

The Mustard Seed Preschool

Parent Handbook 2023/2024



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Welcome to The Mustard Seed Preschool!

A ministry of St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Brick, NJ

We look forward to working with you and caring for your child. This handbook will explain our policies and procedures. If you ever have a question or concern, please let us know. You can email the school at stpaulsmustardseedpreschool@gmail.com or call 732-458-2080 to reach the Director.

The Mustard Seed Preschool is a ministry of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. Its mission is to provide a quality preschool program in a nurturing, Christ-centered environment.

At The Mustard Seed Preschool we believe that we are all God's children. We will provide a quality preschool program to children regardless of race, color, gender, national/ethnic origin, and/ or disability if the student can meet the educational programs and activities of the school.

In this handbook, you will be given policies established by The State of New Jersey as well as the School Board of The Mustard Seed Preschool. Please read over the entirety of this handbook to familiarize yourself with our rules and regulations. Thank you in advance for a wonderful school year.

The Parable of The Mustard Seed

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."



**New Jersey's Department of Children and Families
Office of Licensing**

INFORMATION TO PARENTS

Under provisions of the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers (N.J.A.C. 3A:52), every licensed child care center in New Jersey must provide to parents of enrolled children written information on parent visitation rights, State licensing requirements, child abuse/neglect reporting requirements and other child care matters. The center must comply with this requirement by reproducing and distributing to parents and staff this written statement, prepared by the Office of Licensing, Child Care & Youth Residential Licensing, in the Department of Children and Families. In keeping with this requirement, the center must secure every parent and staff member's signature attesting to his/her receipt of the information.

Our center is required by the State Child Care Center Licensing law to be licensed by the Office of Licensing (OOL), Child Care & Youth Residential Licensing, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF). A copy of our current license must be posted in a prominent location at our center. Look for it when you're in the center.

To be licensed, our center must comply with the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers (the official licensing regulations). The regulations cover such areas as: physical environment/life-safety; staff qualifications, supervision, and staff/child ratios; program activities and equipment; health, food and nutrition; rest and sleep requirements; parent/community participation; administrative and record keeping requirements; and others.

Our center must have on the premises a copy of the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers and make it available to interested parents for review. If you would like to review our copy, just ask any staff member. Parents may view a copy of the Manual of Requirements on the DCF website at <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/providers/licensing/laws/CCCmanual.pdf> or obtain a copy by sending a check or money order for \$5 made payable to the "Treasurer, State of New Jersey", and mailing it to: NJDCF, Office of Licensing, Publication Fees, PO Box 657, Trenton, NJ 08646-0657.

We encourage parents to discuss with us any questions or concerns about the policies and program of the center or the meaning, application or alleged violations of the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers. We will be happy to arrange a convenient opportunity for you to review and discuss these matters with us. If you suspect our center may be in violation of licensing requirements, you are entitled to report them to the Office of Licensing toll free at 1 (877) 667-9845. Of course, we would appreciate your bringing these concerns to our attention, too.

Our center must have a policy concerning the release of children to parents or people authorized by parents to be responsible for the child. Please discuss with us your plans for your child's departure from the center.

Our center must have a policy about administering medicine and health care procedures and the management of communicable diseases. Please talk to us about these policies so we can work together to keep our children healthy.

Our center must have a policy concerning the expulsion of children from enrollment at the center. Please review this policy so we can work together to keep your child in our center.

Parents are entitled to review the center's copy of the OOL's Inspection/Violation Reports on the center, which are available soon after every State licensing inspection of our center. If there is a licensing complaint OOL/Information to Parents/May 2019 Page 2 of 2 investigation, you are also entitled to review the OOL's Complaint Investigation Summary Report, as well as any letters of enforcement or other actions taken against the center during the current licensing period. Let us know if you wish to review them and we will make them available for your review or you can view them online at <https://childcareexplorer.njccis.com/portal/>.

Our center must cooperate with all DCF inspections/investigations. DCF staff may interview both staff members and children.

Our center must post its written statement of philosophy on child discipline in a prominent location and make a copy of it available to parents upon request. We encourage you to review it and to discuss with us any questions you may have about it.

