

STEPPING stones

Family Resource and Child Development Center

Families Serving Families



PARENT HANDBOOK

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WELCOME

We welcome you and your family to Stepping Stones Family Resource and Child Development Center and look forward to supporting you in your role as parents. We value the uniqueness of each family and will make every effort to meet your individual needs. While Stepping Stones is primarily for your child, it is your school also. We encourage you to participate in our programs, invite you to observe our classroom settings, and enjoy an impromptu visit. We hope that you will find Stepping Stones to be a wonderful place that continues to strengthen your relationship with your child.

As with any service organization, however, we must set forth policy to promote the common good and ensure compliance with state rules and regulations. This handbook is written as a guide to summarize helpful information and to highlight our policies. We encourage you to keep it on hand and use it as a reference, but it is not intended to take the place of open, personal communication. We encourage you to voice any concerns you may have to your child's teachers or to administration.

EDUCATION

Staff Development

Stepping Stones' staff are highly motivated and dedicated early childhood professionals. All of our Lead Teachers are required to have a CDA (Child Development Associate), a two-year degree, or a four-year degree to teach at Stepping Stones. Many of our Associate Teachers have at least a Child Development Associate degree. All staff are trained in principles of child development, methods in early childhood programs and child guidance, as well as CPR and First Aid. Each year our staff members complete at least thirty hours of continuing education through professional conferences and in-service activities. Our support staff, in food service and in the office, also participates in on-going training appropriate to their role at Stepping Stones.

We are committed to our staff and recognize them as vital components of a successful program for your children. We make every effort to ensure the work environment is pleasant and supportive of their needs. We value each staff member's life experience and want to empower him or her as individuals. We support staff development and continuing education because we believe that adults who are learning bring that same enthusiasm for learning to the children.

Child Guidance and Discipline Policies

A critical area of our curriculum is helping children gain self-control. This goal is best achieved in a loving, supportive environment where children are treated with respect and fairness.

Our philosophy on discipline is based on respect for the child. The key to success for children is in preparing a supportive learning environment and using selective intervention to guide children in their behavior. We believe that when the environment

and activities are prepared, children can initiate their own play and exploration, and the need for teacher control is reduced.

Our policy in helping children gain self-control is to intervene and redirect energies before problems begin. Our positive discipline approach consists of redirection, choices, consequences, warnings, supplying language, and problem-solving. We cannot write enough guidelines to fit every child or situation. Therefore, each child is treated as an individual, and parents are expected to work as partners with the Stepping Stones staff in helping the child practice self-discipline in the classroom.

When an unacceptable behavior begins to occur at Stepping Stones, the parents are asked to participate in a conference to develop a plan to correct the behavior in a positive way. The plan will depend on the child and the situation.

We recognize that children often respond to changes and situations they do not fully understand. It is important that you keep the Stepping Stones staff informed of matters that may be affecting your child's behavior. In this way, we can offer support when they are at our school.

Our goal is to assist you in raising a happy, well-adjusted child. We can accomplish this goal best through mutual respect and support. We are confident that you, as a parent, will give us that support.

Biting Policy

As we know, biting is a common occurrence among children who do not have language to express their feelings. We understand that biting is normal, but it is not an acceptable means of resolving issues. At Stepping Stones, we will take immediate action in the classroom as well as with the family regarding any biting incidents. Immediate action includes, but is not limited to, documenting the biting incident with an incident report for both parties involved, in addition to observing, shadowing, or separating the children. If a specific biting incident continuously occurs, and if we do not receive appropriate cooperation from the family, we will withdraw the child from our facility.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

We hope that Stepping Stones is one of many enriching experiences in you and your child's lives. Because we recognize that you are entrusting us with your most precious family member(s), we want you to consider Stepping Stones as part of your extended family. Consequently, you are considered an essential element in every facet of your child's activities at Stepping Stones.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Children's assessments are conducted throughout the year to provide parents with an overview of their child's developmental progress. Throughout the year, we conduct portfolio assessments, which involve the collection of multiple samples and repeated

observations of the child's performance in naturally occurring situations. We also evaluate the child's developmental progress through notation during group as well as one-on-one interactions between the teacher and individual students. Parent-teacher conferences are also held biannually. During these conferences, we take the time to answer any questions or concerns parents may have regarding their child's experience at the center. These conferences also enable parents and staff to work closely to meet each child's specific needs. Parents and teachers are also free to request additional conferences any time they wish. We utilize the information gathered during children's assessments and parent-teacher conferences to improve and to update individualized curriculum for each child.

