

Life Skills Home Training Tutorial Program For Pre-Schoolers Inc.

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PARENT HANDBOOK

2023-2024

Learn more about us at www.lifeskillspreschool.org





Life Skills Preschool

PRESCHOOL PROGRAM: 2023-2024

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Dear Parents,

WELCOME TO LIFE SKILLS!

An official welcome to the 2023-2024 school year. Our most important mission is to provide high quality early childhood education to your child in a safe environment!

The Life Skills Preschool is a barrier free facility that provides evaluations and special education services to children ages three through five, in a welcoming and nurturing environment. All services are provided free of charge to children deemed eligible through the New York City Department of Education, CPSE (Committee on Preschool Special Education).

A. INTRODUCTION TO LIFE SKILLS PRESCHOOL

1. OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Life Skills Preschool: *Where Our Children Come First.*

Life Skills Home Training Tutorial Program for Preschoolers, Inc. is a special needs program servicing students throughout New York City. Founded in the early 1970's, Life Skills upholds a mission to provide structure and support for children to develop their full potential, respect the diversity and unique contributions of all, offer instruction that is individualized and developmentally appropriate, promote a child-centered, safe and supportive environment, engage parents, the community and school members in a collaborative team-approach, and to inspire a lifetime to learning. Our program seeks to provide education and related therapy to children with special needs in the least restrictive environment.

2. OUR PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Our preschool sites are located at 24-20 Parsons Blvd Whitestone NY, 25 Westchester Square, BX, NY & 816 Clarence Avenue BX NY. We service preschoolers with varying special needs and disabilities. Our student population is diverse however some possible impairments might include autism, health impaired, intellectually deficit, speech impairment, sensory related issues, down syndrome, etc. At Lifeskills, every part of the school day is thoroughly designed and brought into alignment with what works best for the specific needs of each student. Our certified staff members are aware of the students' intellectual, emotional, physical and social needs.

Each classroom is staffed with a full time certified special education teacher and two full time certified teacher assistants (TA's). Related services (speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and counseling) are provided by licensed New York State Therapists as mandated by each student's individual education plan (IEP). Differentiated support systems are found throughout the rooms to foster independence and promote kindergarten readiness skills.

Life Skills Preschool offers small, structured classrooms. Children are provided with a balance of activities where they have opportunities to play and interact with other children in a warm, supportive learning environment.

- Full Day Special Classes
- UPK Program 3k - 4k (Westchester school only)
- Integrated Classroom With UPK- 3K & 4K (Queens only)



Life-Skills Pre-School offers the following related services:

- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Speech Therapy (Bi-Lingual Spanish available)
- Behavior Support Specialist
- Parent Coordination Services
- Psychologist

The following services are integrated into our daily program:

- ESL Indoor and Outdoor Play Areas (Varies by site)
- Library Cart
- Tablets
- Music and Movement
- Parent/Caregiver Workshops and Support Groups
- Door to Door Transportation (Wheelchair Bus is Available) Bilingual Alternative Interim Placement is available in Spanish.
- Education Plan (IEP). Parents who have parent counseling and training on their child's IEP are provided with monthly opportunities to attend parent workshops provided for all parents. Your family support coordinator will discuss with you other opportunities for parent counseling and training. A family support coordinator (FSC) is always available to each family to provide support for education and community resources.

Our teachers develop classroom activities that reinforce individual IEP goals and help children increase their social awareness of their peer group and other adults in the school environment. Teachers and therapists realize that every child learns differently, and they use teaching methods that encourage each child to participate regardless of language skills or social ability.

3. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION GOALS AND THE LIFE SKILLS PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

The New York State Prekindergarten Foundation for the Common Core is organized into five broad developmental domains. These domains are interrelated and guide in developing our curriculum to prepare each child for kindergarten.

Our preschool utilizes the Creative Curriculum in accordance with the Common Core. The curriculum outlines various objectives in all areas of development and learning for 3–5-year-olds including social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive objectives. Our classrooms, activities, special events, and schedules are tailored to support this program. Our Social Emotional Curriculum embodies differentiated supports to help our students during this time of need. We focus on emotions, transitions, and extracurricular activities to help students regulate throughout the school day.

In all, our program strives to promote parent/guardian involvement and support. We run frequent parent meetings, specialize in classes run by licensed related service therapists, attend class trips, hold support group training sessions, provide extracurricular activities for the students defined as art, music, yoga, zumbini and promote various events for our students and families depending on interest and participation. Opportunities for innovation and creativity for students and faculty alike, as a means to further develop our professional growth system and improve student achievement, is our school's main objective. Communal supports, extracurricular programs, and differentiated methods for instruction will continue to be implemented. Flexibility, teamwork and the communal culture that the employees of Lifeskills embody will help ensure our plan's efficiency and support our goal for ultimate student success.