Our center must post a listing or diagram of those rooms and areas approved by the OOL for the children's use. Please talk to us if you have any questions about the center's space.

Our center must offer parents of enrolled children ample opportunity to assist the center in complying with licensing requirements; and to participate in and observe the activities of the center. Parents wishing to participate in the activities or operations of the center should discuss their interest with the center director, who can advise them of what opportunities are available.

Parents of enrolled children may visit our center at any time without having to secure prior approval from the director or any staff member. Please feel free to do so when you can. We welcome visits from our parents.

Our center must inform parents in advance of every field trip, outing, or special event away from the center, and must obtain prior written consent from parents before taking a child on each such trip.

Our center is required to provide reasonable accommodations for children and/or parents with disabilities and to comply with the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD), P.L. 1945, c. 169 (N.J.S.A. 10:5-1 et seq.), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), P.L. 101-336 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.). Anyone who believes the center is not in compliance with these laws may contact the Division on Civil Rights in the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety for information about filing an LAD claim at (609) 292-4605 (TTY users may dial 711 to reach the

New Jersey Relay Operator and ask for (609) 292-7701), or may contact the United States Department of Justice for information about filing an ADA claim at (800) 514-0301 (voice) or (800) 514-0383 (TTY).

Our center is required, at least annually, to review the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), unsafe children's products list, ensure that items on the list are not at the center, and make the list accessible to staff and parents and/or provide parents with the CPSC website at <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls>. Internet access may be available at your local library. For more information call the CPSC at (800) 638-2772.

Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that an enrolled child has been or is being subjected to any form of hitting, corporal punishment, abusive language, ridicule, harsh, humiliating or frightening treatment, or any other kind of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation by any adult, whether working at the center or not, is required by State law to report the concern immediately to the State Central Registry Hotline, toll free at (877) NJ ABUSE/(877) 652-2873. Such reports may be made anonymously. Parents may secure information about child abuse and neglect by contacting: DCF, Office of Communications and Legislation at (609) 292- 0422 or go to www.state.nj.us/dcf/.

The Mustard Seed Preschool's Information to Parents

ARRIVAL/DROP OFF:

Students should not arrive before 8:35 AM for an 8:45 AM class.

Please have an adult walk the child to the main entrance where a staff member will be available to greet the child and help you with check in.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance is important to a child's success. Children do well with consistency, so it is important to have good attendance and to arrive on time. If your child is going to be absent, please notify the office before the start of the school day. Students who are absent due to an illness lasting 5 or more days are required to bring a doctor's note before returning to class. Make-up days for longer periods of absence are not guaranteed.

CHILD ABUSE:

All staff members are trained on identifying signs of child abuse. All staff members are mandated reporters. If child abuse is suspected, a staff member must report the suspected abuse to the NJ Abuse hotline at 877-NJ-ABUSE. Parents do not need to be notified of the report being made, per NJ law.

DISCIPLINE:

Our policy is to provide an environment of love and encouragement which will enable children to resolve their differences and grow in social skills and self-control. With careful planning our curriculum takes into consideration the child's development and helps avoid many potential situations concerning discipline. In case of a minor occurrence (with taking turns, sharing, excluding a child, etc.), we will encourage the children to work out the problem under the direction of a staff member. Sometimes it is necessary to redirect a child if they are disruptive to a group's activity. Another positive way we handle this misbehavior is to provide individual attention or a quiet talk with a teacher. This allows the teacher to talk about the behavior and to get insight into its cause. It is important for the child to know and understand that the behavior is not acceptable and why. Aggressive behavior is not acceptable and will be handled immediately by removal of the child from the activity.

If a child repeatedly misbehaves after being spoken with, parents will be called in for a conference and a plan of action will be decided upon.

Children are always spoken to in a calm, quiet manner. No child will be disciplined by the deprivation of rest, emotional responses, food or outdoor play for misbehavior.

DRESS CODE:

Children should be dressed for active play every day. Flip flops and open backed shoes are dangerous on the playground and should not be worn to school. We will go outside every day the weather permits. Please make sure children have appropriate outerwear on cold weather days. Hats and gloves should be labeled with the child's name.