Resolving Parental Concerns

Occasionally, differences in philosophy or child-rearing practices may occur in the child care setting. All concerns about your child's care should be discussed promptly with a teacher or the administration to come to a resolution that will best support your child. Please feel free to request a translator at any time to communicate in your preferred language.

Classroom Observations

Parents are encouraged to visit their child's classroom for added insight into our programs. You are also welcome to schedule a follow-up discussion with teachers or administration to offer comments or suggestions.

Volunteer Program

We extend an open invitation to parents to observe or participate in their child's classroom whenever desired. Parents and volunteers are encouraged to accompany the children on field trips and offer assistance on special projects throughout the year.

Some suggestions for parental involvement include:

- Sign up to be a room parent or parent volunteer.
- Volunteer to visit the classroom and read a story.
- Donate a book.
- Attend a field trip.

Parental Discipline Protocol

Stepping Stones asks that when you pick-up your children from the classroom, if you notice a situation that warrants disciplinary action, please notify the teachers in the classroom or administration. Please do not take it upon yourself to discipline any students in our care. Parents entrust Stepping Stones and our teachers to discipline students according to our policies set forth in our Parent Handbook.

Parent Team

The Parent Team offers parents a unique opportunity to interact and to serve their child's classroom and/or school. The Parent Team's mission statement is: "Working families' dedicated to supporting projects and activities to enhance the children's educational experiences at Stepping Stones." Please feel free to volunteer as a Room

Parent or Parent Volunteer. We welcome your participation at any and all levels!

Newsletter

Stepping Stones publishes a monthly newsletter to keep you informed of our activities and to provide you with a monthly lunch menu. Please refer to our monthly calendar for events in which you would like to participate. In addition, please refer to our yearly Event Calendar, which also informs you about upcoming events and school closings.

ENROLLMENT

Closings

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Day after Thanksgiving
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day

When a holiday falls on a Saturday, we will be closed the Friday beforehand. If a holiday falls on a Sunday, then we will be closed on the following Monday.

We are open from 8:00 AM until 5:00 PM the day before Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and New Year's Eve. In the event of inclement weather or a natural disaster, we will follow CISD's closing schedule.

To keep tuition costs to a minimum, our membership fees are set on a monthly basis. As a result, we do not provide a reduction in tuition for holidays, natural disasters, or illnesses.

DAILY PROCEDURES

Daily Sign-In and Sign-Out

Teachers sign your child in and out each day. Roll sheets are located in each of the classrooms. When you bring your child to school, you also certify that to the best of your knowledge, your child is in good health and can participate fully in all activities.

Parents are required to accompany their children into their classrooms. It is important that children are aware that their parents are leaving. While this acknowledgement may result in an occasional emotional upset, parents should take comfort in knowing that such separation anxiety usually ends by the time the parent reaches the front door.

Parents are required to list the name, address, phone numbers, and driver's license number of each person other than the parent who is authorized to care for their child in an emergency. Parents or any other person designated to pick up a child must be

prepared to show picture identification to the Stepping Stones staff. Children are not released to any other person than named on the registration form, unless we have prior written request from the parent. Children are not released to anyone younger than eighteen years old unless specified in a letter that is signed by the parent.

Visitors

Parents and other authorized family and friends are always welcome at Stepping Stones. We do encourage you to consider the children and their work and ask that you enter their classroom with quiet respect.

Birthdays and Other Parties

Every child's birthday at Stepping Stones calls for a special celebration, and parents are encouraged to join in the festivities. For example, parents are welcome to prepare special snacks in recognition of a festive occasion, but we request advance notice. Also, please limit your celebration to a simple, store-bought snack and/or drink at our scheduled snack time. Unfortunately, we cannot allow gift exchanges, piñatas or excessive food. Please provide a party invitation to everybody in the class; otherwise, you may mail them by using our classroom directories.

Sleeping Arrangements

After lunch, restroom use, and hand washing, the children will take a nap or rest quietly on their individualized nappers. After forty-five minutes of resting quietly, those children who are not asleep may read a book for the duration of the rest time. The classroom will resume scheduled activities once the majority of the children in the classroom are awake. We ask that you please take your child's napper home at least once a week to be washed and returned. Pre-toddlers through kindergartners will need to purchase bedding for naps at a discounted price from Stepping Stones. Nappers are available at the front desk for purchase.

