



## **2023 PARENT HANDBOOK**

**Also visit our website:**

**[www.steppingstones-childcare.org](http://www.steppingstones-childcare.org)**

Dear Parents,

In March 1987, the directors of The Infant and Toddler Centers, which were located in the Meadowbrook Apartments and a part of KU, decided to get out of the day care business and close down. After a momentary panic, the parents, whose children were attending the centers, and I, the supervisor of the infant program, joined together to literally “save” the centers. We became **Stepping Stones, Inc.**, a nonprofit corporation, which operates with a parent Board of Directors. We took over the Infant and Toddler Centers and began searching for a place to relocate and expand.

On September 20, 1988, after almost 1 ½ years of dedication, prayers, and hard work, Stepping Stones, Inc. finally opened the doors of our new facility at 1410 Kasold Drive in the Orchards Corners Shopping Center. This was a temporary move. We continued to look for a location to build our own free-standing building. Three years later, in the Fall of 1991, we moved to our permanent home at 1100 Wakarusa. This new facility offered us room to grow, more parking and playground and the option of one day purchasing the building, which we did in 2006. Without the commitment and support of the parents and staff, this dream could never have come true!

I would like to welcome and introduce you to Stepping Stones. I am confident that we can provide the best loving and learning environment for your child. Please read this handbook carefully. I hope it will answer most of your questions and convince you that Stepping Stones, with its devoted parents and staff, is where you want your child to be!

Sincerely,

Shelly Platz, Director  
(785) 843-5919 (center)

## General Information

### HOURS

Stepping Stones is open from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm Monday through Friday. In 1997, we decided we would only offer full-time care. It did not make sense for us to have part-time “holes” in our enrollment that we could not fill when we had such a long waiting list for full-time care. But in September 2012, we were able to add a part-time preschool program for 3-5 year olds to attend during the school year. Parents who pay for full-time care, can come and go on their own schedule, although we encourage preschoolers to be here by 8:30. We ask that you call if your child will be in after 9:30 or won't be in at all so that we can adjust staff and plan for the day accordingly.

### ABSENCES

If your child will not be coming to the center on a particular day because of illness, vacation or just to spend the day with you, please tell your child's teacher, send a Brightwheel message or phone the center as soon as possible so that our staff can make plans for the day and adjust staff. Please let us know what illness or symptoms they have when they are sick so we can give other parents a heads up so about what is going around the center.

### DAYS CLOSED

We will be closed for the following days. Please inform us if your child will be gone for longer periods of time.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day/Staff Training: Monday, January 16, 2023

Spring Break: Thursday, March 16, 2023 & Friday, March 17, 2023

Memorial Day: Monday, May 29, 2023

Independence Day: Monday, July 3, 2023 & Tuesday, July 4, 2023

Staff Training Day for all staff: Monday, August 14, 2023 (tentative)

Labor Day: Monday, September 4, 2023

Thanksgiving: November 22-24, 2023

Winter Break: December 25, 2023 thru January 1, 2024

### COLD WEATHER CLOSINGS

In the event of bad weather, the center will close in order to assure the safety of the staff and children. We will close when the Lawrence Public Schools (USD 497) close due to icy or snow conditions (not just due to cold temps). If the schools delay their start time due to the weather, the center will too. We will use our text messaging system to inform parents of snow closings/delays and it will also be listed on the center's website and Facebook page. If bad weather occurs when schools are out of session, we will decide if we will close or not and let all know asap.

### MONTHLY FEES

Stepping Stones, Inc. is a nonprofit organization. Fees are set to cover our monthly expenses for mortgage, utilities, payroll, insurance, toys, equipment, groceries and all other operating costs. Fees are figured on an average monthly basis and are the same each month. Because our costs do not vary with individual absences, we do not make individual adjustments in fees for the time you miss. Any savings to us for closing the center during holidays will be spread over the entire year to keep your fees as low as possible. If fees do have to be increased to cover expenses, you will be given at least one month's notice. **Fees as of 2/1/23 are:**

**Infants:** \$1,260 per month

**Toddlers:** \$1,095 per month

**Preschool 1:** \$980 per month

**Preschool 2:** \$955 per month

**Part-time preschool:** \$445 per month (M-F 8:15-11:30), (M-F 8:15-1 and other schedules are also available.)

**After school Care 1 & 2 (w/transportation):** \$405 per month **Before school care:** \$190 per month

**Summer Camp 1 & 2 (elementary age):** \$920 per month

*Families who have two children enrolled fulltime will receive a \$50 a monthly fee discount. Those with three children enrolled fulltime will receive a \$75 discount. (Fulltime care is care from 7:00 am-6:00 pm five days/wk.)*

Fees are due by the tenth of each month, for that month. We encourage parents to sign up to have fees taken directly out of their checking account (please ask about paperwork for ACH payments) or you can pay your fees by check directly to the front desk by the 10th. Parents whose fees have not been paid by the 10th of the month will be charged \$10.00. If fees still haven't been paid by the 15th of the month, you will be charged an additional \$15. If not paid by the 20th, your child's spot may be in jeopardy. There is a \$20 charge for returned checks.

## **EARLY & LATE CHARGES**

The center is open from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm. Staff are not scheduled to care for children before 7:00 am or after 6:00 pm. If you cannot pick up your child by 6:00 pm, please call as early as possible so that arrangements can be made for the care of your child. You can then pay that staff for caring for your child after 6. You will be charged an additional \$1.00 a minute for each minute after 6:00pm (with a minimum late fee of \$10) any time you come later than 6:00 pm without having made arrangements with staff in advance. Please let us know if there is an emergency and be considerate of our staff and your child.