ENRICHMENT

Children will be exposed to art, movement, music and cooking as well as other enrichment opportunities each day. Enrichment opportunities are included with your tuition. Additional enrichment programs may become available at an additional cost if done outside of normal school hours.

EXPULSION:

Unfortunately, there are sometimes reasons we must expel a child from our program either on a short term or permanent basis. We will do everything possible to work with the family of the child(ren) to prevent this policy from being enacted. The following are reasons we may have to expel or suspend a child from this center:

IMMEDIATE CAUSES FOR EXPULSION:

- The child is at risk of causing serious injury to themselves or other children.
- Parent threatens physical harm or intimidating actions toward staff members, other parents, or any child(ren).
- Parent exhibits verbal abuse to staff, especially in front of enrolled children.

PARENTAL ACTIONS FOR CHILD'S EXPULSION:

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payments.
- Failure to complete or return required forms for enrollment.

- Habitual tardiness when picking up your child.
- Verbal abuse to staff.

CHILD'S ACTIONS FOR EXPULSION:

- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time.
- Uncontrollable tantrums/ angry outbursts.
- Ongoing physical or verbal abuse to staff or other children.
- Excessive biting, pinching, or other forms of physical harm

PROACTIVE ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO PREVENT EXPULSION

- Staff will try to redirect children from negative behavior.
- Staff will reassess the classroom environment, appropriateness of activities, and supervision.
- Staff will always use positive methods and language while disciplining children.
- Staff will praise appropriate behaviors.
- Staff will consistently apply appropriate consequences for rules. Child will be given verbal warnings.
- Child will be given time to regain control.
- Child's disruptive behavior will be documented and maintained in confidentiality.
- Parent/guardian will be notified verbally and given written copies of the disruptive behaviors that might lead to expulsion.
- The director, classroom staff and parent/guardian will have a conference(s) to discuss how to promote positive behaviors.
- The parent/guardian will be given literature or other resources regarding methods of improving behavior.

SCHEDULE OF EXPULSION:

If after the remedial actions above have not worked, the child's parent/guardian will be advised verbally and in writing about the child's or parent's behavior warranting an expulsion. An expulsion action is meant to be a period of time so that the parent/ guardian may work on the child's behavior or to come to an agreement with the center. They will be informed regarding the length of the expulsion period as well as the expected behavioral changes required for the child or parent to return to the center.

The parent/guardian will be given a specific expulsion date that allows the parent sufficient time to seek alternate childcare (approximately one to two weeks' notice depending on risk to other children's welfare or safety). Failure of the child/parent to satisfy the terms of the plan may result in permanent expulsion from the center.

A CHILD WILL NOT BE EXPELLED

If a child's parent(s):

- Make a complaint to the Office of Licensing regarding a center's alleged violations of the licensing requirements.

- Reported abuse or neglect occurring at the center.
- Questioned the center regarding policies and procedures.
- Without giving the parent sufficient time to make other childcare arrangements, except in cases of immediate cause for expulsion.

It is the policy of The Mustard Seed Preschool that no reimbursement of tuition or fees will be given if a child is expelled from our program.

EXTRA CLOTHES:

In case of an accident, each child should have a complete change of clothing in a labeled plastic bag. We will leave the bag in the child's locker until it is needed. We highly encourage every student to have a full change of clothes, regardless of potty-training efficiency – accidents happen, and we want your child to be able to change quickly out of soiled clothing.

FINANCIAL OBLIGATION:

It is a parent/guardian's obligation to pay tuition on time and in the full amount. Tuition is used to pay staff salaries and all school related expenses. Your student's full monthly tuition is due by the first of every month. We will provide a 7-day grace period for monthly payments. If tuition is not paid by the 7th of each month, a \$10 late fee will be imposed for that month. If tuition remains unpaid by the 15th of the month ~~for 30 days~~ a written notice for termination of enrollment will be given to the parent.

If a family runs into a financial hardship regarding tuition, please notify the Director before your payment is due. The church may have resources available to help including information on registering for subsidized care, payment plan options, and scholarship opportunities.

