

**ST. MARY'S SUNSHINE CENTER, INC.**

## **PARENT HANDBOOK**



### **Our Philosophy**

Children are active learners. They learn through daily interaction with others as well as exploration and discovery of their environment. With guidance and supervision, children should be given the freedom to explore their world. A child's environment and activities should allow them to be challenged yet offer feelings of success when tasks are completed. Children's daily activities require stability and structure; however, the day's activities should be flexible to allow for spontaneous learning activities. Daily activities should also be based on children's interest, engage their curiosity, and allow for creativity and self-expression.

Play is a necessary part of an early childhood program because it offers children opportunities to use materials and learn at their own pace. Through play children develop problem solving and social skills. They are given the opportunity to safely explore, expand their minds and create within their environment.

Teachers should model appropriate behavior and provide guidance which allows children the opportunity to encounter and overcome each new challenge.

The Parent's Handbook is designed to answer questions regarding center policy and classroom practices. Please review this handbook carefully. If there are any questions, please contact the Director.

## **Welcome to our Center!**

## **Who we are and how we started...**

The St. Mary's Sunshine Center, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The center was originally started as part of St. Mary's Hospital. It was part of a grant through the Federal Government. When the grant ended, we moved and separated from the hospital. The property and business of the Corporation is managed by the Board of Trustees, who are elected to serve for a period of two years. Generally, the Board of Trustees hold monthly board meetings, which are open to the parents and staff, unless personnel matters are being discussed. Personnel matters are discussed in closed sessions.

## **Mission Statement**

Our mission is to provide a developmentally appropriate program for all children that nurtures the whole child and respects each child as an individual, instills positive self-worth and a love for learning.

## **Changes in policies & procedures**

Policies & procedures are updated as the Board of Trustees deems necessary for the operation of the Center. Revised or replacement Parent Handbooks are posted on our website. This handbook supersedes all previous handbooks and supplemental agreements.

## **Hours of Operation**

The Center is open year-round, Monday through Friday, from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. We ask that children are dropped off by 9:00 am. For staffing reasons, if your child will be arriving after 10:00 please contact the center. Parents are expected to have their children out of the building by 6:00 pm to avoid late fees. Late fees are assessed after 6:00 p.m.

## **Calendar**

The Center will be closed on New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving Day, the day after Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day and the day after Christmas. The Center will be closing at 3:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve. Parents will be given a one week notice of any change in holiday hours. Should a scheduled holiday fall on a Saturday, the Center will be closed the Friday before the holiday. Should a scheduled holiday fall on a Sunday, the Center will be closed the Monday after the holiday. The Center will be closed for one professional training day per year, parents will be given 30-day notice prior to this closure.

## **Visiting Our Center**

Parents are always welcome to visit the center. We ask that you be conscious of nap times and disrupting the classrooms. We encourage parents and/or other relatives to participate in center events.

## **Camera Monitoring**

In addition, to enhance the protection of students and staff, the Center employs discretely located cameras (without sound monitoring) in all classrooms, playgrounds, the parking lot, and general areas (excluding bathrooms). Because we respect the privacy of all children, parents and staff in our center, cameras for internal purposes only. Live streaming of camera is available in the lobby of the center; however, only the Director, Assistant Director and Board of Trustees President and/or Vice President may review recordings.

## **Enrollment & Financial Policies**

The Center welcomes and encourages you to visit the Center prior to your child's first day. This will give you and your child the opportunity to meet your child's teacher and classmates.

The following forms must be completed and returned prior to your child's acceptance into care:

- Emergency Card (Updated Annually)
- Immunization Certificate
- Health Inventory
- "All About Me" form (Updated Annually)
- Parent Agreement

**\*\*NO child will be accepted without the above-completed forms, no exceptions. \*\***

The remainder of your deposit is refunded upon your child's withdrawal from the Center, provided the center receives at least a two-week written notice and there are no charges on the account. Tuition is charged on a bi-weekly basis and is due every other Friday. Full tuition is charged for weeks in which the Center is closed due to holiday or other reasons. There will be a \$30.00 fee charged for any declined credit/debit card.

Parents are required to sign up for Tuition Express payments. This is an automated system that charges your checking account or a debit/credit card. Parents can choose ACH or Credit Card. There is a convenience fee for each credit card transaction.

