



**Parent Handbook**  
**2023 - 2024**

## **Purpose and Goals**

Our purpose is to provide your child with a Christian environment where he or she can grow spiritually, socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Our goal is to support the development of each child to his or her greatest potential. We believe this happens in a nurturing environment which fosters mutual respect and appreciates the unique qualities of each child.

## **Our Philosophy and Curriculum**

We adhere to developmentally appropriate practices – *children learn while they play*. Our curriculum focuses on the process of learning rather than the finished product. Teachers act as facilitators for learning by providing a carefully planned environment that is appropriately challenging for each age-level.

With infants and toddlers, emphasis is placed on positive interaction with the teacher and exposure to educational and developmental toys. We believe that a nurturing environment where the child's needs are met promptly by caring teachers is vital to the development of the young child. It is important to us that the child feels happy and secure while they are in our care.

In the two-year old classrooms, we build on developmentally appropriate skills while maintaining a nurturing environment that helps the child feel happy and secure. The child will stay engaged through fun activities that foster a love for exploring and learning. Through the use of manipulatives, hands-on activities, sensory play, and social interaction with their peers, the child will grow in the areas of cognitive development, language, and motor skills.

The preschool classrooms will use the Frog Street curriculum. Frog Street is a research-based curriculum that is organized around nine thematic units integrating literacy, math, science, social studies, social-emotional connections, and technology.

## **Christian Education**

In our chapel time each week, the child will be taught creative and age-appropriate Bible lessons. The lessons are both developmentally and spiritually appropriate for the child, as well as fun and engaging.

In the infant and toddler classrooms, Jesus' love for the child is demonstrated by providing a safe and loving environment in which the child can sing and play.

In the two-year old and preschool classrooms, the child will begin learning Bible stories, as well as the concepts of friendship, helping others, and forgiveness.

# POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

## HOURS

The Children First Program offers a two-day a week program on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m.

## CHILDREN SERVED

The program serves children ranging in age of 6 months (by September 1, 2023) through four-year-old preschool.

## CALENDAR & INCLEMENT WEATHER

Our classes begin in September and end in May. During the school year, the Children First Program follows the Midland Independent School District (MISD) school calendar. If MISD is out for a school holiday or inclement weather, the Children First Program will also be closed. Canceled days will not be made up. If MISD delays the start of school, Children First will not have school that day. You may also go online to the First Methodist Midland website, [www.firstmethodistmidland.com](http://www.firstmethodistmidland.com), to check on weather-related closings for our church.

## REGISTRATION: TUITION AND FEES

Registration will begin in February prior to the upcoming school year. The registration process will continue throughout the school year. A spot is reserved once the Registration fee and the last month's tuition deposit (May 2024) are paid in full. If a classroom is full, there will be a wait list for children and parents will be contacted as openings become available.

Tuition is \$265 per child per month of enrollment. A **non-refundable** registration fee of \$100 per child will be charged at the time of registration. This fee is required to hold a spot in the program in addition to the last month's tuition deposit (May 2024).

A supply fees will be paid at the beginning of each semester (September and January), or upon registration if enrolling after the semester has started. The supply fee is \$60 per child, per semester.

Monthly tuition and fees are as follows for the Children First Children's Day Out and Preschool program:

### **TUITION**

	<u>Annual Tuition (Sept. – May)</u>	<u>Monthly Payment</u>
Tuition per Child	\$2,385.00	\$265.00

\* May 2024 tuition deposit is due upon registration. This is refundable if withdrawing in writing before May 1, 2023.

\* Annual tuition (minus May 2024 tuition deposit) may be paid by September 1, 2023, or you may elect to pay monthly via electronic draft.

### **FEES**

<u>Fees &amp; Description</u>	<u>Amount</u>
<b>Registration</b> fee – paid upon registration; required to reserve a space; NON-REFUNDABLE	\$100 per child
<b>Supply</b> fee – paid twice a year; due at the beginning of each semester	\$60 per semester, per child

All monthly tuition will be paid by electronic bank draft unless another method is approved by the Director. The electronic bank draft form will be provided to the parents prior to the start of school.

