



Good Shepherd Catholic School

# **Early Learning Center PARENT HANDBOOK**

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# **Welcome**

It is a pleasure to welcome your family to the Good Shepherd Catholic School Early Learning Center (ELC). The center was developed by parishioners to provide high quality child care for the children of working parents. Over the years, the center has been renovated to accommodate the changing needs of the parish. At the same time, every effort has been made to maintain a family atmosphere. The Good Shepherd Catholic School Early Learning Center is a full-service child care center, which includes a stimulating preschool year-round and an active before and after-school program.

This handbook provides day to day operation information of the center. The director and staff are here to support you and assist you, so please do not hesitate to discuss with them your questions, concerns and provide suggestions. We are glad that you are joining us at Good Shepherd Catholic School Early Learning Center.

## **Mission Statement**

The Good Shepherd Catholic School Early Learning Center is dedicated to the ongoing development of creative thinkers and building positive self-esteem in an effective, developmentally appropriate learning environment.

## **Philosophy**

It is the philosophy of the Good Shepherd Catholic School Early Learning Center that children are encouraged to learn and grow by providing a foundation of developmentally appropriate experiences where all children can succeed in a safe and nurturing environment. We believe that each child is a unique individual and that all children can learn. Our preschool programs provide inclusive settings that recognize children's varied abilities, interests, needs and learning styles.

We believe children learn best through meaningful play. Our play-based, child centered program reflects the integration of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, self-help and aesthetic learning areas for the total development of the child. Meaningful play encourages curiosity, discovery and problem solving which allows for individual growth and the development of a positive self-image.

We recognize that parents are the child's first teachers. Children learn best when parents are involved in their child's educational program. The primary bridge between the home and school is the involvement of the family and community.

*The statement and beliefs in this philosophy reflect the position of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).*

# GSCS Early Learning Center Policies and Procedures

## Goals of the GSCS ELC

- 1. To provide care for infants and toddlers using a warm, affectionate approach that acknowledges and reflects the unique character of each child.**

To meet this goal we provide the emotional affection that is so important at this stage of development. Our caregivers work to meet each child's physical needs completely while they are in our care. Infants and toddlers have opportunities to explore and interact socially, and to learn through a variety of daily activities designed to stimulate their senses. We keep our group size small to prevent over stimulation and to promote safety as well as one-on-one interaction between the children and staff. We encourage parents to be involved in daily communication in order to promote consistency between the GSCS Early Learning Center and the home.

- 2. To provide a two year old program that stimulates communication skills and language development.**

To meet this goal we focus on language development through the sharing of stories, nursery rhymes, and music activities. We continue to encourage the children to explore their world through the use of their five senses through active participation in daily learning activities. We teach our two year olds to self-help skills such as beginning to wash their own hands, button and zip, etc. We provide many gross and fine motor activities that improve body control.

## Admission

The Good Shepherd Catholic School Early Learning Center (ELC) admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students. The ELC does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or ethnic origin in administration of educational policies, admissions policies, or other school-administered programs. There is no entrance exam for the ELC. If parents have educational, social-emotional or developmental concerns about their child they should discuss these concerns with the administration before the child's first day of class. It is important that a positive and appropriate learning environment be established for each child.

### Withdrawal

- Written notice must be provided to the ELC Director or School Administration at least 30 calendar days prior to withdrawal. **If notice is not provided, the family will be charged for two (2) weeks of service from the last day of attendance.**

## Staff Qualifications

All teachers meet or exceed the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) licensing requirements. Every year, the director, teachers, and assistant teachers must complete a required number of continued training hours. All of the staff has experience working with young children in a supervised program. In addition, our staff members truly love and understand child development and our play-based philosophy.

## Attendance

### Arrival:

- Upon arrival, parents MUST record the arrival time and sign the classroom attendance sheet (required by DCF).
- For a late arrival, after 8:00am, the child must be signed-in at the front office and will require a tardy slip to enter the classroom.

**Never leave your child alone inside or outside of a building including in an unattended in a vehicle.**

### Dismissal & Pick-Up:

- At dismissal parents MUST record the departing time and sign the classroom attendance sheet (required by DCF).

### Authorized pick-up:

- At registration parent(s) indicate authorized persons to drop-off and pick-up children.
- When someone other than the parent(s) or “persons authorized to pick up the child” (listed in school database) is to pick up your child, parents must provide written notification (email/note) to the teacher providing the person’s full name. The ELC will require proof of identification (Driver’s License or state-issued ID) before releasing your child to that person.
- In the event of an emergency, parent(s) may contact the school office to give verbal permission for their child to go home with another person.
- Because ELC wants to ensure every child’s safety, if a staff member has reasonable cause to suspect the adult picking up may be under the influence of alcohol, drugs or is physically impaired in any way that may endanger a child, the staff member has the obligation to refuse to release the child. If so, the staff member will contact another adult be contacted from the child’s *Emergency Form*.