The Board of Trustees reserves the right to increase tuition as necessary for the operation of the Center.

Please note occasionally the center receives funding from the State of Maryland. "It is the policy of the State of Maryland that all public and publicly funded schools and school programs operate in compliance with:

♣ Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964; and

♣ Title 26, Subtitle 7 of the Education Article of the Maryland Code, which states that public and publicly funded schools and programs may not:

- i. Discriminate against a current student, a prospective student, or the parent or guardian of a current or prospective student on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.
- ii. Refuse enrollment of a prospective student, expel a current student, or withhold privileges from a current student, a prospective student, or the parent or guardian of a current or prospective student because of an individual's race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability; or
- iii. Discipline, invoke a penalty against, or take any other retaliatory action against a student or parent or guardian of a student who files a complaint alleging that the program or school discriminated against the student, regardless of the outcome of the complaint."

#### **Late Payment**

A late payment fee of \$5.00 per day is charged if payment is not received by close of business Monday, following a tuition due date. If Monday is a holiday, payment must be received by 10:00 am Tuesday to avoid late fees. Third party checks are not considered paid until received by the center. Parents are responsible for ensuring checks are received by the tuition due date. The center has the option to immediately dismiss a child if tuition payment is more than one week late.

#### **Additional Fees**

St. Mary's Sunshine Center provides a wait-list form when space is not available at the time that care is needed. Once completed and returned along with a paid \$25.00 wait list fee. Your child will be added and you will be contacted when a spot is available. This fee is non-refundable.

#### **Late Pick-up**

The Center closes at 6:00 p.m. and parents are expected to have children picked up and out of the building by that time. Late fees are accessed for every minute families remain in the building after 6:00 p.m. The charges are as follows:

6:01 p.m. – 6:15 p.m.                \$25.00 per child (1 to 15 minutes)  
A charge of \$25.00 will be added for every additional 15-minute interval.

Our Procure system and camera monitors will be used to determine late fees.  
Late fees will be billed to the parent on a weekly basis and must be remitted with the next tuition payment.  
Parents and/or guardians will receive three warnings prior to their child being dismissed. The policy is instituted per quarter in the following manner:

|                     |                                  |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| First late pick-up  | Verbal warning issued to parents |
| Second late pick-up | Written warning to parents       |
| Third late pick-up  | Board Notified                   |
| Fourth late pick-up | Child/Children dismissed         |

**Withdrawal/Dismissal**

A two-week written notice to the Director is required when a parent withdraws a child from the Center. This will guarantee the refund of your security deposit. The Center reserves the right to dismiss a child immediately if: 1) the parent fails to pay tuition, 2) the child is not satisfactorily adjusting to the program, or 3) the child’s behavior is deemed a threat to the well-being of other children enrolled in the Center or staff.

**Family Involvement and Conferences**

Family involvement is important to strengthen parent/teacher relationships. We value their opinions, diversity, and partnership. A child’s development is directly correlated to the impact of their home and school life and how these two worlds interact. We team with parents for a consistent and cohesive environment in which a child can feel secure for exploration, learning, and self-esteem building. On a daily basis Parents are welcome to discuss questions or concerns with teachers. We ask that this not be done in front of the children. If you need to contact a teacher, we suggest calling and leaving a message for that teacher and they can call when they are not in the classroom. You can also request to speak to the teacher at drop off or pick up.

Through classroom welcome letters and newsletters, monthly center calendars, flyers, and personal contact, we invite family members to:

- Be aware of classroom activities
- collaborate with staff on their child’s development
- support fundraisers to benefit our Center
- become a member of the Board of Trustees

Parents should feel free to contact their child’s teacher or the Director if there are any concerns or questions.

## **Our Classrooms**

All classrooms incorporate curriculum developed by Creative Curriculum that is based on developmental research and approved by the Maryland State Department of Education for preschool learners. These developmentally appropriate resources provide children with the foundational skills they need to succeed as lifelong learners. These programs are very “hands-on” and build on children’s abilities and strengths.

Each classroom is set up for exploration and growth. With educational value and developmental milestones in mind materials and equipment are readily available to children. Children’s interests, culture and language are also considered when choosing materials and creative activities for each classroom. Classroom activities and materials supports children of all abilities. Classrooms are cleaned continuously throughout the day.