We cannot carry your child **past twenty days without payment**, and therefore, such delays subject the child to removal from our enrollment list.

## **SCHOOL CLOSURE POLICY**

In the event that the Children First Children's Day Out and Preschool Program temporarily closes for reasons beyond our control, full tuition will continue to be billed per child. We will make every effort to keep Children First open, but it is our goal to work responsibly and safely for our community, children and staff members. Tuition collected during school closures helps maintain our teaching staff and secure your child's enrollment spot.

## **WITHDRAWAL FROM PROGRAM**

During the school year, written notice of withdrawal must be given by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month by completing the *Withdrawal Form* (found online), or you will be responsible for the next month's tuition. The last month's tuition deposit (May 2024) is non-refundable if your child is not withdrawn in writing by May 1, 2023.

## **DISMISSAL FROM PROGRAM**

The Director of the Children First Program reserves the right to dismiss any child from the program when the best interests of the child or program are not being met. Our goal is to serve all children of the program with the best care possible.

## **ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE**

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, classes begin at 8:30 a.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. Parents may begin dropping off their child at 8:30 a.m.

### **Arrival**

There will be staff members at the portico area beginning at 8:30 a.m. These staff members will escort the child to his/her classroom each morning.

### **Departure**

Parents may begin picking their child up at 2:00 p.m. each afternoon. An adult will need to walk in to pick up their child from the classroom. Any child picked up after 2:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays will be charged a late fee of \$10.00 and \$1.00 per minute after 2:35 p.m.

## **VISTORS**

All visitors are asked to check in and out at the Ark desk for the safety of the children.

## **RELEASE OF CHILDREN**

A Permission to Pick Up form must be on file. For safety and security reasons, teachers will release the child only to those who are authorized. The child will not be released to anyone other than the parent or guardian without either a signed and dated note or speaking directly with the Director or Assistant Director. If anyone other than the parent or guardian will be picking up the child, they will need to stop by the Ark desk with their identification. We will make a copy of their driver's license, and then place it on file in the office.

## **GUIDING THE DEVELOPING CHILD**

Discipline (positive guidance) will be based on an understanding of the individual needs and development of the child. Teachers will encourage acceptable behavior and inner control over actions by praising appropriate behavior and redirecting inappropriate behavior. In some cases, we will use the positive strategy of withdrawing the child from a situation for a brief time.

If the child's needs are not best met in a group setting, or the child is unable to follow the programs guidance, the director reserves the right to remove the child after a confidential conference with the parents. It is our desire for every child to have a positive experience, and we do not believe the child should remain in the program unless he or she can benefit. Parents must be pleased with their child's experience, and they must abide fully with policies and procedures for their child to remain in the program.

## **BITING**

Biting is a phase that some children go through and will eventually outgrow. It is a fact that biting will occur when young children are placed in group care or in a classroom setting. We are genuinely concerned whenever biting occurs in our classrooms, and we will work diligently with the child and the parents to redirect and change that behavior. Parents will receive a written notice of a bite incident. The notice is confidential, and we will not share the name of a child involved in the biting incident. If the biting continues, the director will conference with the parents to work together to cease the child's biting behavior. If you have questions regarding our policy concerning this matter, please see the Director.

## **SPECIAL NEEDS**

Parents have a responsibility to inform the Director of any special needs or physical disabilities a child may have prior to enrollment. We reserve the right to refuse admission if the situation is one for which our staff is not trained. When a child with special needs is admitted to the program, it will be on a trial basis. Our goal is to effectively meet the needs of each child. If a child with special needs is admitted to the program and after working with the child the teachers do not feel the child's needs are being met, we reserve the right to hold a confidential conference with the parents to determine if the child should remain in the Children First program. The well-being of each child in our program is our highest priority.

