



Family Handbook

Welcome to Downtown Children’s Center!

We are pleased you have enrolled your child with us and look forward to getting better acquainted. This handbook is designed to provide important information about Downtown Children’s Center and the policies and procedures that will affect you and your child. At times these “rules’ may seem overwhelming, but they are guided by best practice, licensing and accreditation. Ultimately, however, YOU are the primary decision maker for your child. We are thankful that you are sharing your child with us and want to supplement your parenting style and practices. If you have any questions or concerns, please call Samantha Thomas, Head of School, or talk with your child’s teacher.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Our school is governed by a Board of Directors. Members consist of community representatives and past and present families at our school. The Board meets 6-7 times each year. The Board President’s information is displayed with the State License which is posted on the wall in the front entry. The Board welcomes parental communications and strives to provide open dialogue with parents at all times.

FACILITY

Our building is unique to the St. Louis area as it was designed for an early childhood program within an historic building. There are 8 classrooms, a commercial kitchen, rest rooms and indoor and outdoor play spaces. All rooms meet specific qualifications by state licensing. In addition, we meet accessibility requirements for the Americans Disability Act (ADA) and work with all therapists for individual children and their specific needs (feeding, physical needs, etc.). Our school is open from 7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday and offers full and part-week programs for children six weeks – six years.

HISTORY AND MISSION

Our school is a not-for-profit organization. It was started in November 1978, through the efforts of parents, child care professionals and business people concerned about the future of the St. Louis downtown area. Our mission is to provide the finest early childhood educational programs along with excellent child care tailored to meet the needs of diverse children and their families in a secure and nurturing environment convenient to the workplace or your home.

PHILOSOPHY

The following principles provide a basis for our program:

- Each child, parent and staff member is a unique individual with skills, feelings and perceptions which may or may not be similar to our own.
- Each person can learn to value him/herself and to value other’s feelings, needs and individuality.
- A warm, nurturing environment is necessary for the development of a positive self-concept, creativity and motivation to learn.
- Opportunities for children’s play are extensive as it is through play that children learn about their world.
- The development of social-emotional, motor, sensory and perceptual skills must be encouraged in order to provide the framework for future educational and life experiences.
- We value the significant role of the family in each child’s development and work to maintain close ties between home and school.

PROCEDURES

APPLICATION FEE and REGISTRATION DEPOSIT

A one-time nonrefundable fee of \$100.00 will be charged for submitting the application. A registration deposit equal to one week's tuition, is required upon acceptance of your child's application. The deposit will be refunded when your child is withdrawn from our school, provided a two week written notice is given to the Head of School.

ADMISSIONS

You will receive a packet of forms to be completed and returned on or before your child's first day of attendance. Families are expected to notify DCC of any changes pertinent to these forms which may happen during the school year.

CALENDAR

We will be closed on the following days:

New Year's Day	In-Service Training Day (Friday before Labor Day)
President's Day	Labor Day
Memorial Day	Thanksgiving and the day after
Independence Day	Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Family and Fund-Raising events will be posted on the calendar throughout the year on the Friday Update, on the Family bulletin board and in each classroom.

CELL PHONE POLICY

We are a cell phone free environment. We ask that you complete your phone calls before entering the building in order to promote active conversations between parents and teachers.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Much of the information that you give us is confidential. All staff are required to follow the NAEYC Code of Ethics and to be respectful when handling private information. Written permission from you will be required before we can talk to other schools or agencies about your child. Medical information, including immunizations, will be kept in a locked file for a year. Parents and guardians have access to this information at any time.

EMERGENCY INFORMATION

The enrollment form and the emergency information card are very important documents. Please make sure that all the information required for the forms is current at all times and if any changes occur, please inform the front office and/or the Head of School as soon as practical. At least one teacher and usually all teachers are successfully trained in Pediatric First Aid and CPR with each group of children. Emergency evacuation drills (fire, tornado, intruder) are practiced monthly. In the event of our building cannot accommodate children, they will be transported to our sister school, Nestle Purina Child Development Center at 1000 S. 9th St. 63104.

FAMILY ROOM

Our Family Room is located next to the Infant/Toddler Rooms. This room has been designed to give moms and dad a place to feed their babies or simply a place to relax! It is stocked with magazines, water and comfortable seating.

FOOD BROUGHT FROM HOME

Food brought from home is to supplement only our food program. All food brought from home must be labeled with the child's name and date. Food that is shared with the class must be either whole fruits or commercially prepared packaged foods in factory-sealed containers. All food will be refrigerated appropriately and discarded following expiration dates. We will work with you to make sure that all food brought from home meet USDA standards!

KEY FOBs

You will be issued a key fob to access to our school. If your key fob is lost or stolen, please report it immediately so we can deactivate it. The first key fob is free, but all replacement keys are \$10.00 each. All keys must be returned when your family leaves the program.

HAND WASHING AND CLEANLINESS

According to the Center for Disease Control, "With the possible exception of immunizations, hand-washing is the most effective disease-preventing measure anyone can practice." With this in mind, we follow strict hand-washing procedures. Please wash your hands and your child's hands upon entering the classroom. Hand sanitizers are available in several areas of the school, but they do not substitute good hand-washing practices. In order for our Infant rooms to remain clean, we also ask that your shoes be removed before entering these rooms.

LATE CHARGES FOR CHILD PICK-UP

We understand that a parent can be late in picking up their child, but it affects our staff and their ability to get to their own families or other obligations. Your first late fee will be waived, but each time after that, a fee of \$20.00 will be charged for the first 15 minutes, and \$1 per minute thereafter when a parent or escort is late (after 6:00 pm) picking up their child.