Any returned checks are subject to a \$35 fee. After two checks are returned, tuition must be paid in cash for the remainder of the student's enrollment.

HEALTH RECORDS:

All students are required to receive a physical prior to the start of school. A physician is to fill out the required health form and return it before the first day of school. In addition to the completed health form, all students must submit their immunization records, or a letter stating the families choice.

ILLNESS:

Please carefully read The Policy on the Management of Communicable Diseases from NJ below for guidelines on when to keep children home.

Policy on the Management of Communicable Diseases

If a child exhibit any of the following symptoms, the child should not attend the center. If such symptoms occur at the center, the child will be removed from the group, and parents will be called to take the child home.

- Severe pain or discomfort • Acute • Episodes of acute vomiting • Elevated oral temperature of 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit • Lethargy • Severe coughing • Yellow eyes or jaundiced skin • Red eyes with discharge • Infected, untreated skin patches • Difficult or rapid breathing • Skin rashes in conjunction with fever or behavior changes • Skin lesions that are weeping or bleeding • Mouth sores with drooling • Stiff neck

Once the child is symptom-free or has a health care provider's note stating that the child no longer poses a serious health risk to himself/herself or others, the child may return to the center unless contraindicated by local health department or Department of Health.

EXCLUDABLE COMMUNICABLE DISEASES: A child or staff member who contracts an excludable communicable disease may not return to the center without a health care provider's note stating that the child presents no risk to himself/herself or others. Note: If a child has chicken pox, a note from the parent stating that all sores have dried and crusted is required. If a child is exposed to any excludable disease at the center, parents will be notified in writing.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE REPORTING GUIDELINES: Some excludable communicable diseases must be reported to the health department by the center. The Department of Health's Reporting Requirements for Communicable Diseases and Work-Related Conditions Quick Reference Guide, a complete list of reportable excludable communicable diseases, can be found at:

http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/reportable_disease_magnet.pdf.

The Mustard Seed Preschool's illness policy in addition to the above information.

- A child will be sent home if they have a fever over 100 degrees, are vomiting, have diarrhea, have unusual rashes, have red or draining eye(s).
- A child who is sent home with an illness may not return to school for 24 hours.
- A doctor's note will be required for children who have been absent for three or more days due to illness.

STITCHES & BROKEN BONES:

Any student receiving stitches or experiencing any broken bones within 24 hours of school meeting times cannot attend school for another 24-hour period. Upon return, student must have a doctor's note stating:

- 1) Allowable activities
- 2) Participation restrictions
- 3) Medical approval to attend school

IMMUNIZATIONS:

All inoculations need to be current and in compliance with State requirements. Any child whose record is not current and in compliance with health standards, may be asked to leave the program until the form is turned in. Should your child's health record show a need for a particular

inoculation, you will be advised and will have 2-3 weeks from that time to see your physician and meet the requirements set by the state. If a family declines to have their child immunized for any reason, a written letter must be provided to the school stating such in order to be compliant with NJ office of Licensing requirements.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY:

Generally, The Mustard Seed Preschool will follow the Brick Township School District's closing/delayed openings due to inclement weather. However, if our grounds are deemed unsafe by the Board of Trustees, we may deviate from Brick Townships schedule.

The following policy will be in effect concerning inclement weather closings, early dismissal and/or delayed opening:

Closings - Parents will receive notification if The Mustard Seed Preschool is closed for the day because of bad weather.

Delayed Openings- in the case of delayed openings due to inclement weather the school shall open at 10:00 AM.

Early dismissals – if the school needs to close early, we will contact parents to notify them of the early release time.

MEDICATION:

It is the policy of the preschool to not dispense medication to a child. However, life saving medication will be monitored if a student would be under life threatening conditions without it. This includes the use of inhalers, insulin, and epi pens.