Teachers are given time weekly to create developmentally appropriate activities which complement the curriculum. Differential instruction is used to ensure that children’s needs are being met. Results of assessments are used when planning activities.

Children are sometimes faced with learning challenges or special needs. Lesson plans and schedules are personalized to include any accommodations and modifications needed for children. Individual Education Plans (IEP) and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) are utilized to ensure that we create inclusive environments for all children. Children with disabilities and special health care needs are to be included in daily activities and accommodations are to be made when developing lesson plans and activities. The children’s interests are also taken into consideration when lessons are planned. Additional activities are developed to enhance the curriculum. Weekly lesson plans and daily schedules are posted in each classroom. Information provided through an IEP or IFSP is kept confidential and used only for the purpose of planning and accommodating children’s needs.

Physical activities are incorporated into daily classroom schedules. Structured physical play, as well as child directed physical play is important in the social, emotional, and physical development of children of all ages. Physical activities also help to build self-esteem. Our goal is to provide ample opportunities for developmentally appropriate and challenging activities. Children are also provided opportunities to explore physical fitness activities during outdoor play.

If any room modifications are necessary, these changes are done prior to the child entering the classroom. If any outside services are necessary, we will work with parents with referrals, schedules, etc.

Several factors are used to determine children’s classroom placement and advancement. Age, development, and availability are all considered. Any questions regarding this procedure should be discussed with the Director.

## **Transitions**

A transition form is completed by the teachers and shared with the Director and parents. Each child is given the opportunity to visit the classroom they will be transitioning to over several days before they are moved permanently. Transitioning can sometimes be challenging for both children and families. We will do our best to assist parents when these transitions occur.

### **Screen Time Policy**

There is no screen time for children under the age of 2. Children over the age of 2 are allowed a maximum of 30 minutes total per week of educational and age-appropriate screen time (iPad, Video and Television). Policy allows for no more than 15 minutes of educational computer time per day. No screen time TV, Videos, iPad and Videos are allowed during meals and snacks.

### **Emergency Procedures**

In an emergency situation where medical attention is deemed necessary by a parent or staff member, 911 will be called immediately. A staff member will accompany the child in the ambulance and will remain at the hospital until a parent or caregiver arrives. Center staff will not in any case transport a child by personal vehicle.

Parents are responsible for providing the names and telephone numbers of at least three persons who can be contacted, during the day, in case of sudden illness or building emergency. Parents will be contacted immediately if there is a building emergency effecting care (power outage, flooding etc.). **It is imperative that these emergency phone numbers be kept up to date at all times.**

Fire drills are conducted on a monthly basis. Staff and children evacuate the building as they would if a real fire were to occur. Disaster drills are periodically done. Copies of our disaster plans are available upon request.

### **Inclement Weather**

In the event of inclement weather, parents should contact the Center for a recorded message before bringing their children to the Center. The Director and one Board Officer (President, Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer) make the determination to close or delay the Center. However, factors like local government and business closings are factored into this decision. Please remember our primary concern is the safety of our staff and children, but also considering the needs of our clients, the parents. While every attempt will be made to decide the night before, if that is impossible, the determination will be made no later than 6:00 am. This information will be available through our answering service. Notifications will be sent through email and bulk text messages. If it should be necessary to close the Center during business hours, parents will be contacted to pick-up their children. Parents or the emergency contact will be advised of the time that the Center will be closing. All efforts should be made to have your child picked up by this time. Morning snack will not be served if there is more than an hour delay in opening.

### **Snacks and Lunches**

Children should bring a nutritional ready to eat lunch. The center will provide am and pm snack. Cold food will be stored in a refrigerator. Parents should label and date each item. Parents are also urged to use a thermos to keep foods warm. For children two years old and younger the center is able to re-heat food for one minute or less. Due to Office of Childcare regulations the center will provide 1% milk for children 23 months and older and whole milk for children under 24 months. Milk is served with lunch unless we have a note from the child's physician. Lactose free milk can be substituted without a doctor's note. Parents must provide all formula, baby food and all other food for bottle-fed infants. Milk is provided by the Center for cup fed babies only. **Due to Child Care Regulations all bottles must be premixed. We are unable to fill bottles.**

## **Clothing**

Children should wear comfortable, weather-appropriate clothing for participation in all activities, such as climbing, painting and playing in the gravel pit. It is recommended that shoes with slippery soles, flip flops and open toe sandals not be worn for safety reasons.