The children's daily schedule incorporates all these learning domains. While classroom schedules will vary from day to day, children will engage in a variety of group activities, structured playtime, art, music, and physical movement. Our teachers and therapists monitor student achievement over time through developmental assessments and formal observations. Each child's instructional program is adjusted to match progress and mastery as per the IEP (Individualized Education Plan). If changes to the IEP are necessary, we will work with you and the CPSE (Committee on Preschool Special Education) prior to your child's Annual Review to suggest modifications.

Formal Parent-Teacher Conferences are scheduled twice a year to discuss your child's progress and issues of mutual interest or concern. These will be scheduled through Zoom, in-person or phone. If an in-person meeting is requested, it will be scheduled with you. As per NYCDOE policy, we update your child's progress three times a year for children who attend our 10-month program (September to June), and four times a year for children who attend our 12-month program (September to August), by sending home a short narrative report of your child's achievements. Your child's IEP is updated annually or more often if a review is requested during the year.

B. PRESCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Engaged and successful students have indicated good attendance provides a child with more and better opportunities to learn. Children who do not show up for school on a regular basis miss out on learning "fundamentals" skills and the chance to build a habit of good attendance.

The NYCDOE defines chronic absence as missing 10% or more school days per year either excused or unexcused. This translates into 18 days a year, or 4-5 absences per quarter. Children who miss 10% of school quarterly are considered to have "excessive" absences, which are likely to impact progress in reaching goals. We understand that there can be barriers to attending school regularly. School staff will be monitoring attendance and are available to help families address any barriers such as transportation, health problems, or personal issues that might be preventing a child from getting to school.

1. ATTENDANCE POLICY

It is very important that your child attend school every day. Attending school will increase your child's growth and development. Your child is attending Life Skills Preschool because they have mandated services on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Please note, when planning family vacations, it would be beneficial to be planned around the school year calendar to avoid your child missing out on school days.

If your child is going to be absent from school, please take the following steps:

1. Call the appropriate Life Skills site pertaining to your child, give the child's name, teacher and reason for missing school. NYC requires that schools account for every student's absence by 10:00am. If the school does not hear from you by 10am, school staff are obligated to call you to determine your child's whereabouts.
2. If your child is going to be absent for multiple days in a row, you must call the bus company and inform them that they will not need to pick up your child. You must call the bus company to let them know that you are ready to resume bus services. For the bus company phone numbers, please refer to the site your child attends.



3. For every absence that your child has, you must provide a signed and dated note explaining why your child was absent. An excused absence is defined as: *personal illness, illness or death in the family, impassable roads or weather, religious observance, quarantine, required court appearances, attendance at health clinics.*
4. If your child was seen by a doctor, a note is required. If your child had a contagious disease (including COVID-19) or is returning from a stay at the hospital, the note must give a date in which the child is able to return to school.
5. If your child is absent without a legal excuse, Life Skills Preschool is required to notify the child's administrator. The district will attempt to contact you. If you have not established a legal excuse for absence, your child's services may be terminated.

Please Note: It is very important for your child to attend school every day so they can progress in reaching their goals and get accustomed to routines and schedules.

2. ARRIVAL/DISMISSAL

Students who attend Life Skills Pre-School have the option to receive busing through the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT.) You will be asked to report the weight of your child, as this information is required to arrange for a car seat on the bus. Our administrative staff can assist you with any changes to pick up or drop off information.

Life Skills Preschool does not hire the bus company or the drivers. The bus company is contracted through the NYCDOE, parents are required to speak directly to staff at the bus company with any concerns about bus service. We also encourage you to report concerns about your child's transportation to us, so we can help you resolve it as quickly as possible. As a last resort, please call 311 to report.

If there is no one at home to receive your child and we have made every attempt to reach someone on your emergency contact list, the bus company has been instructed by the NYCDOE to contact the bus company dispatcher and bring your child to the local police station. **PLEASE** help us avoid this unnecessary trauma by keeping the school updated with any change in contact information.

For students who are not receiving transportation services, please adhere to your site's pick up and drop off protocol.

