction. Epi-pens must be dated and kept current to be effective.

Children with chronic illness will be monitored and if symptoms arise, they will receive treatment according to their health care plan. If any breathing issues we will call 911.

Children with chronic illness such as asthma may need medication at school. Parents will provide doctor’s authorization and current prescription, fill out an Individual Health Care Plan (IHCP) form and have pediatrician and parents’ sign. If there is a medication delivery system, the doctor and parent must sign that the parent can train a teacher to dispense the medication.

**Medications-Prescriptions and Non-Prescriptions**

Medications will be dispensed only with physician and parent authorization. Parents must be the ones to administer the first dose of any new medication other than the epi-pen.

Teachers may dispense prescription drugs or special medications if the parent signs a medical authorization and if the medicine is in its original container with the prescription label attached. Parents need to fill out a medication form and give form and medication to their child’s teacher. If there is training needed for dispensing a medication, please contact the Director.

Teachers will sign a log when they dispense medication. A doctor, in writing, must authorize nonprescription drugs in order to be dispensed by teachers. Parents may come to the Program to dispense nonprescription drugs to their children. We require that these drugs be used for minor cold symptoms only and not to mask a fever, severe coughs, or active diarrhea. Individual topical creams, sunscreen, and insect repellent may be dispensed as directed with written parent authorization. Parents must provide their preferred sunscreen product. The Program will, with parent permission, provide OFF Skin-tastic as an insect repellent. The Program does not usually experience mosquito problems and prefers to come indoors to using repellents. If this situation changes, we will inform parents especially if the use of repellents becomes necessary.

**Dental Hygiene**

The Program supports the State regulation regarding tooth brushing at school. Children may brush their teeth after lunch. A toothbrush and toothpaste are provided for all students. The toothbrush will be kept in a sanitary holder and replaced every 4 months or after an illness. Due to sanitation concerns brought up by some parents, parents also have the choice to opt out of tooth brushing by filling out the form in the enrollment packet.

**Restricted Substances**

1. To protect everyone’s Health, THPS is a non-smoking building. Smokers must go outdoors beyond the grounds of the program and are asked to dispose of cigarette butts in a trash receptacle elsewhere.
2. Alcoholic beverages are not permitted at THPS when children are in care.

**Emergency Procedures**

In the case of a health emergency, the Program adheres to the following procedures:

**In the case of an emergency involving a child:**

1. The teacher with the child will assess the situation and dial 911 and explain the nature of the emergency.
2. One staff member will attend to the child while a supervisor retrieves his or her record and calls a parent. Emergency cards are revised annually but it is the parent's responsibility to update the Program's emergency contact numbers if they change midyear. Reminders are sent each semester.
3. In a life-threatening situation, Police or an ambulance will transport your child to the closest hospital; the ambulance decides which hospital. It is usually Lowell General. Once stabilized, a child may, at the discretion of attending medical personnel, be transferred to another hospital.
4. A staff person who witnessed the emergency will accompany the child to the hospital, bringing records and all parent permission forms.

**Mandated Reporting Laws**

In accordance with Massachusetts law, the faculty of the THPS Program falls under the mandated reporting laws that address Child Abuse and/or Neglect. These laws also address “endangerment of” or “failure to provide a safe and secure environment” for children. Teachers are bound by law to report suspected physical or sexual abuse of a child, or conditions of endangerment/failure to provide a safe and secure environment. An example of endangerment would be a parent or guardian driving a child to or from school while under the influence of an intoxicating substance. This would be a condition of endangerment for the child, parent and other drivers.

If any serious situation should arise, the staff of THPS will act in accordance with the law and the policies of the Program. DSS has disseminated guidelines regarding signs of child abuse/neglect. THPS has policies regarding the “Use of Alcohol at work” and a “Drug Free Workplace” that addresses alcohol and substance abuse issues. Should the program staff encounter a questionable situation of endangerment they are to call the police for assistance.

**Appropriate Communication and Physical Contact**

The THPS program is committed to values that respect individual rights as well as the rights of the group. It is expected that all communication and contact between adults and children or among adults will be respectful and appropriate at all times.