An emergency change of clothing including shirt, pants, underwear, and socks is to be kept at the Center. These clothes should be replaced in accordance with changing seasons and growing children. Under NO circumstances will one child's clothing be used on another child. "Center Extras" will be used when a child does not have appropriate extra clothes.

If cloth diapers are used, rubber pants are required to be worn over the diaper. This includes all in one brands such as, but not limited to, "Bum Genius".

For safety and liability reasons Sunshine Staff are not permitted to assist any school age child in the bathroom or with changing of clothing. If a child is unable to clean or dress themselves a parent or guardian will be contacted to assist the child.

A sheet and blanket should be provided for naptime. Full size pillows are NOT permitted due to Child Care Administration regulations. A "travel" size pillow is optional. All items must fit in a bag that can be hung up. **It is imperative that all clothing and bedding be clearly labeled with the child's name.**

## **Toys from home**

We discourage parents from allowing children to bring in any toys from home. This tends to create chaos in the classrooms. However, toy guns, knives, swords and other weapon toys, as well as whistles, balloons, money and any toys that go into the mouth are not permitted at all. A favorite nap time toy may be brought from home. Please label all items brought in with the child's name. The Center is not responsible for lost or broken toys.

## **Positive Behavioral Practice**

Each teacher is responsible for promoting self-control and appropriate social behavior by practicing positive methods to redirect children's inappropriate behavior. Staff works with children to resolve conflicts and help communicate their needs and challenges. Staff encourages reflection on behavior, frustrations, and problem-solving choices. Methods for guiding children in appropriate behavior include but are not limited to the following:

- use of clear directions
- communication of age appropriate, positive expectations, consequences, and choices
- modeling appropriate verbal responses to conflicts
- provide acceptable choices
- Help children find appropriate words and actions to express feeling
- providing challenging activities or redirecting to alternative activities
- communicating with the parents regarding the behavior

Incident Reports are sent home for inappropriate behavior. Behavior Logs are also kept when necessary.

**St. Mary's Sunshine Center reserves the right to use photographs & video recordings of children in published material and as necessary for behavior observation.**

## **Injury Reports**

For serious injuries such as a bump on the head with a bruise or swelling, possible sprain, bite that breaks the skin, bleeding, etc. staff will inform the Director. The Director or designee will contact the parent if necessary. Appropriate first aid treatment will be administered. Staff will complete an injury report for all injuries that would be of concern to parents as soon as possible. After Director or designee and parent have signed the form, it will be kept on file by administration.

## **Asthma and Allergies Accommodations**

Parents must complete an Asthma Action plan if necessary. Our Senior Staff have received medication administration training and are knowledgeable of nebulizers and inhalers. If a child requires a special diet due to allergies or other restrictions, the parent is responsible for providing food. Children's allergies, food and environmental, will be posted in the classroom. We ask parents to be aware of fur brought in on coats, jackets, and linens as we have several children with allergies to pet dander. This fur is very easily transferred to others. As a new child transitions into the classroom, staff will check the information provided by the parent for allergies and add the child's name to the list. This information is updated and passed on at the transition meeting.

## **Illness Procedures**

Children should **not** be sent to the center if they are ill. Parents will be contacted to remove their child from the Center immediately when that child shows signs of illness. Arrangements should be made to have children picked up **within one hour**.

- These signs include but are not limited to 1) a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher; 2) listlessness; 3) vomiting; 4) breathing difficulties; 5) diarrhea; 6) change in skin color; 7) excessive colored discharge from nose, ears, sores, or eyes; or 8) change in general mood or appearance.
- Fever: Children with a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher are not permitted back to the center until they are fever free for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication.
- Diarrhea: Children with diarrhea that cannot be contained within the diaper/clothing or that causes "accidents" for toilet trained children will be removed from care immediately. Children may return when bowel movements return to normal.
- Vomiting: Children who vomit will need to be removed from the classroom and will need to be removed from care immediately. Children may return when vomiting has ceased.
  - Vomiting caused by reflux in healthy infants will not cause the child to be excluded from school
- Rashes: Any child who exhibits a spreading rash will be removed from group care until the rash is diagnosed by a physician and is determined to be non-contagious. A physician must provide determination of contagious state.
- Head Lice and Fleas: Children who have been determined to have head lice must be treated and be nit/egg free before returning to the Center. All children associated with the child will be checked and the infected child will be rechecked in 7-10 days after treatment. Any child with visible live fleas will be sent home immediately for cleaning and treatment. These cases will be treated as discreetly as possible.
- Chicken Pox: Children with chicken pox must stay home until all lesions have dried or crusted over, and no new lesions have appeared for at least 24 hours.
- Hand, Foot and Mouth: Children will not be allowed to return to the center until fever has resolved for at least 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medication, they are able to participate comfortably in all school activities, excessive drooling from mouth sores has resolved and, where possible, any visible weeping lesion/sores must be covered with a waterproof dressing.