3. EMERGENCY CONTACTS

When you registered your child, you provided us with a list of 3 emergency contacts. **These emergency contacts are the only people other than you who are allowed to pick up your child from school or receive your child from the bus.** We will send a request for updated emergency contact information three times annually: in September, January, and June. This allows us to be sure we can reach you and your emergency contacts in the case of an emergency.

The following guidelines apply to emergency contacts:

1. You must provide written permission of any person you designate as an emergency contact. This should be done when you register your child.
2. Emergency contacts must be at least eighteen (18) years of age.
3. Emergency contacts must be willing to pick up or receive children on an as-needed basis. For example, in the event of unforeseen circumstances (dangerous weather conditions, no heat or



4. air conditioning, etc.), Life Skills may need to close early and would require that you or your emergency contact pick up your child from school or the bus earlier than the scheduled time.
5. You must inform people that you have listed them as an emergency contact. Administrators and classroom teaching staff have the right to ask whether a listed emergency contact is aware of their responsibilities.
6. **All emergency contacts will be asked to show appropriate picture identification (driver's license, state I.D., etc.) when picking up your child.**
7. We will ask you to update your emergency information (home phone, cell, email) and list of emergency contacts at least three times per year. We request that you contact your Family Service Coordinator (FSC) with any contact changes as they occur.
8. An individual whose name does not appear on the emergency contact list will not be allowed to pick up your child unless you have made a prior arrangement in writing. Again, you should inform your school immediately of any changes in emergency contact information or other important information. All changes must be in writing.
9. If there is anyone, you have identified who **should not** have access to your child, please note that on the emergency contact form AND call the school to speak directly to your family support coordinator. In the event that there is a legal document (ex. an order of protection), we will request a copy for our files.

4. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

A. Related Services

If your child receives occupational or physical therapy, it is legally mandated that we have a current prescription that reflects the IEP mandates. As per your child's IEP, therapy sessions (like speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and counseling) are scheduled for your child throughout the week. When your child is absent from school on a day that he or she is scheduled to receive a therapy session, we cannot guarantee that our therapeutic staff will be able to do a "make-up" session. That being said, we will make every effort to meet your child's IEP mandates.

B. "Food from Home" Policy

Life Skills policy does not allow parents to send food from home. There are three reasons for this:

1. Our menus follow New York State guidelines for preschoolers, meaning they are specially crafted to give your child the best possible nutrition.
2. Our teachers and therapists are always with the students during meals and use mealtime as a teaching opportunity to encourage all of our students – including "picky eaters" – to try new tastes, textures, and food items, in a supportive environment.
3. Snacks or food from home can create tension at mealtime, causing unnecessary temper tantrums for children who do not have snacks from home, and distracting all our students from eating the healthy food prepared for them.

C. Illness

A child **must not** be brought to preschool when he or she is sick. Children with coughs, colds, nasal discharge or a fever of 100° or higher should be kept home until symptoms disappear. A child who has had a fever may return to school once the fever has been below 100° for at least 24 hours without



medication. Please call the school to alert us if your child has a contagious illness including the common cold or stomach virus. These guidelines help keep everyone healthy!

Should your child become ill during the day, a staff member will call you or your emergency contact person to come pick up your child. Our response to contagious disease (COVID-19, lice, pink eye, ringworm, etc.) follows NYCDOH protocols for communicating with families and for cleaning the school environment. You will receive a letter from the school informing you of any specific contagious illness or condition that your child may have been exposed to on the bus or in the classroom. We do everything possible to keep your children safe and healthy.

All children are required to have a yearly medical examination completed on a form provided by Life Skills or by your child's pediatrician. Any child with an expired medical form can be excluded from the program until a new medical form is received. Please plan to have your child seen by his/her pediatrician before the medical form expires.

PLEASE NOTE: Life Skills does not administer medication to the students. Medications are to be given at home. If a child was given medication for illness prior to coming to school they must stay home and resume school the following day.

5. WELLNESS POLICY

Life Skills Pre-School is committed to creating a healthy school environment that enhances the development of lifelong wellness practices to promote healthy eating and physical activities that support student achievement.

The Wellness Policy reflects the mandated guidelines of the New York State Child Nutrition Program. Our breakfast and lunch programs are funded through the National School Lunch Program.

A. Nutrition and Physical Activity

Setting Physical Activity Goals

Children participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of physical activity each school day. This includes guided and structured play times in classrooms, and all play areas.

Life Skills encourages parents and guardians to support their children's participation in physical activity, to be physically active role models, and to include physical activity in family events.

Establishing Nutrition Standards

Life Skills follows meal patterns and nutrition standards established for Pre-K students by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Life Skills offers free breakfast and lunch to all our students, every day, regardless of household income. Our lunch menus are provided by third party vendors who provide individualized meals for all students.