## **ENROLLING YOUR CHILD**

If you are interested in enrolling your child, please call our director, Shelly Platz, at 785-843-5919 to make an appointment to tour our center. If there is an opening, a deposit and enrollment forms must be submitted to reserve your child's space. If there is not an opening, there is a \$30.00 nonrefundable fee to place your child's name on the waiting list.

Children are enrolled on a "first come, first served" basis according to the location of your child's name on our waiting list and the age of your child. Preference will be given to siblings of children presently enrolled in our program. Please let us know if you have made other arrangements so that we can withdraw your child's name from our list. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion or gender. You will be contacted when there is a vacancy available for your child. An enrollment form and enrollment deposit must be paid to **guarantee** your child's space.

As soon as the enrollment deposit has been paid, the director will answer any questions you may have, explain what your responsibilities are and give you some additional forms to fill out. **These forms must be filled out and returned to the center on or before your child's first day.** This is a Health Department requirement and will also give our staff the information needed to get to know your child and successfully meet their needs.

## **DEPOSIT & DISENROLLMENT**

A \$400 deposit is required for FT enrollment (\$200 for PT) to guarantee your child's space in our program. It is nonrefundable unless written notice is given 30 days prior to the disenrollment date for a child in attendance or the scheduled start date for a new child. If 30 days written notice is given, the deposit will be refunded or applied to the last month's fees as follows for FT: \$400 is refunded if a child disenrolls from pre 2 or an older classroom, \$300 is refunded if a child disenrolls from the pre 1 classroom, \$200 is refunded if a child disenrolls from the toddler room & \$100 is refunded if disenrolled from the infant room. All \$200 is refunded w/30 days notice for PT.

## **EQUIPMENT AND INSURANCE FEES**

Fees to cover equipment and insurance are charged upon enrollment and as children advance to new classrooms. The fees are:

- Enrollment in Infant, Toddler, Preschool 1, Preschool 2: \$100.00
- Children graduating into next class (Toddler, Preschool 1, Preschool 2): \$100.00
- Enrollment in the part-time preschool program: \$50.00
- Enrollment in School-age programs: \$50.00

If a child is in a classroom fulltime for less than 6 months before they move to the next classroom, the next room's \$100 equipment fee is waived.

## **OUR PHILOSOPHY**

At Stepping Stones, Inc., we believe that learning should be fun, exciting and challenging. A relaxed, child-centered environment invites children to creatively explore their surroundings. This, along with developmentally appropriate lesson plans and the gentle guidance of experienced teachers, help children grow to their fullest potential and prepare for elementary school.

It is important that our children develop into self-confident, well-rounded individuals. We will provide opportunities to facilitate the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and creative growth of each child. A child must feel loved and valued as a person. Through our expressions of acceptance, love and praise, each child will develop a positive self-image which will allow him or her to succeed and acquire the joy of learning.

We also know the importance of our staff and families working together. As a non-profit program, we depend on parental support, involvement and participation in our fundraising and social events.

## **PBS (Positive Behavior Support)**

In 2012, our center became part of a 3-year grant program through the Douglas County Child Development Association. Through this grant, our staff received extensive training, coaching and support as we implemented the PBS pyramid teaching model. This model promotes social and emotional competence and addresses challenging behavior through developmentally appropriate strategies. At Stepping Stones, the program-wide expectations of kindness, safety and teamwork are our general "code of conduct." These expectations are taught in each of our classrooms as we build positive relationships and provide a high-quality, supportive environment for our children.

## **OUR PROGRAM**

We care for 123 children at the center. 17 infants (2 weeks to ~15 months) are divided into a younger and older group. The toddlers are divided into 2 groups of 10 toddlers (~15 months to 2 ½ years) and there are 20 fulltime preschoolers (2 ½ to 4 years), 24 fulltime preschoolers (4 to 6 years), 12 part-time preschoolers (3 to 5 years), 14 school-age children (5 to 7 years), and 16 school-age children (7 to 12 years). Because of the age of the children in the rooms, they each have unique characteristics.

### **THE INFANT ROOM**

The infant room is divided into 2 units with nine children on Side 1 and eight infants on Side 2. The unit at the north end of the building (Side 1) is for younger babies who do not crawl or are beginning to crawl. The other unit (Side 2) is for babies who are crawling and walking. Our staff/child ratio is 1:3 on side 1 and a max of 1:4 on side 2.

When you arrive at the center, you will be greeted by the lead teacher. After you remove your child's outdoor clothing at our dressing area and say good-bye, she will take your child into the play area. Meanwhile, you will put away your child's clothes and empty your child's diaper bag into the appropriate bins. You will also fill out when they last ate/slept via Brightwheel and can use this time to briefly discuss anything that will help us provide better care for your child. Babies grow and change quickly. It is important for us to maintain good communication to be sure each child's needs are being met and we are on the same page regarding their care.

Whenever your child is not eating, sleeping or being changed, they will be in the baby-safe play area. This is an exciting place to be. Babies learn new skills so quickly. Different small motor, large motor, social, language, and individual developmental activities are conducted each half hour throughout the day. A wide variety of toys are available and our staff is constantly devising new and stimulating play experiences for your child. Because most toys go directly into a baby's mouth, toys that were out are picked up, washed and disinfected after each use.