Medication will only be given when ordered by the child's health care provider and with written consent of the child's parent/legal guardian. A "Permission to Give Medication in Child Care" form is required. All information on the Permission Form must be completed before the medication can be given. Copies of this form can be requested from the director. Additional paperwork or requirements regarding medication may be needed to safely administer them to your child.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT:

Our school welcomes parent involvement. There are several ways you can be involved in our school:

- Occasional classroom helper
- Guest reader
- Career day speaker
- Share a special talent or skill
- Buildings and ground help
- Bulletin board helper
- Serve on the school board as the parent representative

PARKING LOT:

Cars are to be parked in designated parking spots within the back lot. Please do not park in the driveway or fire lane. Be mindful of others when pulling in and out of the parking spot.

PICK-UP:

Students are to be picked up promptly at the end of their school day. We realize that a late pick up might occasionally occur due to an emergency, but excessive lateness will result in a \$10 late pick up fee each day a parent is late.

Each child may be released only to the child's parent(s) or person(s) authorized by the parent(s) to take the child from the center and to assume responsibility for the child in an emergency if the parent(s) cannot be reached. If a non-custodial parent has been denied access, or granted limited access, to a child by a court order, the center shall secure documentation to that effect, maintain a copy on file, and comply with the terms of the court order.

With respect to NJ regulations, a written plan specifying the procedures to be followed if the parent(s) or other person(s) authorized by the parent(s) fails to pick up or is late in picking up a child at the time of the center's daily closing states the following:

1. The child is to be supervised at all times by staff members or after-care personnel.
2. Every effort is to be made by staff members to contact the custodial parent(s) and/or other person(s) authorized by the parent(s) to care for the child.
3. An hour or more after closing time, and provided that other arrangements for releasing the child to his/her parent or authorized person have failed and the staff member cannot continue to supervise the child at the center, the staff member shall call the Division's 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-792-8610) to seek assistance in caring for the child until his/her custodial parent(s) or other person(s) authorized by the custodial parent(s) is available to care for the child.

In addition, if the parent(s) or person(s) appears to be physically and/or emotionally impaired to the extent that, in the judgement of the Director and/or staff member, the child would be placed at risk or harm if released to such an individual, the center may ensure that:

- The child may not be released to such an impaired individual;
- Staff members attempt to contact the child's other parent or an alternative person(s) authorized by the parent(s);and
- If the center is unable to make alternate arrangements, a staff member shall call the Divisions 24 hour child abuse hotline at the number

SEPARATION

Some children have trouble saying goodbye to parents when coming to school. We will do our best to help the child transition to their school day. Several calming strategies will be used to help children with separation anxieties. If you have any concerns, please reach out to us.

SOCIAL MEDIA STATEMENT:

This social media policy applies to parents as well as staff of The Mustard Seed Preschool. This policy includes but is not limited to social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, snap chat, etc.), Twitter, You Tube, etc. It is our responsibility to offer a safe and secure environment for our children. As such it is essential to maintain the privacy and security of all our families.

- A photo release must be signed by a parent/guardian giving permission for the school to use their child's photo in any publications used for promotion or advertisement for the school. Posts will not contain personal information about the child, including their name, classroom, or other identifying information other than "student" at The Mustard Seed Preschool.
- No photos taken of the children within the school setting or at special events by visitors, parents/guardians, or staff are to be posted for public viewing, except those of your own child.
- No public discussions are to be held or comments made on social media sites regarding the preschool children, parents, or staff that could be construed to have any negative impact on the school's reputation or that would offend staff, parent or child associated with the school.
- Parents and staff should report any concerns to the Director.

Any staff member, parent or volunteer found to be posting any of the above may face disciplinary action.

TOYS:

Please do not send toys to school. All toys that we play with must be sanitized after use. We are carefully monitoring which toys are used in the rooms. Thank you for helping us.

TRANSPORTATION POLICY:

Any student arriving at or leaving the school grounds must be transported from an authorized individual listed on the student's registration form. This includes parents, guardians, and emergency contacts. If another person is picking up your child, you must notify the school in writing before the pickup occurs. Students will not be released to anyone not on their approved list. The Mustard Seed Preschool will not provide transportation to any student.

VISITORS

Visitors are currently welcome by appointment only. If you know someone who would like to see our school, please have them arrange a visit. Visitors will not be admitted into the school building during school hours.