The Program fosters these values as follows:

1. We discourage discussions of children's behavior in the child's presence. Teachers want to listen to parents' concerns or information, but request that sensitive issues be addressed in a private conversation. This also applies to the possible need for discussion between adults. If a discussion is needed or a conflict arises, please arrange a time and place away from children to address the issue. Caring for your child is a team effort and problems need to be handled in an atmosphere of cooperation with the goal of finding mutually satisfactory solutions. Children need to see parents and teachers working as a team and in agreement. This fosters their comfort and security. The Director should be informed of any serious issues.
2. We use language from a “Safety” curriculum that empowers children to verbalize their feelings and helps them respect the feelings of others. When adults are interacting with children, they acknowledge feelings, explain decisions simply, and enforce rules equitably. Adults physically interact with children only with their permission, unless there is a safety issue. Children are also taught to seek permission before touching (hugging etc.) a child or adult. Teachers model coping strategies for children having conflicts. Using words and seeking compromises are presented as appropriate ways to solve problems. Physical aggression is not allowed and hurtful words are discouraged.

**Phone Procedures**

Each teacher may be reached at their individual lines:

1. Barbie Bergstrom directly at (978)884-9489.
2. Ashley Conti - (978)400-1506
3. Elaine Hanvey

Please use our voice mail systems to convey important information to the teachers and Director so as not to unduly disrupt the classrooms. Once a message is left for the teachers, they will return the call at the earliest opportunity. Any parent with information that needs to be relayed quickly, such as a change in pickup time, a change in who is picking up a child, or a temporary change in location and phone number, should use their child’s teacher’s individual number. A parent who wishes to speak with a teacher about a matter that is not urgent should use the appropriate number to leave a message for the teacher. Messages are checked throughout the day and are returned as quickly as possible.

**Emergency Procedures**

In the case of an emergency at the Program, staff will do the following:

1. Dial 911
2. One staff member will attend the child while the others manage the rest of the children. The supervisor/teacher will retrieve the child's emergency card and record and call the parent. If parents cannot be reached, the designated emergency person will be contacted.
3. Police or an ambulance will transport child to the nearest hospital.

In the case of an emergency or a situation, THPS will use several different methods of notification including emails, text alerts, web postings and phone calls. THPS can be specifically contacted by emergency personnel through our main line and/or cell phones. In the event that THPS needs to be evacuated, the staff will follow the program’s evacuation plan. We will do our best to inform parents of our relocation through the Dracut police department and individual cell phones.

**Storm Closings or Delayed Opening**

THPS will post on our Facebook Page. The Program's policy in the event of storm closings or delays is as follows:

1. The THPS Program will be closed when Dracut Schools are closed and/or at the discretion of the Director.
2. The THPS Program will delay opening until the time designated by the Dracut School Department and/or at the discretion of the director.
3. The THPS Program will be closed if a state of emergency is declared.

In the event that you arrive at THPS before the scheduled opening time, please keep your child(ren) with you. The teachers cannot accept children before the program opening time. It is not possible to anticipate when other commuting staff will get here during a storm delay and we do not want to create a safety issue or violate licensing standards by having too many children with too few staff.

Mid-day storm closings will be communicated as stated above and by phone calls. If a storm is expected or in progress, and you are not available by phone, please check in with us as soon as possible.

**Building Security (Coming In2023)**

The THPS program has coded door locks. The combination is changed and given to parents and staff at the beginning of each academic year. Please keep this code confidential and give only to your authorized pick-up persons. Please do not share this code with the children; they like to offer it to anyone approaching the door. THPS also has deadbolt locks, which secure the building when the Program is closed. Files and computers are in the main office, which is locked when unoccupied.

**Child Care after Hours**

Any THPS employee who accepts a baby-sitting job does so as an independent contractor and not as an employee of THPS. THPS cannot be held responsible or be held liable for actions or incidents that occur when a person is engaged in work outside their employment day with THPS. If you wish to have an employee pick up your child from the Program, you must authorize this by putting the employee’s name on the Approved Pick-up List. Family childcare arrangements with any THPS employee outside of the THPS day are private employment situations and not part of the THPS program.

**Safety Inspections**

THPS is licensed and inspected by the State of Massachusetts Dept. of Early Education and Care, the Dracut Building Inspector and the Dracut Fire Department. These inspections ensure that all health and safety codes are met and that the Program adheres to quality program guidelines in areas such as teacher requirements, curriculum, and administrative practices. All staff members are trained annually in child CPR and other basic emergency procedures. THPS employees inspect the playground and inside equipment on a monthly basis. A licensed playground inspector inspects our playground yearly and any recommendations are addressed in a timely manner.