Your child will be fed (between 8:30 and 5:00) according to a schedule you discuss with us. You should feed your child a good breakfast before bringing him or her to the center. You are responsible for bringing the kinds and amount of bottles and baby food your child will need during the day. Nursing mothers are welcome to nurse their child in the classroom or our staff lounge. Children will be held during bottle feedings unless they choose to independently hold their own. Please work on using a bottle before starting at the center so eating isn't difficult for them. As your baby gets older, we encourage you to introduce them to finger foods and using a cup. Around 10 months, we will provide two snacks and a lunch from our menu and start taking them off the bottle during the day to prepare for the toddler room. At this time, you will no longer need to provide food from home unless there are substitutions you need to make due to allergies etc.

Your child will also be put down for naps according to their individual schedules. We encourage children who are one year old or older to take one nap after lunch in preparation for the toddler room. Each child will have his or her own bed and sheet which we provide. Babies will always be put to sleep in their beds, on their backs. We suggest you do this at home too as well as help get them used to sleeping in an environment with a little background noise. We cannot swaddle or cover babies with blankets while in bed due to safe sleep practices enforced by the health department. We encourage parents to bring sleep sacks for their infants. We will launder their sheet and sleep sack as they are soiled (at least once a week). We will rock or pat your child to sleep. Please let us know what works best. We cannot allow babies to sleep in swings or infant seat and toys are never placed in their beds. Pacifiers can be used at naptime (if you'd like) but not while children are awake.

Each child's diaper will be checked and changed (if necessary) at least once an hour. You are responsible for bringing a supply of disposable diapers with you each day. Cloth diapers will not be used because of Health Department regulations. You must also supply any powder, lotion or ointment you would like us to apply.

When the weather is good, the babies will spend some time outdoors playing on the playground, going on stroller rides, or sitting on a blanket. Please be sure to bring the proper jackets, hats, coats and hard soled shoes depending on the weather. We will bundle them up when it is cool and apply sunscreen when it is warm/sunny.

Throughout the day, your child will receive many hugs, kisses, cuddles and smiles. We understand their need for love and affection. Two or three times a day we will update you on how your child ate and slept via Brightwheel (a mobile app) and we will send you photos of your child as often as possible. When you return for your child, you will also receive a verbal report telling you about your child's busy day here and answer any questions you have.

## **THE TODDLER ROOM**

The toddler room is divided into two units of ten children. Placement in the toddler room depends on your child's readiness and availability in the classroom. He/she must be walking fairly well, only taking one nap a day, no longer drinking from a bottle and feeding him/herself. This is generally between the age of thirteen – seventeen months. A 1:5 staff/child ratio is maintained at all times.

You will be greeted at the door by the lead teacher each day. After saying good-bye, your child will join his or her friends in the play area. You will check them in and explain any special needs your child has that day. Your child's coat will be put in their cubby in the hall and you will give diapers etc. to the teacher.

For most of the day, your child will be engaged in stimulating small motor, large motor, dramatic play, social, language and self-help activities. These activities are conducted in small group, large group and free play situations. Interesting art and science activities, geared at short attention spans, will also be a part of the daily routine. Our teachers are constantly trying out new games and activities for the children. They want to provide each child with interesting ways to explore their surroundings and increase their awareness of the world around them.

At this age, many children are seeking a little independence. Although most activities are conducted with the teacher's gentle guidance, there is enough room for independence so that a child can experience a sense of accomplishment. Self-help skills are also worked on throughout all daily activities to encourage children to do simple tasks by themselves (washing hands, pulling up pants, putting up their plate, putting on their shoes etc.)

The center serves two snacks and a lunch each day using menus that are nutritious and enjoyed by children. We have four weekly menus that are rotated monthly and posted each week. Our cook makes a special effort to minimize the sugar, salt and other additives in our recipes. Please feed your child a good breakfast before coming to the center. You must provide any substitutions you wish to make due to allergies, illness or other preferences. Children will brush their teeth after lunch daily.

Naptime is after lunch (about 12:00 until 2:30 pm). Each child has their own mat, sheet and blanket (you can bring one from home) which we wash at least weekly. Those who tend to sleep longest are put down first. As children wake up, quiet activities (story time, etc.) are conducted until everyone is awake.

Learning to use the potty is one of the many important things toddlers do. We have regular potty training procedures with all children. Our staff are trained to work with these procedures in a gentle and positive way. It is easiest to introduce this idea to your child before they reach the power struggle stage of the "terrible twos." We want potty training to be a fun and exciting event to catch their interest. Children may use the potty anytime during the day and are changed every 1 ½ hours (unless it is needed more often). For purposes of potty training, we divide the children into four groups or stages of training, depending on their age and developmental level:

**Stage 1:** The younger toddlers wear diapers and are encouraged to sit on the potty (we have child-size toilets) if they are dry or request to do so.

**Stage 2:** Children wear diapers and are sat on the potty each time they are changed.

**Stage 3:** At the age of 2, we require that all toddlers move to Stage 3. This means that they wear cloth training pants with plastic pants over them (not pull-ups). They sit on the potty each time they come in to be changed. They are encouraged to keep their big boy/girl pants dry. Self-help skills are also worked on (pulling up their pants, etc.) Pull-ups can be used at naptime only.

**Stage 4:** Children wear training pants only and use the potty when needed. At the end of this stage, we hope the children will be able to stay dry and come into potty on their own.

During each of these stages, the toddlers are given a sticker when they are dry and a goldfish cracker if they successfully potty in the potty. They are encouraged to sit on the potties, but are never forced to do so.