Non-Discrimination and Dietary Restrictions

Life Skills provides free breakfast, lunch, and snack to all students, regardless of income eligibility. Life Skills may not discriminate against any student by refusing to provide them with free meals. Students with religious, medical, or other dietary restrictions are offered alternate meals that meet their requirements.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination against customers, employees, and



applicants for employment based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay

Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

Nutrition is an important part of your child's overall health and we can work together to create a lifetime of healthy habits while your child is young and impressionable. We have worked with thousands of preschoolers over the years, and we know that even the meticulous eaters can learn to enjoy the meals prepared for them.

We are able to provide modified food items (soy, gluten free, etc.) and/or puréed food to meet each child's individual needs. If you have significant concerns about your child's eating habits or health, we will set up an appointment for you with our Registered Nutritionist. If you believe that you need to send specially prepared food from home to meet your child's dietary requirements, please speak with your Family Support Coordinator. Together we will discuss your concerns and develop a Food Modification Plan if necessary.

B. Birthday/Celebration Policy

Classroom staff always acknowledge children on their birthday in their own special way. Some classes celebrate with special birthday hats or Birthday Helper jobs, and of course by singing the Happy Birthday song. If you would like to visit your child's classroom on their birthday, please speak with your child's teacher and the family coordinator at least 1 week in advance. We limit visitors to two guests during the student's snack time and food brought in must be nut free and store bought due to the various allergies and/or dietary restrictions of many students.

The children and staff at Life Skills come from diverse backgrounds. Not everyone celebrates the same holidays, and not everyone celebrates a given holiday in the same way. Helping children understand the diverse nature of our school community is one of the goals of celebrating holidays at school. If you do not want your child to participate in holiday celebrations, please inform your child's teacher.

6. POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT PROGRAM

At Life Skills Preschool, we believe that every child, regardless of current ability, is capable of further growth and achievement. Our staff is trained to guide children's behavior by word and example. Staff realize that children may not immediately understand or follow all the rules. Until children learn what is expected of them, they will occasionally exhibit challenging behavior. Furthermore, staff understand that children who struggle with language or other skills often use "temper tantrums" and other tactics to communicate their needs, because they do not know how else to express themselves.

We view discipline as part of good teaching, and disciplinary problems are viewed as "errors in learning."



Instead of thinking that a child is choosing to behave badly, behavior is viewed as a skill that still needs to be taught, whether it is related to social and emotional interactions or communication. When a child acts out, our school psychologist, along with classroom teachers and teaching aides, consider where the behavior is coming from. Once we identify the source of the problem, we can begin teaching the child about appropriate reactions.

Part of our responsibility is teaching children how to create and maintain healthy relationships. With this in mind, our teachers aim to establish nurturing and responsive relationships built on mutual respect and trust with every child who enters our program.

7. CHILD SAFETY

All children are entitled to live and go to school in a safe and nurturing environment. All staff and clinical consultants at Life Skills Preschool treat each student with respect and respond to their needs in a calm and supportive manner.

All staff and clinical consultants at Life Skills are trained to report suspected child abuse, neglect, or maltreatment, as mandated by New York State Public Health Law. If our staff and/or clinical consultants suspect that a child has been subjected to child abuse, neglect or maltreatment, they are required by law to contact the NYS Child Abuse and Maltreatment Register for mandated reporters (800-635-1522).

Life Skills will make every effort to maintain confidentiality in all such cases and is committed to supporting students, parents, and staff members throughout the reporting process, while working cooperatively with Child Protective Services (CPS) and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS).

If you have any concerns about your child; if your child has been injured while outside of school; if you or your child needs assistance in any way; or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact the family support coordinator at your school site. Communication with our school staff is encouraged. All undocumented injuries, sustained absences from school, verbal reports made by students, noticeable changes in a student's behavior and/or appearance, etc., must be reported and investigated. If your child is injured during the school day, you will receive a phone call and/or written documentation of the incident. Your child's well-being is our top priority.

Fire, evacuation, and lockdown drills are conducted throughout the school year. The preschool has an emergency fire and evacuation plan on file. If we need to vacate the building during an emergency, you will be notified of your child's location as soon as possible. It is essential that you provide the school with up to date emergency contact information.

In addition to the drills noted above, Life Skills has a written Health and Safety Plan, which is reviewed with staff on an annual basis. This plan includes a Lost Child Plan, an Emergency Evacuation Plan, and a Medical Emergency Plan. If you would like to review a copy of the Health and Safety Plan, please contact the education director. It is our goal to keep your child safe at school and to communicate with you about any concerns you may have.