**THPS School Calendar of Official Holidays 2022-23**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| September | 5 | Monday | Closed Labor Day |
| October  | 10 | Monday | Closed Columbus Day |
| November | 11 | Friday | Closed Veterans Day |
| November | 24 | Thursday | Closed Thanksgiving |
| November | 25 | Friday | Closed Day After |
| Closed Dec 23 - Jan 2, 2020 |  Holiday Break |
| January  | 16 | Monday | Closed MLK Day |
| April | 7 | Friday | Closed Good Friday |
| April | 17 | Monday | Closed Patriots Day |
| May | 29 | Monday | Closed Memorial Day |
| June | 19 | Monday | Closed Juneteenth |
| July  | 4 | Monday | Closed Independence Day |

Vacations to be announced at a later date. 3 Weeks per year

**THPS School Events**

The following list is an example of Program events and happenings. Each year the families and staff plan these events together and as the year, progresses gatherings and dates may be added or changed.

**August - End of year family picnic and Open house** – This year we will celebrate our end of year with a Luau theme. We will have a bounce house for the children. Families bring a picnic lunch and join us for some fun and games! Snacks and drinks will be provided by THPS.

**Fall**

**Curriculum Mornings -** Teachers invite parents to spend some time in the classroom. The first 20 minutes will be an opportunity for parents to hear Ms. Barbie talk about the classroom, curriculum, and routines while the children are on the playground with Ms. Ashley and Ms. Elaine. The remainder of the time, parents will be able to see the classroom and curriculum in action as parents and children play together in the room.

**September 22 8:45-9:45** Sunshine Group Curriculum Morning

**September 24 8:45-9:45** Rainbow Group Curriculum Morning

**TBD - School Picture Day** (individual pictures optional) - School group pictures are taken at 9:30AM and then children’s individual portraits are offered to those who sign up for them. Children not registered for that day are invited to come in for the group and individual pictures.

**Halloween Celebration -** THPS celebrates Halloween as a day to pretend and dress up. We will have some fun games and activities planned. Please do not send your child in their Halloween costume. We wouldn’t want something to happen to it and ruin their Halloween.

**Winter**

**November -** Thanksgiving Celebration for children only

**December -** Family Christmas Party – 5PM – 8 PM Parents and siblings are welcome

**March -** Fundraiser Begins – Yearly fundraiser helps us to acquire new learning materials and keep tuition costs down.

**Spring**

**April -** Week of the Young Child - THPS Celebrates this week with a Family Breakfast and Art Show **Depending on Current Covid Situation**

**May/June - THPS Program Evaluation -** Families fill out an anonymous program evaluation. This questionnaire is important and helpful, so we request that all families please participate.

**Tenderhearts Preschool Faculty**

**Barbie Bergstrom, Owner/Director**

* **Education** AA in Early Childhood Ed, Middlesex Community College, Bedford, MA, and Director 2 Qualified
* **Education** Studying Early Childhood Ed at Lesley University for Bachelor’s degree
* **Experience** 27 years in the EC field 22 years at THPS

**Ashley Conti, Sunshine Group Teacher**

* **Education** Studying Early Ed at Middlesex Community College
* **Experience** 13 years in the EC field, 4 Year at Tenderhearts Preschool

Elaine Hanvey, **Rainbow Group Teacher**

**Faculty Lines of Authority**

The Program is licensed by the MA Dept. of Early Education and Care and follows the EEC regulations. You may contact EEC regarding the preschool’s license and compliance history at the Lawrence office located at 360 Merrimack St., building 9, 3rd Floor, Lawrence, MA 01843; Phone: (978) 681-9684: Fax: (978) 689-7618. A copy of the regulations is available in the preschool office, as well as, online at [www.eec.ma.state.us](http://www.eec.ma.state.us)

All faculty listed are teacher qualified or above according to the EEC qualifications. The authority for decisions rests with the Director. If she is not present then the lead teacher on duty as indicated on the schedule will make any decisions necessary.