During the day, you will receive a notice of your child's potty activities (via Brightwheel) so you can keep track of their progress. We recommend that you buy a potty chair right away so that your child can get used to it. Offer them a chance to sit on it once in a while especially first thing in the morning and before bath time.

When your child starts wearing training pants, you will have lots of laundry to do. You don't have to use training pants at home right away. You may want to wait until they have been fairly successful here at the center. We also would like you to work with us and take one day at a time. Our staff have a lot of experience with potty training. They want to support you, offer advice and share helpful hints with you. This is a learning experience. If you approach it in a relaxed, positive way, your child will too!

Unless it is extremely hot, cold or raining, the children play outside each morning and afternoon. Running, climbing, digging in the sandbox, running through the sprinkler, splashing in the sensory table and other large motor activities are conducted daily. Please be sure to send the proper clothing for your child including a jacket or coat, snow pants, hat, shoes or boots and/or mittens. All of these items must be labeled so they aren't misplaced.

Our staff is expected to model appropriate behaviors and manners for the children. This, along with verbal praises, hugs and smiles for those who are behaving nicely, helps to promote and maintain good behavior. Other techniques are used to avoid problems. Redirection or moving a child before an undesirable situation occurs are often all that is needed. Throughout the day, we offer children many choices and follow-up with logical consequences whenever possible. For example: "We do not hit people with blocks. You can build nicely with the blocks or play somewhere else." The children are told what the inappropriate behavior is, what is appropriate and praised for following our rules. Because they are not very verbal, toddlers often become physical to express themselves (hit, bite, push). We work hard teaching them to "use their words" as well as recognize how their behavior makes others feel. Discipline is viewed as a learning opportunity not a punishment. Our procedures are used consistently and handled in a calm and gentle manner. If they are ineffective with a particular child or behavior, the teacher will discuss the situation with the director and the child's parents. Corporal punishment is **NEVER** used in the center and is grounds for immediate termination of staff.

At the end of the day, our staff is happy to share any of your child's accomplishments with you and answer any questions you have. Pay attention to things posted and talk to your child about their day. They tell great stories!

## **THE PRESCHOOL 1 AND PRESCHOOL 2 ROOMS**

There are 20 children in our Preschool 1 room. A child should be potty trained and about 2 ½ years old when they enter. The minimum staff/child ratio is 1:10 and is maintained at all times. The Preschool 2 room has 24 children who start when they are about 4 years old. They maintain the minimum staff/child ratio of 1:12. In both of our preschools, we have added an additional (third) staff from 9:00-1:00 and 3:00-6:00 pm daily to allow more individualized care for the children.

The curriculum in our preschool programs is organized around a thematic unit. These themes include topics such as seasons, holidays, numbers, animals, health and safety, etc. as well as unique themes such as the Iditarod, Monarch Migration, Our wonderful United States of America to name just a few. Throughout each day of the week, activities will be planned using emotional, physical, social and cognitive skills. The use of a theme will aid the children in tying the activities of the week together. You will receive a weekly email from the lead teacher noting our themes and some of the activities your child will be doing.

We work on preacademic activities throughout the day, especially at center time when pre-reading/language, math, pre-writing/fine motor, visual perception, science and art activities are planned. Academics are presented in a developmentally appropriate manner in our classrooms. We want learning to occur naturally as the children explore and experience the environment around them. There will be teacher directed activities and many spontaneous learning situations that will arouse the children's many interests. During the day, many other skills that are prerequisites to academics are also worked on.

These skills include:

**Communication skills**—Verbalizing emotions and experiences, articulation, labeling, asking questions, story telling and describing.

**Attending skills**—Looking, listening, remembering and completing an activity.

**Social skills**—Taking turns, sharing, conflict resolution and working together.

**Problem solving**—Following instructions, cause and effect etc.

**Self-help skills**—Dressing, tying shoes, serving food, self-regulation etc.

**Motor skills**—large motor and fine motor.

The lead teacher will plan a daily schedule of activities, but is flexible and will take advantage of learning opportunities as they occur. The daily schedule includes the following routines:

**Freeplay**—The children can choose from three or four different areas: dramatic play, manipulatives (small motor), large motor, computer, reading and sensory table activities.

**Calendar**—The days of the week, month and year are discussed as well as the weather, helpers, plans for the day, the theme and new skills, concepts and activities available at the learning centers.

**Learning Centers**—We encourage each child to try each activity at centers where the following skills are worked on:

1. Prewriting: pencil grasp, tracing, copying and writing letters, words and names.
2. Prereading: listening, reading comprehension, naming colors & letters, sorting, sequencing, syllables, phonic sounds and sight words.
3. Premath: rote counting, classification, seriation, numeral recognition, object counting and matching numerals with quantities.
4. Science: Exploration, critical thinking, discovery, cause and effect and answering why questions.
5. Art: Painting, cutting, pasting, coloring, drawing, sculpting and creative expression.

**Large group/Circle time**—Stories, songs, puppets, finger plays and other activities are conducted as a group and are usually theme related.

The children will be able to learn and work at their own individual pace. They will be given activities that are at their level of development or a bit beyond. We want each child to be academically and behaviorally prepared for kindergarten. We want them to be challenged and to experience success. When they leave Stepping Stones, they will have a positive self-image, a secure foundation for learning and a motivation to increase their knowledge.

Messages and photos will be sent to parents via Brightwheel so that they see their child involved in our activities and some of the things they are learning. Please pay attention to our lesson plans and notes posted outside of the classroom and emails sent to you so that you know what is happening in your child's classroom. This will also help you ask questions and discuss your child's day with them. Please let our teachers know about anything that is happening at home that may affect your child's day and feel free to participate in any way you can.