## Illness

- Germs spread quickly in a preschool environment. All children and staff stay healthier when sick persons stay at home. Common sense must prevail in the case of colds, which can range from a mild case of sniffles to a full-blown sinus infection or deep cough. **If your child is not well enough to participate in ALL aspects of the daily schedule, please keep them home from school.**
- The *Emergency Form* information is used to contact parents or an authorized adult if your child develops symptoms of an illness while in school. Ill/sick children are supervised in the clinic (in school front office) until he/she can be picked up if one or more of the following symptoms is present:
  - \*temperature higher than 100°F
  - \*sustained loss of appetite/nausea/vomiting
  - \*red, pink, or crusted eyes
  - \*stomach ache
  - \*earache
  - \*diarrhea
  - \*rash/infection of skin
  - \*pale or flushed face
  - \*headache
  - \*thick or greenish mucus from nose
  - \*persistent cough
  - \*loss of energy/decrease in activity/falling asleep
  - \*sore throat

## 24 HOUR RULE

**A child who has shown signs of illness in the previous 24 hours may not attend class.**

- **Fever free:** A child should be fever free for 24 hours, without the use of fever-reducing medicine.
- **Antibiotic timeline:** A child should be on antibiotics for at least 24 hours before returning to school.

## Parents must notify the school office immediately if a child:

- Is diagnosed with a **communicable disease**. Notification to classroom families, respecting affected child/family confidentiality, may be important for parents to be on the lookout for symptoms in their own child.
- Has **allergies**
- Is taking **medication**, since medicine may impact a child's behavior.
- Has been diagnosed with a head **LICE** infestation. Licensing requires cleaning and removal of materials (dress-up clothing, etc.) within a classroom that has a lice infestation. **A child who has head lice will not be permitted to return until treatment has been accomplished. The treatment shall include the removal of all lice, lice eggs and egg cases.** We also implement additional procedures, such as head checks if necessary.

## Communication

Communication between the home and school is vital to a successful program.

**School-Wide (Nonemergency) Information** is communicated with parents in a number of ways:

- Email
- Telephone
- Good Shepherd Catholic School website
- Parent Orientation
- Back-to-School Night
- Notices sent home in children's folders

### **Classroom Information:**

- Monthly newsletters are sent via email to parents.
- Weekly lesson plans are posted in the classroom.

### **Child-Specific Information:**

- During arrival and dismissal, staff members must devote full attention to all of the children. Please keep teacher-parent conversations brief. If you need to communicate specific information, a written note or email is preferred.
- If, at any time, you have special concerns, please contact your child's teacher using email, a note, or call the office to leave a message. During school hours, teachers cannot accept phone calls. If you have a message for a teacher during school hours, please call or email the office, and we will relay the message. The teacher will respond as soon as possible.
- If you wish to talk to the teacher at length, you can email the teacher to request a phone conference or, if needed, arrange a time to meet in person.
- Please do not discuss problems or concerns in the presence of your child or other parents.
- Please communicate with the teacher regarding any changes at home or within the family (i.e., parent on a trip, family member in the hospital, sick grandparent). These changes can impact your child's behavior, and it is useful for staff to be aware of such developments. We will always respect your privacy.
- **If your child is going to be out of school for any reason, please contact the school office.** For illnesses, this is especially important if we need to inform families of any communicable disease symptoms while maintaining confidentiality. In addition, teachers and children miss a child when they are absent, so they want to know that the child is okay.

## Confidentiality

Confidentiality plays a vital role in promoting respect for every individual and fostering a strong community. Good Shepherd Catholic School ELC takes confidentiality very seriously and makes every effort to protect each family's privacy. Communication between staff and parents about children is to be confidential at all times. Our preschool recommends that conversations about a child, behavior, or an incident be conducted in private, away from the child and other members of the community. If a parent has a question or concern, we suggest that this parent first contact the teacher via email or in person to arrange a time to discuss.

## Classroom Supplies

### Dress

- Children should be dressed for active and participatory play. The ELC does not want a child's creativity hampered because of the clothing he/she is wearing.
- Children should wear sturdy, protective shoes (no sandals or Crocs®), which will enable him/her to run and climb with ease.
- Children play outside most days, so please dress your child appropriately.

### Extra Clothes

At all times, each child should have at least one set of seasonal clothes that fit, pants, shirt, underwear, socks, that remain in the classroom for emergencies.

**Please label each item** that your child brings to school including the lunch box, backpack, cups, bags, clothing, blankets, etc.