## **IMMUNIZATIONS**

Each child enrolled in the Children First program must have a current immunization record on file. An immunization record must be present before the first day of school. It is the responsibility of the parent to update the records each time the child receives an immunization. Parents must pay close attention to keeping immunization records current. Please see the Director for specific questions.

## **ALLERGIES /MEDICAL ISSUES**

It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the teacher and director of any allergy or medical issue the child may have. If the child has an allergy or medical issue, it should be disclosed on the Enrollment Form completed during registration. If the child develops an allergy or a medical condition during the school year after paperwork has been submitted, please notify the director immediately and update all paperwork on file. If needed, please complete a Medical Plan of Action form (please see the Director).

## **HEALTH**

Your cooperation is needed to help maintain high health standards in our program and to help protect all our children from unnecessary illness. Parents are asked to keep their child home when the child:

- ☞ Gives evidence of a fresh cold
- ☞ Has a temperature of 99 degrees or more
- ☞ Has a sore or discharging eye
- ☞ Has had vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- ☞ Has a heavy nasal discharge
- ☞ Has a constant cough
- ☞ Is fussy, cranky, and generally not him/herself
- ☞ Has not been without fever for at least 24 hours
- ☞ Cannot play outside

Parents will be called to pick up their child immediately if he or she becomes ill at school. Parents must pick their child up within 30 minutes of notification.

We will not administer medication to any child. This must be done by the parent.

Should your child have an illness diagnosed by the doctor as a contagious disease (for example, chicken pox, flu, Covid-19, etc.), please notify the school. Before any child diagnosed with a contagious disease is allowed to return to school, there must be a signed statement from a doctor confirming that the child is ready to return. This statement must be given to the Director.

## **PERSONAL BELONGINGS**

Please label (first and last name) on all personal items of clothing, blankets, bottles, diaper bags, lunch boxes, nap mats, etc. that you bring for your child. All other personal items, such as toys, should be left at home.

## **FOOD**

We are a nut free school, and therefore nut products are prohibited. Please do not send any food or snack items that contain nut products. This includes, but is not limited to, peanuts, almonds, hazelnuts, cashews, pecans, etc. Thank you for helping keep our children safe.

Please send a well-balanced, nutritious lunch and a drink each day with your child. Do not send any items that need to be cooked or warmed in the microwave. Please send water to drink.

Lunches will be stored in your child's cubby. Use a thermos or ice pack to keep lunches cold and/or hot. All lunch kits must be labeled with the child's name.

For infants, send plenty of bottles and food with the exact instructions as to how and when your child is to be fed. For children in the toddler rooms, two-year old rooms, and preschool rooms, please make sure that what you send is something your child can feed him/herself. Please include eating utensils if they are needed.

Do not send breakfast for your child to eat at school. This applies to children of all ages, including infants and toddlers. Teachers are very busy receiving children at the beginning of the day and schedules do not allow time for breakfast feedings.

## **SNACKS**

Parents are asked to provide snacks for their child's classroom. At the beginning of each semester, a snack calendar will be sent home, along with an age-appropriate suggestion list.

## **CLOTHING**

Children should wear comfortable, washable, play clothes in which they can move easily and freely. We paint, glue, play with sensory toys, use markers, etc. All articles of clothing should be marked with the child's name. Shoes should be rubber soled and comfortable. **Each child needs to bring a complete change of seasonally appropriate clothes in case of an accident. Please make sure to include shirt, shorts, undergarments (if applicable), and socks.**

Children play outside daily, except during inclement weather. Make sure that your child is dressed appropriately for this.

For health and safety purposes, **flip flops, open toe sandals, soft sole shoes and open back shoes** will not be allowed. Your child should wear some version of a closed toe shoe. Tennis shoes are the best choice.

## **DIAPERS AND BABY WIPES**

Parents are required to send diapers and wipes for their child (if applicable). When the supply is low, you will be notified by your child's teacher.