The center will serve delicious and nutritious snacks and a lunch each day. We serve food in the preschool rooms "family style." The children pass food, serve themselves and pour their own drinks. Table manners are also something we work on. All weekly menus will be posted. You may be asked to bring substitutions that are required due to allergies, illness or personal preferences. This is the age of the "picky eater." We encourage the children to take a bite of each food so they are sure to taste everything. Children will brush their teeth after lunch daily.

There will be a rest period after lunch. The Preschool 1 children will be encouraged to nap for an hour or two. Those in Preschool 2 will also have a quiet resting period. The health department requires us to allow 45-60 minutes of quiet rest time for all preschoolers enrolled fulltime. Those who are not asleep after resting a short time can get up and do quiet activities while those who need a nap can sleep. Each child will have his or her own mat with a sheet which we provide and can bring a blanket and/or stuffed animal from home. Children will be allowed to use the bathroom whenever they ask to do so. Assistance will be given to those who need it. Extra changes of clothing should be brought for all preschool children in case accidents or messes occur.

Weather permitting, there will be outside time for 30-45 minutes each morning and afternoon. We generally go outside when the temp is above 32 and below 95 degrees. Large motor activities as well as walks around the neighborhood will be planned for your child. Please be sure to bring the appropriate outdoor clothing. We will also plan field trips throughout the year. We sometimes visit a farm, the pumpkin patch, the zoo, the museum and wading pool as well as many other exciting places. Permission slips must be signed for each child and car seats must be brought for them. We will ask for parent volunteers to help drive and escort the children.



Our staff is expected to model appropriate behaviors and manners for the children. This, along with verbal praise, hugs and smiles for those who are behaving nicely, helps to promote and maintain good behavior. Other techniques are used to avoid problems. Redirection or moving a child before an undesirable situation occurs is often all that is needed. Throughout the day, we offer children many choices and follow-up with logical consequences when possible. For example: "We do not hit people with blocks. That is not kind. You may build nicely with the blocks on the floor or choose to find another area to play." The children are told what the inappropriate behavior is, guided to find an appropriate way of handling problems/emotions and praised for following our rules. Discipline is viewed as a learning opportunity not a punishment. Our procedures are used consistently and handled in a calm and gentle manner. If they are ineffective with a particular child or behavior, the teacher will discuss the situation with the director and the child's parents. We will seek outside advice and assistance as needed. Corporal punishment is **NEVER** used at the center and is grounds for termination of staff.

At the end of each day, our staff will share your child's accomplishments with you and answer any questions you may have. Please pay attention to all your child brings home to share. They get so proud showing off their "work".

### **THE PART-TIME PRESCHOOL ROOM**

In 2012, all of the kindergarten programs in the Lawrence Public Schools became fulltime so there was no longer a need for our half-day kindergarten program. In September 2012, we decided to offer a part-time preschool program using this open classroom. This program is a great opportunity for children to work on their social skills and experience learning in a group setting. The curriculum and the skills they work on are similar to those listed above for the full day preschool programs. Morning sessions (8:15-11:30), lunch bunch (8:15-1) and extended day (8:15-3 T, Th only) schedules are available. This program operates on the public school calendar so is not in session in the summer as well as the times the public schools are not in session throughout the school year.

### **THE SCHOOL-AGE AND SUMMER CAMP PROGRAMS**

In September 1991, we added the after school program for 16 children age 6 to 10 years. This was something new for us that we took one step at a time. By Spring, the program was in full swing. We didn't have a van for transportation to public schools this first school year so we did a lot of walking! Luckily, after several months of fund raising, we purchased a 15 passenger van at the end of May. In June 1993, we added a second School-age room. We now have two mini-buses for transportation. The children are divided into these rooms by age. During the school year there is a classroom with 14 kindergarten and first graders and a minimum of a 1:14 ratio and a classroom with 16 second through fifth graders which has a minimum of a 1:16 ratio. During the summer when the children are here all day for summer camp, there is a 1:8 ratio during most of the day. Transportation will be provided to and from several schools. Each year we reassess our needs to see what schools our route can include.

Our philosophy for the after school program is that the children have been at school all day and now need a chance to unwind, relax and play! They will have a snack, play organized games, go outside, do arts and crafts, play board games, build with manipulatives, read stories and listen to music. Although the teacher will plan specific activities and games, each will be offered in a somewhat unstructured environment and the children will be able to choose what they do. Homework can be worked on during our free play period (5 - 6pm). Full day care will be offered for children in our after school program on days when the public schools are closed. Two snacks will be provided by the center and the children bring their own sack lunches (we will provide beverages). A sign-up sheet will be posted in advance for these days so we know how many children will be present. You will be charged an additional fee per day (depending on which before/after program your child is already enrolled in).

During the summer, our popular summer camp program for children 6-10 is VERY popular. A wide variety of fun and educational activities will be planned for the children to do. Arts and crafts, outside games, board games, manipulatives, reading, and music will be available daily as well as daily field trips places like the park, swimming pool, movie theater, library, museums, local businesses, putt-putt etc. Academics are worked on in fun ways throughout the day to maintain skills needed for school. Additional fees will be charged for swimming lessons. Sack lunches will need to be brought daily. This is an exciting program with many exciting things to do!

Each year we will re-enroll children for the after school and summer camp programs. Priority will be given to those families with other children currently enrolled and/or who have been at Stepping Stones the longest.