- RSV, Flu & COVID:

Children who test positive for RSV, Flu or COVID may return after five days from the positive test and if showing no symptoms. Administration has final decision regarding return.

- Molluscum Contagiosum: Children with this condition do not need to be excluded from care. The lesions should be covered where possible with clothing or a water-tight bandage. Keeping the child's finger nails short, reducing scratching, and frequent hand hygiene after touching bumps (staff and child), are recommended to help prevent spread.
- If a child has been suspected of having or has been diagnosed with **any** contagious illness (i.e. impetigo, chicken pox, pink eye etc.) he/she must have a doctor's note stating they are no longer contagious. **Children may return after 24 hours only if they have received the required doses of medication for contagious illness which requires medication.**
- Children will not be permitted at the Center if they are unable to participate in **normal** daily activities. This includes classroom activities and outdoor play. School age children should not be sent to daycare when they are too ill to be sent to school.

***Children must be illness/fever free (without medication) for 24 hours prior to returning to the Center. The Director, other administration, or teachers would be happy to clarify any questions you have regarding our illness policy. Using all these factors, the Director or designee has the final decision of notifying the parent regarding the child's illness.***

#### **Administration of Medication**

Designated staff members may administer medication only if a Medication Order Form is completed. This form contains the child's name, parent's signature & date signed, identity of the medication & dosage for the child, dates on which the medication is to be administered, time to administer the medication or the conditions for which the medication is to be administered.

Prescription medication must be labeled by the pharmacy or physician with the child's name and the expiration date. At least one dose of a prescription medication, including topical ointments, must be given to the child at home prior to the administering that medication.

The amount, date, and time of administration, as well as who administers the medication to the child in the center, will be recorded in the child's personal records. Prescription medication may only be administered according to a licensed health practitioner's written instruction or the instructions on the label of the medication.

#### **Birthday Parties**

We look forward to celebrating birthdays and other special occasions with the children and their families. If a parent would like to bring in a special treat, please make arrangements with the child's teacher in advance. This is to ensure children with allergies can be included. We encourage food items such as fruit muffins, fruit/vegetable bread, granola bars, fresh fruit, frozen yogurt. Due to licensing regulations, birthday treats **must be store bought**. Any food brought in for a celebration snack must arrive unopened. Please remember that due to safety reasons, we cannot light birthday candles in the Center.

#### **Child Abuse & Neglect**

By law, all suspected cases of abuse or neglect must be reported to the appropriate authorities. If a staff member suspects that a child is being abused, they will notify the Director immediately. The staff member and the Director will then notify Social Services.

**Off-Site Care**

The Center will not be held liable for injuries or damages to staff or children when employees are hired by parents to provide childcare (or for any other reason) at their home or other site outside of Center business hours. Once a child has been signed out and exited the Center building the Center is no longer liable for employee actions. Parents must provide a written permission for an employee to transport their child. The Center will not provide car seats for use by parents or employees.

In the event that a child has missed the school bus, a parent will be contacted for staff permission to transport their child to the school. Every effort will be made to secure the child in a proper seat restraint. The Center will not be held liable for injuries or damages during transport.

**Sexual Harassment Policy**

Sexual Harassment is unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual Harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in regard to any Parent or Staff Member of the Center. All parents and Staff are expected to avoid any behavior that might be interpreted as sexual harassment. Any parent who believes that they have been harassed sexually, should report the problem to the Director immediately. The report will be investigated, and remedial action will be taken where needed.

7/8/2026