### Lunch and Snacks

Parents provide snacks and lunch including a drinking cup (labeled) in a lunch box (labeled). To keep food warm, thermoses are required because the health department does not allow for the school to heat food.

- We promote good eating habits by requesting nutritious items for lunch and snack.
- Lunches should not include candy, and no more than one small dessert.
- **AM/PM Snack** should be in two separate containers marked with their child's names, as well as AM for the morning snack and PM for the afternoon snack.

## Positive Discipline Policy

The ELC's commitment to an age-appropriate and play-based curriculum ensures that activities are safe, child-centered and promote positive social interactions. Teachers carefully craft the environment, communicate and enforce clear boundaries and



expectations for behavior, and use nonverbal cues and/or redirect a child's behavior to foster success. Self-control, respect for others and a positive self-esteem are our goals.

When a problem arises, the teacher relies on modeling appropriate behavior, teaching peacemaking skills, and presenting stories or scenarios that reinforce the desired behavior. Nurturing these social skills is a central component of Creative Curriculum®, and helps children grow as successful, lifelong learners. Children learn to make suitable choices and develop techniques for regaining self-control when they feel frustrated. Instructive and individually appropriate consequences help to strengthen the child's self-control and self-esteem.

### **Biting**

Biting does happen in a preschool situation, especially with young children who do not have the verbal skills to express their feelings. Children's feelings are related to environmental factors, as well as internal emotions, such as frustration, tiredness, overstimulation, seeking attention, etc.. ELC teachers work to create a positive, peaceful and nurturing environment that encourages children to maintain self-control. Parents are informed of biting incidents and whether their child was bit or is the biter.

### **Discipline**

When a child experiences a particularly challenging time, the school encourages parents and teachers to work together and develop appropriate strategies. If a specific circumstance needs attention, the teacher follows these procedures:

1. The teacher observes and documents a child's behavior, and addresses the behavior with the child. Techniques such as reminders, breathing, or the *Safe Spot* are used to address the behaviors and reinforce good choices.
2. The teacher discusses the child's behavior with the parent and informs him/her of learning-based strategies the teacher is implementing. The teacher may discuss options with the Director, School Administration, or school Guidance Counselor.
3. The teacher will follow up with the parent(s) about how the strategies are influencing the behavior.
4. If concern persists, a conference may be held with the teacher, parent, and director/school administration to discuss options to help the child further develop appropriate social skills.
5. Staff members make every reasonable effort to work with the child and his/her family to resolve behavioral concerns. At any time, an *individual plan of action* may be implemented, depending on the severity of the concern. Additional support from outside resources may be implemented if necessary. The *individual plan of action* may include removal of a child from the classroom and/or calling the parent to take the child home. Repeated, severe behaviors may result in ELC excluding a child from attending.

# Curriculum

## **Creative Curriculum®**

Creative Curriculum was chosen for the infants, toddlers, and preschoolers based on the developmentally appropriate approach to learning. The philosophy behind Creative Curriculum® is that young children learn best by doing. Learning isn't just repeating what someone else says; it requires active thinking and experimenting to find out how things work and to learn firsthand about the world we live in.

In their early years, children explore the world around them by using all of their senses (touching, tasting, listening, smelling, and looking.) In using real materials such as blocks and trying out their ideas, children learn about size, shape and color and notice relationships between things.

## **Goals of Creative Curriculum**

The most important goal of our early childhood curriculum is to help children become enthusiastic learners. This means encouraging children to be active and creative explorers who are not afraid to try out their ideas and to think their own thoughts. Our goal is to help children become independent, self-confident, inquisitive learners.

We're teaching children how to learn, not just in preschool, but all throughout their lives. We're allowing them to learn at their own pace and in the ways that are best for them. We're giving them good habits and attitudes, particularly a positive sense of themselves, which will make a difference throughout their lives.

The curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development:

- **Social:** to help children feel comfortable in school, trust their new environment, make friends and feel they are a part of the group.
- **Emotional:** to help children experience pride and self-confidence, develop independence and self-control, and have a positive attitude toward life.
- **Cognitive:** to help children become confident learners by letting them try out their own ideas and experience success, and by helping them acquire learning skills such as the ability to solve problems, ask questions, and use words to describe their ideas, observations and feelings.
- **Physical:** to help children increase their large and small muscle skills and feel confident about what their bodies can do.

The activities planned for the children, the way the environment is organized including toy and material selection, plans for the daily schedule and how we talk with the children are all designed to accomplish the goals of the curriculum and give each child a successful start in school. Age-appropriate weekly themes have been designed for children to learn and interact with each other. Each week the weekly theme and lesson plans are posted so parents are aware of what their child will be learning.