Clothing

Please be sure that your child's name is clearly marked on all articles of clothing and nappers so that we can minimize the loss of personal belongings. In the event of a missing item, please notify us promptly. Unclaimed items are donated to charity periodically.

Clothing should be comfortable, easy for the child to manage (buttons in front, elastic waist bands, etc.) and appropriate for "messy" activities, such as creative arts and outdoor recreation. Clothing that comes on and off easily, without adult help, gives your child added confidence and avoids toileting accidents. Closed-toe shoes, sneakers or other soft-sole shoes are advised for the prevention of injuries.

We ask that infants, pre-toddlers, and toddlers have two changes of clothing and a supply of disposable diapers and wipes. Preschoolers and kindergartners should have one change of clothing. A sweater or jacket should be brought to the center during the winter months.

Personal Belongings

It is difficult for young children to share toys and personal belongings with other children. Likewise, it is difficult for the staff to monitor all the many belongings children might bring from home. As a result, with the exception of show-n-tell, please leave all toys, food, gum, pets, and money at home. Personal items for naptime at Stepping Stones should be limited to a pillow or blanket for resting. Children are encouraged to bring a book or record/tape for the teacher to share during group times.

FINANCIAL POLICIES

Tuition

To keep tuition costs to a minimum, monthly tuition is due and payable by the first day of each month. A \$5 late charge is added each day thereafter. If an unforeseen emergency arises that prevents you from paying your fees as agreed, you must contact administration as soon as possible. Repeated late payment will be cause for your child to be dropped from enrollment without prior notice.

When you register your child, you will pay $\frac{1}{2}$ of your last month's tuition to guarantee your child's position. This money is credited back to you upon receipt of your written 30-day withdrawal notice. Stepping Stones families may be subject to annual tuition increases.

Registration

An annual, non-refundable registration fee of \$100 and half of last month's tuition is due upon application and guarantees your child's position at Stepping Stones. However, the fee does not hold your spot if a waiting list exists. In this case, tuition is due immediately as well. This fee covers application charges, supplies, and insurance. The half of last month's tuition will be applied to your account once you have given us a 30-day written notice of withdrawal.

Discounts

Families enrolling two children will receive a ten percent discount off the lowest tuition of the two children. Families enrolling three or more children will receive a fifteen percent discount off the highest tuition of their children.

Absences and Vacation Credits

Stepping Stones bases its operating costs on annual membership projections. As a result, to assure the highest quality of staff personnel, equipment, and supplies on a continuous basis, we cannot offer tuition reductions for absences due to illness, holidays, natural disasters, etc. Stepping Stones offers families who are enrolled either full-time or part-time a vacation credit. After 6 months of continuous enrollment, a \$100 vacation credit is awarded. This credit only applies to tuition fees. If the vacation credit is not used in the calendar year, then it will not carry forward to future years. In addition, this credit is non-transferable. We require a two week notification in writing.

Withdrawal/Program Changes

Should it become necessary to withdraw your child from Stepping Stones, you are required to give thirty days written notice to administration. Your last month's tuition will be applied at this time. Otherwise, you are required to continue to pay tuition for thirty days after notification of withdrawal, regardless of your child's attendance in the program. If you decide to withdraw from the Private School Program prior to the end of the school year, you automatically forfeit your Last Month's Tuition.

Any program changes will require a thirty day written notification. Partial Day program families will be billed for extra days beyond the enrolled program time period or late pick-up fees at the rate of \$75.

Extra Charges

Extra days beyond the enrolled program time period are billed at the drop-in rate of \$45 per day. This fee is due upon arrival each day and excludes any field trip costs. Please check with the front desk to inquire about availability.

Returned checks result in a \$40 minimum charge. Recurrent returned checks result in cash-only terms.

Punctuality is a crucial element in the operation of our center, and we ask for your cooperation in adhering to these hours. Also, please be conscientious of your child's schedule. Late pick-up fees are \$15 from 6:30 PM to 6:45 PM and one dollar per minute thereafter. These fees are due in cash upon pick-up of the child. Late fees are assessed thereafter.

Additional charges may be assessed for field trips, shirts, extra-curricular activities, photography, nappers, hearing and vision screenings, etc. T-shirts are required for attending field trips.