PARKING

Our school has access to free parking in the lot across from the main entrance of the building, located at 22nd and Washington. You can also park for free on both sides of 22nd Street. Meter parking is available on Washington Street. We will not be responsible for any parking tickets you incur. Please be sure to hold your child's hand when entering and exiting the school or playground. **Teachers do not transport children.**

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND CLOTHING

Because our children are so active during the day, we encourage you to dress them in casual, comfortable clothing. We do our best to protect children from paint and other sensory items along with food, but children tend to get messy!

Children are encouraged to wear closed toe shoes that fasten with Velcro, ties or buckles. Sandals, "cros," cowboy boots, flip flops and dress shoes are discouraged and not appropriate for the school setting. State licensing prohibits teachers from rinsing out soiled underwear and clothing so these items will be sent home in a plastic bag.

Each child will have a cubby for their personal items. Families are asked to bring two complete sets of seasonal clothing; shirt, pants or shorts, socks, underwear, etc., for their child and to be left at school. Please dress your child in a warm coat and cap during the winter months. We do go outside every day unless the

temperatures are extreme. We follow Children's Hospital guidelines on the amount of time to be outside. This chart is posted in the classrooms.

- To prevent losing items, please label all clothing items with first and last names.
- Families with infants/toddlers need to provide an adequate supply of diapers. If you use cloth diapers, you must provide a hand's free, medium sized container for soiled diapers. Cloth diapers must be changed as a unit. The diapers must be taken home daily.
- Necessary sunscreen, ointments, powders or creams must be provided by the parents and must be labeled appropriately along with a signed authorization form to use these items.
- Special security items are acceptable to bring, but not toys, because they are easily lost or broken. Classrooms will have a designated day for "show-n-tell".
- Tooth brushing will be a part of your child's daily schedule, so please provide a toothbrush.
- All families will be required to provide a small blanket for their child that does not extend over the cot. The cots and sheets will be provided by our school and are laundered at least once each week.
- Please do not bring nuts, candy, gum, balloons or other choking hazards.
- If you wish to have your child wear a helmet when riding a tricycle on the playground, please provide their own personal helmet that is labeled with their name.

RATIOS (TEACHER TO CHILD)

We pride ourselves in having small class sizes. We *always* follow state ratios, but in order to offer more individualized care to your child, our ratios are typically: Infant Room 1:3, Toddler Room 1:4, Two's Room 1:7 and our Preschool 1:8. On rare occasions, we may move a teacher to another classroom to maintain ratios.

SCHOLARSHIPS

We believe that all children are entitled to a quality early childhood program. Families needing a scholarship are asked to submit last year's tax return, two recent pay stubs and a letter of request. All families are encouraged to volunteer to support this program and families who receive scholarship money are asked to donate an amount of time equal to the percentage of scholarship money received. Applications for the scholarship program will be considered as space and funds become available.

SIGN IN SIGN OUT SHEETS

Teachers use paper sign-in sheets for security purposes. **In order for teachers to supervise the children is vital that you tell your child's teacher when you arrive and when you pick up your child.** In addition, an authorized adult must sign his/her child in and out daily using our computerized system. Each classroom has a communication board for families. If your child will be late or absent, please call and inform us. Children will only be released to parents or authorized adults.

SMOKE FREE SCHOOL

For the safety of our children and staff, we are a smoke free campus. Smoking is prohibited.

SNOW DAYS

In order to ensure the safety of the families and staff, it is the policy of our school to only close in extreme weather conditions. While this is the last resort taken, in the event that it is necessary to close, we will do so in a timely manner. Announcements will be made on KMOV Channel 4 and KSDK Channel 5, all televised and on-line. Should early morning conditions prove hazardous, an announcement of a SNOW SCHEDULE means that we will open at 9:30. There are no refunds for snow days.

TUITION PAYMENT

All tuition is to be paid in advance on a monthly basis by the 5th day of each month. Families cannot carry a past due balance. A child may not be admitted to their classroom if tuition payments are two weeks in arrears. There will be a \$35.00 late fee for tuition payments received after the 6th of each month unless special arrangements have been made with the Head of School. Place all payments in the locked box by the office door. We prefer that you do not use cash as your method of payment. **There is a \$25.00 service charge for all returned checks.** Electronic account withdrawals are available through our school. Please contact our administrative team if you wish to enroll.

TUITION POLICIES

Individual children's tuition is based on the age of the child and the days the child will attend. The tuition rate changes the month following your child's 2nd and 3rd birthday. Tuition is paid monthly, unless other arrangements have been made. You are paying to keep your child's spot in the program so tuition is due whether or not your child attends their scheduled time regardless of the reason.

WALKING FIELD TRIPS/ENRICHMENT WITHIN OUR SCHOOL Children of all ages often enjoy walking trips in our neighborhood. The babies and toddlers use buggies and the older children walk. We do not transport children in vehicles. The older children are able to walk to Union Station and the City Garden. The older children will often times take the trolley! There are always at least two teachers on any walking trip and they always carry cell phones, first-aid supplies and emergency contact numbers. If a parent decides that they do not want their child to attend this trip, the child can stay behind in another classroom. At no time is a child singled out and every parent's desires are respected. Other entities visit our school including a story teller from the St. Louis Public Library, police officers, postal workers and firemen.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE SCHOOL

On rare occasion, it may be necessary to withdraw your child from our school. Several constructive steps will be taken by both our school and the family to find a satisfactory solution. A child's behavior may warrant withdrawal if that child appears to be in danger to him/herself or others or if outside consultants determine that our school is not in the best interest of the child. A family may be asked to leave due to non-compliance with center policies, behavior that is deemed inappropriate, disruptive or threatening to center staff, or nonpayment of tuition.