**Preschool Nutrition Guidelines Addendum**

**General Nutrition Recommendations**

Children of all ages should consume a balanced diet that together with daily physical activity promotes healthy growth and development. *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* advises a dietary pattern that emphasizes whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, and lean protein sources for all people age 2 years and older. Poultry, legumes, and seafood are recommended sources of lean protein while red meats and processed meats should be limited. Intake of added sugars and sweetened beverages should be moderated to lessen risk of dental caries and excessive energy intake that contributes to overweight.

For this reason, the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that added sugar be limited to no more than 10% of total calorie intake. Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that fruit juice intake be limited to 6 oz. / day to avoid the effect of higher consumption on calorie intake and displacement of other foods from the diet. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) offers up-to-date advice on nutrition for preschoolers at <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/children> Preschool children have unique nutritional needs compared with older children or adults.

As part of normal growth and development, children experience behavioral milestones at an individual pace and should be offered a diet that matches their developmental stage. Behavioral milestones that affect eating are outlined here:

<https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/audiences/behavioral-milestones.pdf>.

Meal and snack patterns should focus on provision of a variety of nutrient-dense foods, such as those listed, in appropriate portions following a predictable time schedule to allow for three meals and two snacks per day. Preschool children usually cannot consume a sufficient amount at a meal to stay full and energized until the next meal, which emphasizes the need for snacks.

Snacks should contribute to the nutritional requirements of the child. A nutritious meal contains at least three of the major food groups, while a snack contains at least two food groups. Food groups and preschool portions are contained in the accompanying *USDA Child Meal Pattern* along with suggestions for lunches and snacks. Lunches and snacks must be nut- and peanut-free as described in the Food Allergy section of these guidelines. Food and beverages brought from home should be labeled with the child’s name.

**Nutrition Concerns**

Food Allergies- Food allergies affect 1 in 25 individuals, with a higher prevalence among children. It is imperative that food allergy diagnoses are communicated to the Program so that an individualized plan can be developed to protect the child from contact with the allergen. The Program requests parent or guardian consent for posting information about individual food allergies as part of this plan. Because of the prevalence of nut and peanut allergies, the Program is designated as nut- and peanut-free. No food or beverage can be brought to the Program that contains any nuts or peanuts. We recommend that food brought to share be peanut/nut free, store packaged, and labeled with ingredients.

**Choking**

Choking is a hazard in preschool children. Round, hard, thick and sticky, and smooth foods are implicated in choking incidents in young children. Examples include raw carrot rounds, whole grapes, hard candy, nuts, popcorn, and chunks of meat that are larger than what can be swallowed whole. Foods that present a risk for choking should be avoided or modified to reduce choking risk. For example, whole grapes should be cut to bite size pieces. Information on choking and food safety can be found at:

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers-food-safety>

**Food Safety**

All lunches and snacks are stored in the refrigerator at the Program to maintain temperature between 32º F and 40º F. Food prepared at home should follow safe food handling and personal hygiene practices: hands should be washed before preparing food, clean surface and clean utensils should be maintained, care should be taken to assure proper cooking and refrigeration/storage temperatures are reached.

Food safety information for the home and Children’s Program can be found at

[http://www.fightbac.org/,](http://www.fightbac.org/%2C) [https://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers-food-safety,](https://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers-food-safety%2C) and <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/foodsafety.pdf>

**Suggested Snacks for Preschoolers**

We request a nonperishable item for the morning snack. Snacks should contain at least two food groups in portions outlined in *USDA Child Meal Pattern.* Snacks should be tree-nut and peanut free. Please, no grapes, hotdogs or dried meats as these pose a choking hazard.

Choose any *two* or more groups depending on appetite

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Food group | Example 1 | Example 2 | Example 3 | Example 4 | Example 5 |
| 1-ounce grain | Rice cakes | Bread Sticks | Crunchy Cereal  | Trail Mix (No Nuts) | Flour tortilla  |
| 1-ounce meat/beans | Hummus | Cheese Sandwich  | Hard Boiled Egg | Chicken Chunks | Bean dip |
| Cup milk or yogurt | Plain Milk | Cheese Sticks | Cupyogurt | Gogurt | Cottage Cheese |
| Cup fruit | Sliced Strawberries | Apple Slices | 100% Fruit Juice | Pineapple Chunks | Orange Slices |
| Cup vegetable | Carrot Sticks | Sliced Cucumbers | Celery Sticks | Sliced Peppers | Sliced Tomatoes |

Water can be offered as a beverage, but is not counted among the food group requirements.