7a. Security Cameras

Life Skills Preschool has a security camera system in place that is designed to support the security team in their daily responsibilities to assist promoting a safe and healthy environment for students and staff. The security team will properly use the security cameras system to observe and monitor the school entrances and exists at all times that children, staff, and visitors are on the premises.

The security camera system has been placed in the following areas to monitor students transitioning between floors and between activities, visitors (parents, vendors, contractors) traveling through the school, identify visitors entering the building, and to overlook the street and busing area:

- Hallways
- Classrooms
- Front Entrance

8. CLOSING FOR INCLEMENT WEATHER

If the New York City Department of Education closes due to inclement weather, Life Skills Preschool will be closed as well. The NYCDOE website will provide up to date information on school closures, as will local TV and radio stations. The NYCDOE website is <http://schools.nyc.gov>. Because all of our students are transported to school by bus, depending on transportation/safety concerns **Life Skills may choose to close even if the NYCDOE remains open. Since we are prepared with remote learning, we are able to schedule remote sessions with you on snowy days.**

In the event of a school closure, parents/guardians will receive an automated message over the telephone.

You can also learn about school closures by calling our main office. You will hear a recorded message in English, Mandarin, and Spanish if school is canceled.

9. PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

We look forward to your active involvement and support of the program. Communication and cooperation between preschool and home help to establish a warm and nurturing environment and further our efforts to provide a rich learning experience for your child.

Life Skills hosts a variety of family events, parent workshops, and parent support groups to encourage involvement in your child's education program. Please note, parents who have Parent Training and Counseling on their Child's IEP are mandated to attend these programs as part of the services indicated on the IEP. We have a Family Support Coordinator who is available to support you throughout the year and to help with individual needs. You will receive regular family newsletters with information on school events and techniques to help your child.

10. CLOTHING AND BELONGINGS

In order to be comfortable and able to participate fully in class activities, your child should be dressed appropriately, including shoes. Dress him or her casually and according to the season.

It is our goal to help your children with toilet training and to work with you through this process. If your



child is not yet trained; you are required to supply diapers. You may send them daily, weekly, or monthly. An extra, complete set of clothing (including underwear, socks, shirt, pants/skirt, sneakers, and sweater) should be brought to school in a marked bag. This will be kept in the child's cubby for use as needed. **Label all personal items;** it helps to prevent loss. Although we will do our best to ensure that your personal items are safeguarded, Life Skills cannot be responsible for items brought to the preschool program. Please do not send electronic games, cell phones, expensive items like jewelry, or special toys to school. Children have a hard time-sharing these items and they are easily broken and/or lost. Any special items brought to preschool are restricted to planned show-and-tell events. Your child's teacher will inform you of such events.

11. SCHOOL CALENDAR

Our preschool program operates 12 months a year. We will send home two calendars, one for the summer months of July and August (if your child has been approved by the preschool district to attend the 12-month preschool year) and a separate one for the September to June school year. Please keep this calendar handy for your reference and planning. Any changes to the calendar will be communicated in writing. If your child does not qualify for the summer months, please contact the family support coordinator for resources on summer activities.

12. FERPA POLICY AND STUDENT RECORDS

Life Skills Preschool respects our students' privacy and protects the confidentiality of their education records. KCC adheres to the guidelines outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Your rights to Due Process can be found on the NYSED website at: <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/dueprocess/impartial-hearing-guidance-jan-2018.htm>

We maintain a file on each child enrolled at Life Skills. This file contains all the information reviewed with you at your preschool district CPSE meeting. Your child's file is confidential and only certain people are able to access it for educational or administrative purposes. This includes your child's current teaching and therapeutic team, school administrators, and clerical staff. We must have written permission from you, the parent/guardian, in order to release any information from a student's educational record.

You have the right to contact us to review your child's file at any time. Parents/Guardians may request that the student's educational records be amended if you believe those records to be inaccurate. You should clearly identify the part of the record you want changed and specify why it is inaccurate. This request must be made to your preschool district chairperson. If the preschool district decides not to amend the record as requested, you may request a fair hearing from the NYCDOE. Life Skills maintains all files until the student graduates, after which Life Skills staff can assist you with contact information should you need to contact the district office.

We hope this handbook will be useful as we embark on an exciting year of growth and learning with your child! On behalf of all of us at Life Skills Preschool:

WELCOME!