MEDICAL, HEALTH AND SAFETY

ACCIDENTS

Accidents do happen and if a child has an accident while at school, immediate first aid will be given. Each classroom has a first aid kit. If the accident requires immediate medical attention, the child's parent(s) will be contacted. Teachers will complete an Accident Report that is signed by the Head of School. Emergency medical care will be administered, if necessary. At least one teacher (and usually all teachers) in each room has Pediatric First Aid and CPR training. We will use the child's enrollment form to gather information about your doctor or dentist and preferred hospital.

ALLERGIES

We will work with each family to make sure that the entire staff is aware of your child's allergies, so we can keep your child safe. Allergies are documented in your child's file and posted in the child's classroom and kitchen. If your child has a severe allergy (for example an allergy that may require the use of an Epi-pen) we will include your child's picture by the posted list so that we are aware of the immediacy of treatment. If your child is on soy milk or some other product you are providing, please bring the *unopened* item in each Monday (or the first day of the week that your child attends) labeled with your child's first and last name and date, and then take it home on Friday (or the last day of the week in which your child attends school).

EMERGENCY DRILLS AND EVACUATIONS

In accordance with Missouri State licensing requirements, DCC practices evacuation drills for emergencies such as fires, tornadoes, and breaches of security. Exit routes are posted in each classroom. Emergency numbers are posted by each phone. Contact information is taken with the teachers when they exit the building for any reason. Families will be notified if they need to pick up their child due to an unforeseen event. In an extreme situation, it may become necessary for staff to transport children (via their cars) to Nestle Purina Child Care (1000 S. 9th St. 63104). Periodic fire and storm safety drills are held to familiarize children and staff with appropriate procedures during an emergency. Our Emergency/Evacuation Procedure Manual is available for you to review.

HEALTH AND IMMUNIZATIONS

It is our policy that the parent or guardian may request notice of whether there are children currently enrolled in or attending the facility for whom an immunization exemption has been filed. Before enrollment, whether immunized or not, we need a copy of a Child's Medical Record Form, signed by a physician. Due to licensing and accreditation, our requirements for health and immunizations are strict! All babies and children are to be immunized according to the recommended schedule of the American Academy of Pediatrics. This is posted for your convenience and available in the intake forms.

Your child's health information must be on file before your child is enrolled and it must be current with the appropriate immunizations in order for your child to remain in attendance.

As your child receives additional immunizations, or any other changes to their medical history occur, please give updated information to the Head of School. If your child is under-immunized for health reasons, written documentation from a health professional must be on file. If your child is overdue for their health form or any immunization, parents or guardians will be notified and given one week to set up an appointment with a health professional. The information is confidential and in a secure location, but available to administrators, teachers and parents, if needed. Information is kept for one year.

LEAD TESTING

In accordance with State Licensing Regulation 19 CSR 20-8.30, we are required by law for annual testing of children younger than 6 to be tested for levels of lead. All children shall have a blood lead test by age 12 months and annually until the age of six. An Evidence of Blood Lead Testing form must be on file for each child. Parents have the right to refuse this test for their child, but will need to sign the appropriate form.

MEDICATION

If your child requires *any* type of medication, a parent/guardian must sign a release form allowing medication to be administered at school. Medication Authorization forms must also be filled out for prescription and non-prescription medication, diaper creams, sunscreen and insect repellants.

Prescription Drugs - Must be in the original container, labeled with name of patient, name of physician, prescription number and date, name of medication, dosage and frequency.

Non-prescription Drugs - Must be in the original container.

No form of aspirin will be administered to a child without the written prescription of a physician.

We reserve the right to refuse to administer any medication to a student. An authorization form needs to be completed for all non-prescription lotions, diaper creams etc.

THE 5 R's (Five Rights) OF MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION Our staff have training on administering medication to children. The 5 R's training covers are: 1) The right medication, 2) the right patient, 3) the right dosage, 4) the right route and 5) the right time.

THE ILL CHILD

Keeping a careful watch on your child's health is a primary concern and we strictly follow MO State licensing guidelines. To help minimize the transmission of germs, we follow strict hand washing, toileting and sanitation of toys and equipment. When a child is injured or becomes ill at school (or develops a temperature of 100 degrees or more) we will notify the parent or guardian. Your child will be made comfortable until you arrive. Your child may not come to school or remain in class if he/she has:

- 1) Temperature of 99 degrees. **He/she may not return to school the following day. He/she must be fever free for 24 hours without the aid of any medication.**
- 2) Conjunctivitis, an eye infection commonly referred to as "Pink Eye". The eye is generally red with some burning and there is a thick yellow drainage being secreted. **Two doses of antibiotic drops must be administered before he/she may return.**
- 3) Rashes that you cannot identify or have not been diagnosed by a physician.
- 4) Diarrhea (watery or greenish bowel movements that look different and are much more frequent than usual). **He/she must be free of diarrhea for 24 hours.**
- 5) Vomiting (more than once).
- 6) Severe cold with fever, sneezing and nose drainage.
- 7) If a child seems really sick without obvious reasons. In this case a child may look and act different. There may be unusual paleness, irritability, unusual tiredness or lack of interest.
- 8) A child must be kept at home with contagious disease. Some of these are: Mumps, Roseola, Measles or Chicken Pox (**children can return from chicken pox when all lesions have dried and crusted, approximately 7-10 days.**)
- 9) Children who have strep throat **may return after 48 hours** of antibiotic treatment.
- 10) If a child had head lice, scabies or ringworm, they **may return after treatment has been given.** Exposed ringworm must be covered with a band-aid.
- 11) If your child has been diagnosed with impetigo, **they may return 24 hours after treatment has been initiated.** Sores should be covered with a band-aid.