## **WHAT TO BRING**

### **INFANT ROOM**

On your first day in the infant room, you need to bring the following items and leave them here at the center:

- a sleep sack for naptime (non-swaddling kind)
- a box of small plastic bags or plastic grocery bags (for soiled clothing)
- A&D or Desitin ointment or something else for diaper rash
- a pacifier (if used)

On a daily basis these items should be brought in a medium size diaper bag:

- 10 disposable diapers (we provide hypoallergenic wipes)
- 2 changes of clothing
- powder (if you want us to use it)
- a day's supply of bottles and/or baby food (We prefer that you send formula premeasured in each bottle. We can add warm water if it is powdered. Breast milk can be frozen or brought daily).

All items should be labeled with your child's name or initials. This includes bottles, caps, containers, socks, etc. (anything that could be misplaced). All medications must be taken out of your diaper bag and locked up for health and safety requirements.

### **TODDLER ROOM**

On your child's first day in the toddler room, you need to bring the following:

- a light weight blanket (to be kept here)
- 2 changes of clothing
- 8 disposable diapers or 8-10 cloth training pants
- a box of small plastic bags or plastic grocery bags (for soiled clothing)
- A&D or Desitin ointment and powder (if you want us to use it)

All of these items will be kept at the center. Bring the appropriate number of diapers/training pants each day (no diaper bag). All children should wear shoes and have the appropriate outdoor clothing. All coats, hats, shoes and socks must be labeled.

### **PRESCHOOL ROOMS**

The following items need to be left at the center for each preschooler:

- a light weight blanket (full day preschool)
- a change of clothes or two

We have an abundance of toys at the center. To avoid lost and broken toys, we request that you do not allow your child to bring toys from home without permission from their teacher. We will not be responsible for any toys that are lost or broken.

## OUR STAFF

At Stepping Stones, Inc., we hire staff, who truly love children. A natural, loving dedication to children is necessary to become an effective teacher and caregiver. We work together as a team to ensure that your child is receiving the best care and early education available.

At the beginning of employment, all staff receive specific job descriptions and personnel policies. Training is conducted in the classroom and an evaluation is made at the end of training. These evaluations are continued throughout employment. Staff names and fingerprints are also checked by the KBI for previous abuse/criminal records and staff turn in a physical and negative TB test results. They receive first aid, cpr, child development, recognizing childhood illnesses and signs and symptoms of child abuse training as well as training on several other topics soon after they are hired. Staff are required to receive 15 hours of training annually.

We are VERY fortunate to have very experienced, dedicated, long-term staff at Stepping Stones. Staff positions and responsibilities are below. Staff pictures are posted on our website and by each classroom to help you match names with faces. Each semester we will share staff schedules so you can get to know your child's teachers.

**Director**— The director must have an HDFL (Human Development and Family Life) degree and at least two year of experience working with children in a group setting. He/she is responsible to the Board of Directors. The overall operation of the center is his/her responsibility. Some of these duties include program planning, hiring, training and evaluating staff, administrative and bookkeeping duties, maintenance, enrollment, public relations and addressing parental concerns.

**Assistant Director**— The AD will assist the director in most all aspects of operating the center. Some of these duties include answering the phone, keeping files up to date, answering parent questions, staff management and assisting in the classrooms.

**Lead teachers**— Each room will have one full time lead teacher. It is preferred that he or she have a degree in a child related field and required that they have experience working with children in a group setting. The lead teacher's responsibilities include planning and implementing the daily program for their classroom, caring for the children, communicating with parents, and evaluating teacher's aides. Most leads work from 7am to 3pm daily.

**Assistant lead teachers**- The infant, toddler, preschool 1 and preschool 2 rooms have an assistant lead who works from 9am-6pm. It is required that they have experience working with children in a group setting. They assist the head lead teacher in all aspects of their job and talk to the parents when they pick-up their children.

**Teacher's Aides**— Most teachers' aides work part-time. It is preferred but not required that they have previous experience and/or education in a child-related field. Aides are responsible for assisting the lead teachers in implementing the daily schedule and meeting the needs of the children in their care.

**Cook**— The cook is responsible for the safe preparation and storage of all food items. This includes menu planning, grocery shopping and preparing the snacks and lunch each day. They also conduct nutrition and cooking activities in many of the classrooms and will help with the center's garden.

## GENERAL POLICIES

**Accreditation:** The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, which is a division of NAEYC, the nation's largest organization of early childhood educators offers a voluntary, professional accreditation system that recognizes high quality care. We have completed the self-study of this process, abide by most of their standards and have chosen not to seek full accreditation at this time.

**Adjustment:** It usually takes a child a week or two to adjust to new surroundings. Even moving to a new room down the hall can be enough to upset a child. If you are enrolling an infant, we recommend that you don't go back to work and start child care on the same day. Leaving them at the center for 3-4 hours the first couple of days will make the transition easier for everyone. If you are enrolling a toddler or preschooler, visit the center with your child before the first day. As your child is getting ready to "graduate" to a new room, we will take them to visit for a couple hours once or twice a day the two weeks before they move. Parents will also meet with their child's current and new the teacher to discuss upcoming changes. Talk to your child about all of the exciting new things

they'll do at school. On the first day, calmly say good-bye and that you'll return at the end of the day. We feel that it is easier on the child to make this a quick departure. If your child cries, it usually lasts only a few minutes. Our staff is used to comforting new children and getting them involved with something fun. Feel free to call during the day to see how things are going. Quite often this adjustment period is harder on the parent than it is on the child!