HEALTH

Immunization Requirements

In accordance with state licensing requirements, each parent must submit a doctor's certificate and immunization record upon enrollment. These records are kept on permanent file at the center and must be updated as your child receives immunizations. You may refer to the Health Department's website for immunization requirements: www.ImmunizeTexas.com.

Medicine

Each day that a child is required to take medication at Stepping Stones, parents must complete a Medication Authorization Form. According to state licensing requirements, the medication must be kept in its original container and clearly state the following information: the child's name, doctor's name, prescribed dosage, time to be given, and date. For over-the-counter medications, new licensing standards state that we must administer the medication in amounts according to the label directions or as amended by a physician in writing. We only administer medication once a day at 11:30 AM for

toddlers and older children. Stepping Stones houses all medications in a secure place, well out of reach of children. We maintain dated records, the amount of medicine dispensed, and the name of the staff person who administered the medication for one year. We also provide refrigeration when necessary. Medicines are returned to you or properly disposed of when they are no longer required by your child.

Illnesses

While we take precautions to protect your child against illness, most children experience a normal number of infections and illnesses throughout the year. In such cases, we provide a quiet, calm place for your child to rest in the classroom. We also notify you if it is necessary to take your child home or to the doctor. State licensing regulations state it is necessary for a child to leave the school if they have a fever of 100.4 degrees or higher, or if they have uncontrollable diarrhea and/or vomiting.

Should your child become exposed to an infectious disease at Stepping Stones, we will notify you promptly. In return, we request that you report to us when your child has been exposed to or diagnosed with a particular infection or disease. In addition, we also ask that your child be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to school for an extended period of time due to an illness or contagion, we will not prorate your tuition.

Keeping Records Current and Confidential

To provide emergency medical care to children at Stepping Stones, we require signed authorization by each child's parent or legal guardian. This form contains vital information about each child, such as parents' office and home phone number and addresses; and the name, address, and phone number of the child's physician. This form must be kept current and on file as long as the child attends Stepping Stones. Please notify us of any changes. We will request updated contact information on a quarterly basis.

Children's files are stored directly behind the front desk. All child and family information will remain confidential unless a legitimate need exists to share such information. Furthermore, this information will not be disclosed to relevant persons without written permission by a parent or guardian.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is an essential ingredient in our child development program. Stepping Stones prepares a hot lunch and two snacks daily. Each meal and snack is planned to meet a child's nutritional requirements and is presented in an appealing manner. You may bring your child's breakfast between 6:30 AM and 8:00 AM.

Because meals and between-meal snacks are provided daily, we ask that you refrain from bringing food from home unless your child has special dietary requirements, as ordered by a physician. If so, please make proper arrangements with administration at Stepping Stones. You may also be asked to prepare a nutritious sack lunch for an occasional field trip.

We utilize mealtime to instill in children at an early age the long-term benefits and the joy of healthful eating habits. We make a special effort to encourage the children to sample new foods and to cultivate a taste for those that are nutritionally beneficial. All meals are served in the classroom, and teachers eat with the children in a family-style manner. We encourage parents to drop by for lunch with their children. We do ask that you notify administration beforehand, so that we know how many parents to prepare for each day.

Outdoor Recreation

Outdoor recreation for fresh air and exercise is scheduled daily, weather permitting (i.e., ozone days). Each playground has developmentally appropriate climbing structures for each age group. A park-like playground is aesthetically pleasing as well as conducive to normal muscle development and creative use of space. Your child is given the opportunity to climb, balance, stack, swing, ride bicycles, and simply enjoy nature. In addition, the children enjoy playing ball, participating in group games, planting flowers and vegetables in our garden, experiencing a variety of textures, and reading under a gazebo.

Children with Special Needs

At Stepping Stones, we believe that every child should have a successful and meaningful experience. We will do everything we can to include every child; however, administration and the parents will work together to decide if we are able to accommodate a child with special needs. Upon enrollment, we would like a copy of your child's IFSP, IEP, or any other individualized plans to enable the teacher to tailor your child's curriculum regarding any disabilities or other special learning needs.

SAFETY

Licensing

Stepping Stones is licensed by the State of Texas and adheres to rigid enforcement of regulations that meet or exceed the minimum standards in child care. These standards relate to our physical facility, staff, health and safety procedures, nutrition, and record keeping. The center undergoes regular health inspections by the city and state, and fire and licensing departments. We support high standards in child care, as they are in the best interest of the children in our care.