In addition, your child may need to go home, if your child is not able to participate fully in our program. We ask that you pick your child up within one hour of contacting you. Please help us protect your child and others by observing good health standards. Before returning to school a doctor or other health professional's approval may be requested. You will be notified if your child was exposed to a communicable disease and please notify us if you know your child has been exposed to a communicable disease.

NUTRITION AND BREAST FEEDING

Our goal is to help children develop flexible, healthy eating habits and promote meal times as an enjoyable experience. Our program supports breast feeding and we will help new moms appropriately store their breast milk. There are also several areas in our school for all moms to feed their baby. Bottles or other containers for breast milk need to be labeled and dated. If you are bottle feeding your baby, we provide baby formula and also encourage you to feed your baby here! As there are many requirements for properly feeding your baby, please talk with your classroom teacher for more specific information on both breast and bottle feeding. We work with a licensed dietician to help us plan balanced meals. Breakfast, lunch and snacks are served daily. All food is prepared, served, and stored in accordance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Child and Adult Care Food Program guidelines and are served "family style." The teachers sit with the children during at mealtime not only to enjoy a healthy meal, but to practice conversations with the children. All food is stored properly and maintained at the proper temperature. Any food or liquid over 110 degrees is kept out of the reach of children. Weekly menus will be posted in the classrooms. We will work with families whose children have special dietary needs and we will accommodate these needs whenever possible. We do not make special accommodations for children who are vegetarians, but there is plenty of options on each plate for a full meal. Families are welcome and encouraged to eat lunch with their children. We are a nut-free school and we do not serve grapes, raw carrots, popcorn and hard pretzels. Finally in the interest of preventing childhood obesity and to encourage healthy eating habits, we follow USDA portion sizes and we are very cautious of sugar, fat and sodium contents in our food program.

SAFE SLEEP POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Babies will always be put to sleep on their backs. Because babies sleeping on their sides are more likely to accidentally roll onto their stomach, the side position is not as safe as the back and is not recommended. We will require a physician's note for a non-back sleeper that explains why the baby should not use a back-sleeping position, how the child should be placed to sleep, and a time frame that the instructions are to be followed. When infants can easily turn from their stomachs to their backs and from their backs to their stomachs, they shall be initially placed on their backs, but shall be allowed to adopt whatever positions they prefer for sleep. Sleeping infants shall have a supervised nap period. The care giver shall check on the infant frequently (every 10 minutes or less) during napping or sleeping and shall remain in close proximity to the infant in order to hear and see them if they have difficulty during napping or when the awaken. Sound machines will not be used in the infant classrooms, and lights in the infant rooms remain on at all times. We use safety-approved cribs and firm mattresses certified for safety and keep cribs free of toys, stuffed animals, and extra bedding. Steps will be taken to keep infants from overheating by regulating the room temperature, avoiding excess bedding, and not over-dressing or over-wrapping the infant. Infants should be dressed appropriately for the environment, with no more than one (1) layer more than adult would wear to be comfortable in that environment. Sleep clothing, such as sleepers, sleep sacks, and wearable blankets, are good alternatives to blankets. Only one baby is allowed in each crib. All caregivers will receive in person or online training on infant safe sleep based on AAP safe sleep recommendations. This training must be completed within 30 days of employment or volunteering and will be completed every three years. We do not use wedges or infant positioners, since there's no evidence that they reduce the risk of SIDS. We have supervised "tummy time" for babies who are awake. This will help babies strengthen their muscles and develop normally.

SAFE SLEEP ENVIRONMENT:

1. Room temperature will be kept at no less than 68 degrees Fahrenheit and no more than 85 degrees Fahrenheit when measured two feet from the floor. Infants are supervised to ensure they are not overheated or chilled.
2. Infants' heads and face will not be covered during sleep. Infants' cribs will not have blankets or bedding hanging on the sides of the crib. **We may use sleep clothing (i.e. sleep sacks, sleepers) that is desired to keep an infant warm without the possible hazard of covering the head or face during sleep/nap time.**
3. No blankets, loose bedding, comforters, pillows, bumper pads, or any object that can increase the risk of entrapment, suffocation, or strangulation will be used in cribs, playpens, or other sleeping equipment.
4. Toys and stuffed animals will be removed from the crib when the infant is sleeping. **When indicated on the Infant and Toddler Feeding and Care Plan or with written parent consent, pacifiers will be allowed in infants' cribs while they sleep. The pacifier cannot have cords or attaching mechanisms.**
5. Only an individually-assigned safety-approved crib, portable crib, or playpen with a firm mattress and tight-fitting sheet will be used for infant napping or sleeping.
6. Sitting devices such as car safety seats, strollers, swings, infant carriers, infant slings, and other sitting devices will not be used for sleep/nap time. Infants who fall asleep anywhere other than a crib, portable crib, or playpen must be placed in the crib or playpen for the remainder of their sleep or nap time.
7. No person shall smoke or otherwise use tobacco products in any area of the child care facility during the period of time when children cared for under the license are present.
8. Home monitors or commercial devices marketed to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) shall not be used in place of supervision while children are napping and sleeping.
9. All parents/guardians of infants shall be informed of the facility's written Safe Sleep Policy at enrollment.
10. To promote healthy development, infants, who are awake will be given supervised "tummy time" for exercise and for play.