**Babysitting:** One of the many benefits of having children at Stepping Stones is receiving a list of staff who are interested in babysitting in the evenings and on weekends. Please be sure not put staff in an uncomfortable position by asking them to discuss confidential topics about those at the center with you.

**Birthdays:** We will plan special activities to help celebrate your child's special day. If you would like to be a part of this, we would love to have you. Please let your child's teacher know your plans in advance. Here are suggestions:

- \* Bring yourself—Spend time with your child and his/her friends in their classroom. Cameras are welcome.
- \* Donate a favorite toy, book etc—We never have as much money in our toy budget as we would like to. Bring something that your child especially likes or ask the teachers what is on their wish list.
- \* Bring a small treat for each child—cupcakes, stickers, raisins, balloons, etc. (remember it **MUST** be nut-free!)

**Board of Directors:** Stepping Stones is a private, nonprofit corporation that operates with an advisory Board of Directors composed of seven parents who have children at the center. These parents serve a two-year term and meet monthly with fulltime staff to go over the operation of the center and plan events.

**Clothing:** Play is hard work and we guarantee that kids will get messy here. Although bibs and art smocks are often used, children are sure to find the mud puddles and finger paints when clothing isn't always covered with protection. Please do not send your child in special clothing you don't want to get dirty.

**Communication:** Teachers and parents working together to meet the needs of each child is very important. We will do our best to communicate all that is happening through phone calls, emails, Brightwheel and daily conversation. Open communication about what is happening at home is also crucial. Please call the center for all timely info.

**Conferences:** Formal conferences will be conducted twice a year (usually in Nov/Dec and May/June). At this time we complete an informal developmental checklist on each child based on the Kansas Early Learning Guidelines. Parents are encouraged to make individual arrangements with their child's teacher or the director at any time.

**Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is very important in our family oriented center. Discussion of sensitive issues concerning other children, families and staff members with other families or staff should be avoided.

**Current Events:** Please check Brightwheel, our website, bulletin boards, doors, emails and notes sent home to stay up to date on what is happening at the center and in your child's classroom. Each family has a mailbox in the entry. We don't expect you to attend all events but hope you will participate when you can.

**Differences:** Our developmentally appropriate program is based on what we believe is the best early childhood program we can offer for your child. We understand that some parents may not agree with our philosophy and we respect a parent's right to choose the early childhood care and education their child receives. We would be happy to discuss our views with you if you are unhappy with the program we are offering. Please understand that we may not be able to meet the needs of every family.

**Donations:** We are a 501 (c)(3) organization so donations to the center are tax-deductible. Feel free to ask for a receipt when donations are made. Check to see if your employer offers a matching program too.

**Field Trips:** We hope to plan fun and educational field trips for our preschoolers and school-age children throughout the year. You will be informed of any plans we have. Please let us know, if you have any ideas or would like to help drive on these occasions.

**Fundraising:** We organize fundraising events year round. These are usually family-friendly, social events although we sell things on occasion too. The funds we raise are used to meet our goals for the year which may include purchasing big tickets items and/or adding new programs. Please get involved! We don't expect you to attend everything but hope you will participate when you can. Fundraising events can be fun and give parents and staff a chance to get to know each other better. This income also allows us to keep monthly fees as low as possible.

**Graduation:** Children “graduate” into the Toddler room when they are about 15 months old, to Preschool I about age 2 ½ and to Preschool 2 around age 4. This graduation date is determined by your child’s individual development and when vacancies are available. Your child’s current teacher and new teacher will meet with you a month before they move up to discuss the transition and what you can do to help prepare your child. Moving into a new room brings on a lot of changes. Be sure to ask a lot of questions and express any concerns you may have with your child’s lead teacher or the director. We want to make these transitions as easy as possible for everyone.

**Grievances:** If at any time you are unhappy with the care your child is receiving, please discuss this with your child’s lead teacher or the director in a professional manner. We want you to feel free to come to us with your concerns. Your input as parents helps to maintain and improve our high standards of child care and education. If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint is handled by staff, you can address these issues with our Board.

**Health and Safety:** At the beginning of each day, as you drop off, your child will be given a health check to catch injuries and illnesses early. Any symptoms, bumps, bruises, etc., will be noted. We are required by law to report any suspected cases of child abuse. If a staff member were accused of abuse, they would be immediately put on leave of absence until a not guilty ruling on their case had been made. You will be informed of any accidents that occur at the center.

We do not have the staff or facilities to care for sick children. Your child and the others will be sick less often if everyone follows our policies consistently. Please do not put our staff in the position of having to turn you away at the door. We require that you do not bring your child to the center if he or she: (1) has a temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher. (2) has frequent diarrhea—3 or more times a day or (3) is vomiting. It is also our policy that a sick child does not return until (fever, vomiting, diarrhea) symptoms have been gone for 24 hours or they have been on antibiotics 24 hrs. A child must maintain a lowered temperature without taking fever-reducing medication.

Of course, children must also be kept at home if they have any contagious disease or virus. This includes conjunctivitis (pink eye), strep throat, etc. In most cases, this is only 24-48 hours after treatment begins. Please follow your doctor’s recommendations.

Any time your child becomes ill during the day, the lead teacher or director will call you. You will often be asked to come for your child. Please do this as promptly as possible. If you cannot be reached, we will call one of the names you have listed to contact in case of emergencies.

You might expect your child to be sick a lot when in such close contact with other children. This depends on each individual child. We follow strict sanitary procedures and do our best to keep the passing of germs to a minimum. Children often develop immunity to germs after being at the center for a while. Health Department regulations require that your child have a current physical on file and that all immunizations are kept up to date. Please let us know when additional immunizations are received so we can update your child’s file.