Please review a copy of the minimum standards and our most recent Licensing Inspection report by contacting TDPRS by one of the following:

Website: www.dfps.state.tx.us

Child Abuse Hotline: 1.800.252.5400

Local Licensing Office: 936.525.2187

Under the Texas Penal Code, any area within 1000 feet of a child-care center is a gang-free zone, where criminal offenses related to organized criminal activity are subject to harsher penalty.

Field Trips

For children three years and older, field trips will be planned periodically throughout the school year. Information regarding the field trips will be presented in your child's monthly classroom newsletter and calendar. In addition, a sign-up sheet will be attached to the inside of your child's classroom door during the week prior to the field trip. This sheet serves as a permission slip to allow your child to attend the field trip. This sheet will need to be signed and initialed for your child to attend the field trip. Each child must wear a Stepping Stones t-shirt as well. During field trips, the teacher and the bus driver will have cell phones to call for help whenever necessary, first-aid kits to address any injuries, and alternate transportation arrangements if there is a problem with the bus during the trip.

Physical Facility

To ensure the security of the children at Stepping Stones, administration is readily available at the front door to greet incoming guests. If administration does not recognize a guest, the guest will be asked to provide a photo identification card before he will be allowed to proceed through the building. All of Stepping Stones' playgrounds and classrooms are enclosed by wooden fences with safety latches. Each classroom is designed with safety features, including two exits and observation windows. Stepping Stones maintains high standards in health, hygiene, cleanliness, and comfort. To provide a nurturing environment, we are equipped with appropriately sized furnishings, playground equipment, and bathroom fixtures designed to help your child develop self-reliance skills.

Fire/Tornado Drills and Evacuation Procedures

In accordance with the Texas State Law, Stepping Stones holds regularly scheduled fire and tornado drills. It is crucial to the safety of the children that they learn proper emergency evacuation procedures. In our effort to simulate emergency conditions during fire drills, children are required to exit the building, dressed as they are, for a few minutes. Evacuation plans are posted in each classroom.

In the unlikely event that the center is ever severely damaged or declared unsafe, the staff will evacuate all children to a designated emergency shelter to wait the arrival of a parent or guardian. Most likely, our Falconwing location will evacuate to Community Christian Church, while our Cranebrook location will evacuate to Grace Presbyterian Church, both of which are next to our respective schools. Should such an emergency occur, the administration of Stepping Stones would notify each child's parents.

**10601 Falconwing Drive
The Woodlands, Texas 77381
(281) 298-5838 office
(281) 298-5150 fax**

11900 Cranebrook Drive
The Woodlands, Texas 77382



PARENT HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGMENT

_____ 1. The registration fee is \$_____ and is annual and non-refundable.

_____ 2. A security deposit equivalent to half of one month's tuition (\$_____) is also charged upon enrollment. Should it become necessary to withdraw your child from our program, you are required to give us 30 days written notice. Provided a 30 day written notice is given, your security deposit will be applied to your final monthly tuition. In addition, should it become necessary to change your child's program, a 30 day written notice is required.

_____ 3. The monthly tuition for the _____ program you have selected is currently \$_____ and may increase or decrease from time to time. You will be notified in advance of any increase/ decrease.

_____ 4. Tuition is due on the first day of each month. A \$5.00 late charge may be added each day thereafter.

_____ 5. In addition to your tuition, there may be a charge for any extra-curricular activities you choose for your child (i.e., Kids in Action, Science Quest, Spanish, and Music by Mary).

_____ 6. You may make payments by cash, check, Visa, Master Card, or Tuition Express.

_____ 7. We are open from 6:30 AM to 6:30 PM Monday through Friday. We are closed on the following holidays: Labor Day, Columbus Day, Thanksgiving and the day after, Christmas Eve and Christmas, New Year's Day, MLK Day, President's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, and Independence Day. We do not prorate tuition for these closings.

_____ 8. Because our program requires us to engage staff based upon the number of children enrolled, we cannot give tuition refunds for days your child is absent.

I acknowledge that I have read the parent handbook. I am fully aware of the educational philosophy, discipline policy, and procedures for arranging conferences with the staff at Stepping Stones.

I have read and understand the fee arrangements and conditions detailed in the parent handbook. I agree to these conditions and will abide by them.

This acknowledgment must be placed in our files. Please sign this form and return it to Stepping Stones.

Child's Name

Parent's Signature

Date