SAFETY

Nothing is more important to us than the safety of your child. Families, teachers and the Head of School must operate as a team to ensure the safety of all our children. Our doors remain locked and secured at all times. Families complete an Emergency Card and an Enrollment Form stating who is able to pick up a child. If a person other than a parent or guardian is sent to pick up your child, it is essential that the teacher or Head of School is certain of that person's identity before the child is released. A photo ID will be requested of anyone who a staff member does not know.

There are various outdoor climbing structures which are designed for active children. Each structure is recommended for use by a specific age group. Teachers will direct children's play so that everyone uses the appropriate equipment in a safe way. Toys in the classroom are inspected for safety. We do not use "walkers" in the classrooms. We ask families to dress their children for active play. Select shoes for your child that will provide enough security or protection when children are climbing and jumping. Small injuries are reported to the family through the use of an Incident Form.

We are also concerned with the environmental safety of our children and staff and work with outside entities to ensure the safety of our building. An Evacuation and Emergency plan has been written and reviewed by

staff. It is available for you to read, too. If we need to evacuate, the children will be transported to Nestle Purina Child Care.

SANITATION AND CLEANING

Staff are responsible for keeping the classrooms and follow “Cleaning and Sanitizing” as outlined by the MO Department of Health. Teachers clean and sanitizing all of the toys and once a toy is put in a child’s mouth, it is transferred to a “to be cleaned basket.” Cot sheets are cleaned at least once each week. Blankets are sent home at the end of the week to be cleaned by families. All soiled clothes must be sent home as this is a sanitation rule. We are particularly cautious of keeping the rooms sanitized and allergen free. An outside company comes in every night to do a thorough cleaning. We use ventilation and proper sanitation versus chemicals or aerosols. The cleaning company uses a “health based cleaning system.”

SIGHT AND SOUND

Teachers supervise infants and toddlers by sight and sound at all times. Teachers supervise preschoolers by sight and sound, as well, but preschoolers may be out of the range of vision for short periods of time (walking to the food cart etc.). We may use monitors to augment listening for the babies, but our rooms are designed so that we can hear and see the babies throughout the day. Teachers do position themselves so that can and hear see sleeping babies when other babies are awake.

SUNSCREEN and INSECT REPELLANT

In order to keep our children safe from the sun, please dress your child in sun protective clothing and provide either sunscreen or sun block with UVB and UVA protection of SPF 15 or higher. Appropriate sunscreen/sun block will be applied to the skin with written parental permission. Our playgrounds have shade structures and natural shade so the children can play outside regularly. When insect repellants are needed, only those containing DEET are to be used and only on children older than two months. Written parental permission will be needed. Forms are provided!

PROGRAM INFORMATION

ACCREDITATION

We are accredited with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). There are 10 standards and literally hundreds of criteria that are documented. Our accreditation is reviewed yearly.

ARRIVING ON YOUR FIRST DAY

Before your first day, you will be invited to come into the classroom so you and your child can get to know the teachers and meet their classmates. If you so desire, you can visit several times! You will be given all of the paperwork ahead of time to familiarize yourself with our program. You are welcome to stay as long as you would like, but when you leave, it is best to give a big hug and then go! Feel free to call to check in on your child and we will update you, too, through a phone call or email.

CELEBRATIONS

We value the diversity that our families bring to our school along with their traditions and celebrations. Responses to the Child Development History form included in your initial packet will help us plan with your family. We also encourage you to talk with the teachers to make sure that we incorporate family traditions in our program. Please remember, not all families celebrate the same holidays and we will be respectful of each family. We know that birthdays are an important celebration for many families. You are welcome to bring in a small treat, but we ask that you refrain from bringing in balloons and candy. As a gentle reminder, all food

treats must be store bought. Please talk with your child's teachers to find out if any children have allergies. Food containing nuts or traces of nuts is prohibited. You are also welcome at school to celebrate with the classroom!

CLASSROOMS and ENVIRONMENTS

- Our Infant environments apply a child based curriculum where the teachers plan activities and lesson plans according to what the children want and need. Our teachers use their observation skills to assess each child and use that information in their lesson plans. The individual temperament and the diverse learning styles of each child play a significant piece of daily planning may be modified for individualize learning. Many areas of development (language, gross and fine motor, sensory, and creative arts) are encouraged throughout the day. We do not use baby walkers or swings. In addition, teachers are constantly communicating with families, so that both the parents and the teachers have an understanding of what is most appropriate and the best care practice for each child.
- Our Toddler and Two Year Old environments are an exciting time of exploration and independence! Our smaller ratios allow more time for the teacher to spend with each child. The focus is on social-emotional development as we believe that a nurturing environment encourages strong independence and self-esteem. Many areas of development (language, gross and fine motor, sensory, and creative arts) continue to be encouraged throughout the day. Self-help skills (using the toilet, washing hands, and using utensils for eating) are also promoted. We do not allow pull-ups at school as they tend to deter a child's use of the potty.
- Our pre-kindergarten classrooms utilize a play based curriculum that is developed around the student's interests and curiosities. The curriculum is designed to help the children be successful in kindergarten and beyond. We provide diverse learning opportunities that are addressed through games, real life activities and play. We promote autonomy and self-help skills by giving children opportunities for ownership of their environment. We are strong believers that exploration and discovery are paramount to helping a child be successful in their academics and personal endeavors.

COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

We use many forms of communication with our families including My Day sheets for infants and toddlers, Friday Updates emails, notes, phone calls, conferences and informal meetings. At this time, all information is given in English. If you prefer this information given to you in another language, please talk with the Head of School to see what arrangements can be made. Every effort will be made to communicate with you in your preferred language.

CURRICULUM

Based on constructivist practice, we have developed our own curriculum knowing that children learn best by acting on their world. Activities are age appropriate and meet the social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs of each individual child through their play. Teachers plan and guide developmentally appropriate activities that make sense for each child, are able to assess the learning that has taken place and then develops goals for each child. Our curriculum also aligns the Missouri Early Learning Standards with the NAEYC standards. A complete curriculum guide is available for all parents to view at the front desk.

DAILY SCHEDULE

A written schedule is posted in each classroom. The schedule includes time for active play, independent play, group times, free choice, toileting and hand washing, snack and meal times and rest times. The schedule for the children is based on their needs. Infants and toddlers, in particular, follow a schedule according to their feeding and napping requirements. We attempt to follow the schedule that parents have at home to be

consistent with family life. The children go outside based on weather conditions. They will not be exposed to extreme elements due to the extremely low wind chill and extremely heat indices.

DIVERSITY

We welcome all families to our school and value the differences that each family and child brings. Whether the differences are family structure, religion, race, culture or language, we will gather information with you so that we can specifically meet your needs. We also understand that our viewpoints do not always coincide. When there is a difference of opinion, please work with your child's classroom teacher first and then meet with the Head of School, if you have additional comments or questions. We want you to feel comfortable in all areas of our programming. We also value the common goal that similarities can develop. We look forward to getting to know each family and working together.

ENRICHMENT

We believe it is important to offer additional learning opportunities to expand individual learning. Because they are at our school, it is also convenient for parents! Extra-curricular activities are available at an additional cost (see special activities enrollment form). Gymnastics and dance are our current selections. These activities are based on the age and interests of each child.

GUIDANCE AND SELF CONTROL

Our philosophy on guidance (discipline) includes adults taking action by helping children change unwanted behavior by identifying and reinforcing types of acceptable behavior. Our teachers are trained in working with young children and helping them learn self-control. Actions include redirection, being proactive in setting up the environment, and having a child sit with the teacher. If typical strategies do not work, we will set up a time to meet with the families to come up with a personalized behavior plan.

If this does not work, we will contact outside agencies to offer some additional resources.

Biting is typical behavior for toddlers, two year olds and some preschoolers. A child may bite because of lack of language, exploration, teething and learning self-control. Some solutions are shadowing the child, providing a "biting necklace" or teething toy. Both the families of the "biter" and "bitee" will receive incident reports, without the names of the children. If biting becomes too frequent, we will seek assistance with our educational consultants and write a "biting plan." Biting can be an emotionally charged situation so we encourage families to work with their classroom teacher.

All staff are prohibited from using any physical punishments, psychological abuse, coercion, threats, derogatory remarks and/or withholding food as a form of discipline.

INCLUSION

Some of our children have special needs and we work with their therapists to incorporate their specific goals from their Individual Family Service Plans or Individualized Education Plans into our activities and lesson plans. We also work with therapists for appropriate assessment plans. Through our assessments, we are often able to notice that a child might have a delay. We will collaborate with each family to find some different activities or strategies. If necessary, we will guide each family to some outside resources to make further decisions. We have a wonderful relationship with many community organizations and can help families navigate the system.

LESSON PLANS

The teachers in each classroom write a lesson plan specific to the children in their classroom. Sometimes it is based on a theme, but it always is based on developmental goals for the children. These goals come from observations that the teachers write on each child and then are incorporated into the weekly lesson plan.

PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT OF CHILDREN

Observations, assessments, screenings and developmental checklists are an integral component of our program. It is a way for us to periodically collect information so that we can identify your child's interests as well as their needs. In addition, as we learn about your child we can plan appropriately for them. Some form of assessment will be completed on each child within three months of their entry into our program.

Assessments gathered are kept in the child's file. All information is confidential and will only be shared with family members and teachers in the classroom. With parent's permission, it may be shared with others.

There are several assessment tools that we use:

- The primary teacher will gather information about your child and compile this information into an individual portfolio. Each teacher has their own style, but the portfolios will include photographs, art work, observations and additional assessments.
- Anecdotal Records on children are done about once a month. They cover all areas of development: cognitive skills, language development, social/emotional development, approaches to learning and physical/health development)
- The DENVER II is an assessment appropriate for children under 3 years of age. It shows developmental benchmarks for different age groups.
- The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is another monitoring tool, particularly useful for social/emotional development. The ASQ can be used from 4 months to 5 years of age. They are typically done about twice each year. The ASQ is completed both by parents and teachers so it is a great way to compare notes!

Your child's teacher will work with you so that you can choose the best assessment for your child's needs. We offer conferences twice each year and additional ones as necessary or requested by parents. Conferences are a great way to communicate the information from the assessments to you verbally and you will receive a copy of any assessment completed. Also, you will be able to talk about your child's development and bring up any concerns or share other areas of growth that you have seen.

If we discover that additional referrals or more standardized assessments are necessary for your child, we will guide you to additional resources and professionals. If your child has special needs, we will work with your child's therapists and use their assessments. As necessary, we will incorporate their goals into your child's day.

Please remember that our assessments are not only valuable for each child, but they help to improve our program overall. If you have additional needs (i.e. an assessment in a different language), please talk with your child's teacher. We value working with you and making our program the best possible place for all of our children and their families.