With your written and signed instructions, your child’s lead teacher will give your child medication. Please do not ask us to give medication more than once a day - give as much medication as possible at home. The center cannot give any medication or even apply ointment without your signed authorization nor do we keep medication on hand. Please remove all medication from your child’s diaper bag and give it to our staff to lock up each day.

Our staff receives regular first aid and CPR training so they can act quickly and accurately in an emergency. Your child’s physician’s name and phone number are kept near the phone, and he or she will be called immediately if your child requires professional medical care.

In case of severe weather watches, the center staff will listen for directions from local radio broadcasters. If directed to take cover, all children will be taken to shelter in the basement. Please do not come for your child until the weather has cleared. In the event of a fire, our staff is also trained in procedures for quick and safe evacuation of the center. These emergency procedures are reviewed and practiced often.

**Health and Fitness:** We do our best to serve nutritious food that the children will eat and provide a variety of physical activities for the children. We plant a garden each spring serving the vegetables we grow to the children and we supplement our meals with additional fresh produce when we can. A fitness coach from Stretch-N-Grow visits our preschool classrooms each week (October through May) to lead an exercise program for our children and we encourage active play both inside and outside year round.

**Holidays:** Stepping Stones strives to recognize and respect diverse cultural traditions. Although art projects and decorations at the center generally reflect the dominant cultural celebrations of our community, we hope to expose children to as many traditions and customs as possible. In addition to our own efforts to represent such diversity, we encourage parents to help us with this endeavor by sharing their traditions with us too.

**Home Changes:** Please let us know whenever there is a change at home. A new baby, visitors, death in the family, separation or parent out-of-town can help explain your child's behavior. Being aware of changes as they occur will enable us to give your child any extra attention, support or comfort they may need. A child's behavior is often affected when things are different in their lives.

**Insurance:** Our center has health, accident and liability insurance for our staff and children as required by KDHE.

**Immunizations:** We require that all children enrolled at the center are current with their immunizations to protect others. This is especially important because many of the infants enrolled here are too young to be fully immunized.

**Labeling:** Please label your child's coat, shoes, socks, hat and mittens so fewer items get lost or misplaced.

**Licensing:** We are licensed by the Health Department and strive to maintain if not surpass their standards. Annual licensing evaluations will be made for license renewal. Drop-in visits can also occur from time to time.

**Observations:** Our center is available for students and others in the field for observation and research pertaining to child development and early childhood education. Parents are also welcome to observe at any time.

**Parent Participation:** Stepping Stones would not exist without parental support and participation. You are responsible for your child's well-being and should have an input on the care they are receiving. Please volunteer your time and talents in any way possible. Be on our Board of Directors or other committees, help at fundraising events and attend our parent engagement events throughout the year. There are a variety of events to choose from. We don't expect you to attend everything but encourage you to get involved and get to know us better!

**Parent Sponsors:** When new families start at the center, they receive a special care-package and are also assigned a board member to be their parent sponsor. This parent will contact the new family after a week or two to welcome them, see how things are going and answer any questions they may have.

**Parking:** Our parking lot is especially busy during drop-off and pick-up times. Please keep a close eye on your child and others. Don't leave your car running in the parking lot (even if locked). This is illegal and can be dangerous.

**Photos:** Our staff would like to periodically take pictures of your child for our scrapbooks, website and Facebook page. These pictures will often be shared with you too. Photos put on the internet will not include a child's name. Let us know if you do not want your child's photo included and respect other parents' privacy by not posting photos that include other children without prior authorization.

**Safety:** Please use a car seat and/or seatbelt when transporting your child. Watch them carefully as you are going to and from your car in the parking lot each day and help us enforce "walking feet" inside and in the parking lot.

**Security:** Generally, all doors to the outside are locked throughout the day. Each family is given a key fob for entry into the center via the second set of doors in front. Additional fobs can be purchased for \$5 each. Key fobs should be returned upon disenrollment. A \$25 fee (per fob) will be assessed if it is not returned, damaged or lost. People are to buzz in or call the center if they do not have a fob. The director and/or the assistant director will check the identification of those unfamiliar. Security cameras are located in the entry and 7 areas outside of the building.

**Smoking:** Smoking and vaping of any kind will not be permitted on the Stepping Stones property. Any staff member coming to the center smelling like cigarettes will be asked to go home, change clothes and shower as needed.

**Termination of Enrollment:** We will do everything in our power to work with families and difficult situations as they arise. Disenrolling a child is a last resort that will only occur if our staff and Board of Directors agree that it is necessary for the protection of the other children and is in the best interest of the center as a whole.

**Toys From Home:** Toys and other personal belongings should not be brought to the center. If your child has something they wish to share with the other children, it should be discussed with the teacher first. Preschoolers may have "Show & Share". Toy guns or other weapon/violent toys are NOT allowed!

**Visits:** Parents are welcome to drop in to visit at any time. Other friends or relatives should check in at the front desk or office. No friends or relatives will be allowed to pick up a child without parental permission. Their names should be on your child's medical authorization form. They will also be asked for identification.

**Weapons:** No weapons (including pocket knives) are allowed at Stepping Stones. If a weapon is brought to the center, it will be confiscated by staff and the child's parents will be notified. If an item is used in a malicious or threatening way or involves a firearm, law enforcement officials may be contacted and further action taken.

**Website:** Visit our website [www.steppingstones-childcare.org](http://www.steppingstones-childcare.org). Also friend us on Facebook!