## **POTTY TRAINING**

There are potty-training requirements for children who will be three by September 1<sup>st</sup> of the new school year and are attending our preschool three and preschool four classes. If you are concerned that your child may not be potty trained by the time school begins, or if your child is prone to having accidents, then it is the responsibility of the parent to discuss potty training requirements in detail with the director at the time of enrollment.

Children First staff members will assist in the potty-training process after the child has been successful for five (5) consecutive days at home. After success has been reached at home, your child can attend Children First in underwear. Please notify the teachers that your child has underwear on and not a diaper/pull-up as to minimize any surprises. Your

child needs to be able to *communicate verbally* that they need to go to the potty without reminders from an adult. There are times in the daily schedule where teachers do remind the child to go to the potty, but we cannot take them every thirty minutes to the bathroom as this disrupts the classroom schedule and activities, unless they ask.

During the training process, we request the following: (1) Your child must wear loose fitting clothing that is easy for the child to pull up or down on his/her own; Your child **MUST** wear undergarments during this time for sanitary reasons. (2) a supply of **3 complete changes of clothing** including socks is to be kept in the classroom in the event of an accident; (3) a supply of pull-ups will also need to be kept in the classroom until the child has shown naptime dryness for a week; (4) Children First does **NOT** rinse out or wash soiled clothing. It will be bagged and sent home at the end of the day.

Please keep in mind that often a child shows a readiness and has success for potty training at home before the signs are seen at school. There may be a period of time where the child is potty trained at home and not at school. That is perfectly normal. If the child comes to school with underwear on and has two accidents in a short period of time, the teachers will place a diaper or pull-up on the child and the child can try again another day when he or she shows signs of being ready at school.

### **QUIET TIME & NAPS**

Individual sleep/nap schedules will be accommodated for infants. Children in the toddler to preschool three class will have an assigned nap time after lunch. Children are expected to rest quietly during this time and not be disruptive to the class. **Parents are required to purchase a 1" thick basic rest mat (1 X 19 X 45 inches see supply list) to be kept in the classroom. The program does not provide such items.** If you have specific questions regarding the nap mat, please visit with the Director.

The preschool four classroom **WILL NOT** have a nap time during the school day.

### **BIRTHDAYS**

This is an exciting time in the life of a young child. Should you wish to send a birthday snack for your child's class, please check with the teachers as to what they believe will be appropriate. Please do not send birthday party invitations to school unless all children in your child's class are included.

### **EMERGENCY PROCEDURES**

In the event of an emergency, the following procedures will be followed:

**TORNADO:** All children will be taken to the basement of the church in the event of a tornado. We will remain in the basement until it is safe to return upstairs.

**FIRE:** All children will be escorted out the north doors of the church building and walked to the far north end of the parking lot. We will remain outside until we have been told it is safe to return inside.

Please note that we have the assistance of church staff members in transporting children to either the basement or the parking lot in the event of a tornado or fire.

# How Parents Can Help

There are several ways you can help to enrich your child's experience while attending Children First.

- Talk about the program as a happy place not only to your child, but to others as well.
- If your child cries when you bring him or her to class, it is best for you to leave your child with the teachers as soon as possible. Most children stop crying within minutes of your departure. Please remember that the longer you stay, the more difficult it is for a child to separate. Feel free to check on your child throughout the day by calling the Director. The Director will be happy to give you a report on how your child is doing.
- Please make every effort to drop your child off on time so that teachers can get the class settled and begin the day's activities.
- Communicate regularly with your child's teachers. If unusual circumstances arise at home, please let us know. We can be a stronger resource for your child if we are aware of developments that change your child's routine or significantly affect his or her life.
- Carefully read all notices sent home. Refer often to your Parent Handbook, calendars, and any postings outside of the classrooms, etc.

If you have questions or concerns, please discuss them with the teachers or Director as soon as they arise. We welcome your suggestions for improvement and growth. Children First Children's Day Out and Preschool should be a wonderful part of the growing up process. When families and our program work together for the good of a child, we set a wonderful example of God's love. Our door is always open!