PRACTICUM STUDENTS

We welcome practicum students and student teachers from area colleges and universities, including St. Louis University, Fontbonne U., Maryville U and St. Louis Community College. Our students are screened and have all of the necessary immunizations. They can count in ratios, but we usually use them as extra hands!

If a student is doing an observation on your child, the student will notify you ahead of time and will ask you for a signed permission slip.

PRIMARY CARE

The bond between each child and their teacher is of paramount importance to us. The teachers are assigned to specific classrooms. All of the teachers will know your child, but each child will have one teacher who is responsible for documentation, conferences etc. In addition, our "floaters" know each child. They, too, are assigned to a classroom. With primary care, one important piece is that the teacher works closely with each

parent so that the parent's wishes and goals can be achieved. The parent is the ultimate decision maker in their child's development and we are here to support YOU!

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A key component of our program is the social and emotional development of each infant and child. Many of our teachers have participated in the SEC (Social Emotional Competency) project through one of our partners, Child Day Care Association. All teachers receive additional training so that we can meet the needs of your children.

Throughout each day, the teachers plan and carry out daily activities with the aim of increasing your child's happiness and well-being and minimizing distress. Nevertheless, children do get sad which is often more difficult for the parent than the child! All children will be comforted by the teachers. At times, teachers will respond to crying by noticing it, considering why they are crying and reacting to its meaning. The teacher may wait for a time to give the child an opportunity to calm down and then respond accordingly.

Teachers encourage pro-social behavior by:

1. Anticipating needs before they occur by knowing the child's schedule.
2. Setting up a safe, interesting environment that is not overly stimulating or too restricting.
3. Helping children learn to socialize, interact and explore
4. Ensuring that your child's needs for good nutrition and rest are met.
5. Comforting the child by rocking, singing or holding and having calm conversations.

TRANSITIONS

We actively work to minimize transitions for children by keeping the children with their teachers for at least nine months and usually for longer periods of time. Children are assigned to one classroom and stay with their teachers for the day. When it is time for a move to another classroom, things are in place to ensure a positive experience for the child and you!

Transition Guidelines: Many factors are considered before a child transitions to the next program. One determining factor is whether or not a child is developmentally ready. Another factor is the child's age. Infants transition to the toddler room when they are walking which is usually between the ages of 12 to 15 months old. Toddlers can transition to the two year old room on their two-year-old birthday. Twos and threes transition to the Dolphin Room when they are developmentally ready and to the All Star Room sometime prior to leaving for kindergarten. One factor is whether or not there is room, but our primary concern is when a child is ready for the next step.

Transition Steps : The Head of School, classroom teachers and parents decide together when your child will transition. Once the decision is made the classroom teacher and/or the Program Coordinator will contact the parents to set up a conference *prior* to the scheduled transition date. This is an informal meeting where the parents can meet the new primary caregiver of their child, go over goals and ask any questions about their child's new room and to make the transition as smooth as possible for their child. An individual plan will be written for each child, but it includes a progressive visiting time each day to the new classroom.

If a parent wants their child to transition earlier than what the recommended schedule suggests, please contact the Head of School.

Transition to Kindergarten: Transitioning to kindergarten can be overwhelming for both the child and the parent. Our pre-k classroom prepares the children in many ways for this transition. We offer a Graduation each spring which signals this "rite of passage." We also have resources on hand to guide families in enrollment procedures, kindergarten screenings and Open Houses for both private and public schools in the greater St. Louis area.

USE OF TELEVISION AND OTHER MEDIAS

We typically do not use a television at our school. On occasion, the preschool might watch a short video that relates to a project that is related to a class lesson. Computers are in the preschool rooms and all use is monitored by the teachers and relates to developmentally appropriate programming. One short movie is viewed on Parents Night Out.

VISITING ANIMALS AND OUR FISH!

Only animals or pets that are approved by Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Child Care may visit the classrooms. Reptiles are not allowed to visit due to the risk of salmonella infection. Please ask your classroom teacher if you can arrange a visit bearing in mind that there may be some children in the room who have allergies. The teachers will supervise all interactions with the visiting pet and will instruct the children on safe behavior around animals. The children must wash their hands after contact with any animal. Our aquarium in the front entry is available for all staff and visitors to enjoy. Our fish are maintained by an outside source.

VOLUNTEERS

We appreciate having volunteers at our school. They provide extra hands for the teachers and additional play interactions with the children. Many volunteers come to us from area high schools and colleges and universities. Volunteers go through an initial orientation program. Long term volunteers must submit a negative TB test and submit appropriate documentation with the Missouri Child Care Registry. Volunteers are not counted in our ratios and are not left alone with children at any time.

WALKING FIELD TRIPS/ENRICHMENT WITHIN OUR SCHOOL

Children of all ages enjoy walking trips in our neighborhood. The babies and toddlers use buggies and the older children walk. We do not transport children in vehicles. The older children are able to walk to Union Station and the City Garden. The older children will often times take the trolley! There are always at least two teachers on any walking trip and they always carry cell phones, first-aid supplies and emergency contact numbers. Other entities visit our school including a story teller from the St. Louis Public Library, police officers, postal workers and firemen.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT AND PROCEDURES

One of our best resources is YOU! We know that many of you lead busy lives, but we appreciate the relationship that we have each family.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

There are positions on the Board of Directors for family representatives. If you are interested in joining a committee, please contact Head of School for more information.

CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION

Families are encouraged to visit the classrooms at any time. You are always welcome for lunch, parties or to join our walking field trips. If you have particular talents, we would love to have you come and share them with the staff and children.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Comprised of family and board members, this group works to promote our school in the downtown community through advertising and various promotional events.

EDUCATION

From time to time we will be sponsoring speakers of interest to parents. Topic, time and place will be announced ahead of time.

DONATIONS

We always appreciate and welcome gently used toys and play equipment! If your child outgrows a toy or piece of equipment and you wish to donate it, you may qualify for a tax donation letter.

FUND-RAISING

Tuition does not cover the cost of all capital expenditures, so our families are expected to participate in two fund-raising projects each year. Different fund-raising events are planned throughout each year.

GRIEVANCES

If a parent has a concern regarding their child or the classroom, we encourage you to talk first with the classroom teachers. If you need further assistance, please contact the Head of School. If the concern is still not resolved, the parent may request a meeting with the President of the Board of Directors, Scott Thomas. His contact number is posted in the front entry way on our licensing certificate.

LENDING LIBRARIES

Families have access to lending books from our parent library. We also have additional resources available in the front entry and in the Head of School's office. We encourage families to borrow any books and we always welcome appropriate donations! The St. Louis Public Library also brings books to us each month.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

We value *your* input on our program. Each year we will gather information from you in either a Family Survey or a Program Evaluation. The results will guide us with further planning and enhancements to our program.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND RESOURCES

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

A comprehensive list of community resources is available in the Head of School's office, the Community Resource in the front lobby or the Parent Lending Library in the preschool wing. A few quick references are as follows:

- Division of Family Services, Missouri: (800) 392-1261
- Parental Stress Hotline (800) 367-2543
- Child Abuse Hotline (800) 392-3738. As mandated reporters, if any employee of Downtown Children's Center suspects either neglect or abuse, it will be reported.
- Kids in the Middle: A program to strengthen and support family relationships for families affected by divorce: 314-909-9922
- First Steps: Designed for infants to age 3 who have developmental delays or diagnosed conditions: 866-583-2392
- Nurses for Newborns: Provides services to babies who are born with medical problems, born to teen moms or mothers with other concerns: 544-3433 or www.nfnf.org
- WIC Nutrition: For Women, Infants and Children: 314-679-7900

HEALTH CARE RESOURCES

Our health care resources include a consulting pediatric practice and physician, the St. Louis County Department of Health, the Missouri State Licensing and Sanitation regulations, and the manuals Infection Control in Child Care Centers and Preschool and the American Academy of Pediatrics Red Book.

LICENSING

We are licensed with the State of Missouri and comply with all of their rules and regulations. Our certificate is posted in our entry along with information to contact our licensing representative. A copy of the procedures is available in the Head of School's office.

NAEYC ACCREDITATION

We are accredited with the National Association for the Education of Young Children. NAEYC also provides quality resources and support for our school.

NESTLE PURINA CHILD CARE

Although we are separate, we embrace our relationship with this center. We are able to work together and plan for the future of our youngest learners.

UNITED 4 CHILDREN

United 4 Children is a partner who gives technical assistance to teachers in the classroom. They offer quality in-service hours. Many of our teachers have participated in their Social Emotional Competency Project.

STAFF

LEADERSHIP

Our program is guided by the Board of Directors and Head of School. Leadership is provided by mentoring staff, providing opportunities for staff through education and leadership roles. Our Head of School is active in the neighboring community as well as the St. Louis early childhood community. In addition, our Head of School oversees the general operation of our sister school, Nestle Purina Child Care Center.

STAFF

Our staff consists of a Head of School, administrative assistant, 8 teaching teams, 2 substitutes, 2 assistants, and a cook. We are pleased that we have a low turnover rate with our staff as many staff have been with us over 10 years. To provide consistency for each classroom, staff are assigned to a classroom and when they are not at a school, we use our floaters. Staff work either 4 ten hour days or five 8 hour days. Background checks are completed on staff before they are hired and every year thereafter. New staff complete an orientation period. Staff also must have an annual negative reading with their TB test.

STAFF EVALUATIONS

Staff receive yearly evaluations and this guides our program for their own professional development as well as programming for our school.

STAFF LOUNGE

Staff take breaks according to their schedules and are always allowed bathroom breaks. We have a Staff Lounge devoted to just our staff so that they can take a break away from the children and their busy days.

STAFF QUALIFICATIONS

Staff vary in their educational qualifications and experiences and all are very qualified. As outlined by NAEYC, our Head of School meets administrator qualifications and teachers meet teacher qualifications. We make

every effort to maintain staff with the cultural and racial characteristics of the families that we serve. Staff receive a minimum of 15 in-service hours each year, including Pediatric First Aid and CPR. We value our staff, embrace the diversity of each staff member and support them in their professional growth. New staff complete an orientation program. Staff are encouraged to receive additional early childhood education and we provide tuition assistance for them.

TEAM WORK

Working together as a team is important to the quality of our program. Staff have regular meetings either as a team to plan accordingly or with the entire staff. Fun activities are also planned just for staff to promote friendships within our school. Committees provide additional opportunities for teamwork. We also appreciate the efforts that many families afford us with their generous support for staff parties.

Acknowledgement of Receipt - Downtown Children's Center

Please read this handbook carefully and refer any questions you have to the Head of School.

After you have read this handbook, please complete this acknowledgement and return it to the Head of School on or before your child's first day.

I have read and fully understand the guidelines and procedures set forth by the Family Handbook, and have a copy of this handbook for my personal reference.

Primary Parent or Guardian Full Name (Please Print) _____

Childs Name(s) _____

Primary Parent/Guardian Signature _____

Date _____