

**Early Learning Center for Research and Practice**  
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**History**

The Early Learning Center first opened in 1927, as a Nursery School Program started in the Jessie B. Harris Home Economics Building. In the early 1930s a Nursery School Building at 1206 White Avenue was constructed. It was one of the first structures in the country designed and built specifically for the use of preschool children.

Eventually the program was named the University of Tennessee Child Development Laboratory. The day care program for preschoolers was begun at the Golf Range facility at 3700 Sutherland Avenue in 1966. The Infant Day Care program opened in 1968 and the Toddler Day Care program in 1981 at the Nursery School Building.

In the fall of 1982 the Nursery School (half-day) program was discontinued and all programs were converted to full-day childcare. After extensive renovations to the kitchen and food service areas the Infant and Preschool programs were located at 1206 White Avenue. The facility on Sutherland Avenue was also renovated so that it could adequately house the toddler program.

In 1983 the special education component was added to the Preschool program. The inclusion of children with special rights became a welcomed mission and goal of the program.

The program converted to a full-time 12 month schedule as an additional step to meet the needs of working parents in the fall of 1986. Also in 1986, the Foster Grandparent program, placing grandparents in the laboratory programs to work with children with special rights, was initiated. The special education component was expanded to include the Infant and Toddler programs in 1987.

In 1987 the program became the first child care program in Knoxville to receive accreditation from the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Also in 1987, the Cumberland Child Care Center was established as the first employer-sponsored early education center at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Cumberland Child Care Center began operations under the UTK Personnel Office. In 1989 the administration of the center was transferred to the Department of Child and Family Studies as a first step in the expansion of university childcare programs.

In 1991 the Cumberland Child Care Center was re-structured as one of the Child Development Laboratories' programs. This became the CDL's third site (White Avenue, Cumberland, and Golf Range), and a total of 99 children ranging in age from six weeks to five years were served.

In 2000, the Cumberland facility was closed and newly renovated space in the Laurel Avenue Student Apartments became the third Child Development Laboratories' site. An 8th classroom was opened to

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expand the number of children served to a total of 111. The programs were simultaneously restructured to create the Infant and Toddler Programs at Golf Range and Laurel Avenue, and the Preschool Program at White Avenue.

In July 2005, the Child Development Laboratories became the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center for Research and Practice. This change came from a desire to better reflect the diverse mission and goals of the program and the Department of Child & Family Studies.

In August 2006, the Early Learning Center for Research and Practice initiated a new Kindergarten program at the White Avenue location.

In July 2011 the Early Learning Center for Research and Practice closed the Golf Range facility and opened a new facility; Lake Avenue @ 21st Street. This facility serves two toddler classrooms and one preschool classroom.

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**Mission Statement**

The mission of the Early Learning Center for Research and Practice (ELC) is to foster scientific understanding of young children's development. Prominent features of the ELC mission are the investigation of **development in context**, the study of **children and families at risk**, and the generation and utilization of **informed practices**. The ELC accomplishes this mission through (a) interdisciplinary research, (b) academic programs for undergraduate and graduate students, (c) early education programs for young children, and (d) outreach, advocacy, and public policy.

*Interdisciplinary Research.* The ELC leads and supports interdisciplinary research initiatives that share the common purpose of making qualitative differences in the lives of children and families. To this end, projects are typically conducted in natural settings, which better ensures the findings are socially significant and readily applied by parents and professionals. Research is supported by university, state, federal, and private agencies and addresses a wide range of current and emerging issues relevant to contemporary society.

*University Academic Programs.* Theoretical principles and empirical findings guide the selection and implementation of informed practices that are showcased in ELC classrooms. Undergraduate and graduate students discover how theory and practice combine to contribute to a deeper and more useful understanding of development in context. Through a diversity of ELC experiences, students learn to value and engage in processes of critical inquiry and systematic research that challenge popular solutions to complex problems related to the welfare of children and families.

*Early Education Programs.* The ELC provides an exemplary, inclusive early care and education program for infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Children and families represent a wide diversity of racial, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. The program design assures a well-balanced curriculum that promotes the physical, emotional, social, creative, and cognitive development of young

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children. The curriculum is guided by a theoretical orientation, which posits that all children, regardless of their developmental dispositions, are active learners who construct increasingly more complex representations of the world, primarily through the processes of play.

*Outreach, Advocacy, and Public Policy.* The ELC serves as a bridge between the university and the broader community through its involvement in outreach, advocacy, and public policy. As new knowledge is generated about young children and families, it is shared with local, national and international constituencies of parents and professionals. The ELC also promotes university-community partnerships that facilitate the dissemination and utilization of resources in response to the needs of families and children, particularly those at risk. Because the ELC faculty, staff, and students generate and have access to science-based knowledge, they are in a unique position to advocate for children and families and influence public policy.

*In all these respects, the ELC strives to achieve not only its own mission, but also the missions espoused by the Department of Child and Family Studies and the University of Tennessee.*

**Philosophy Guiding the UT Early Learning Center for Research & Practice**

Since the mission of the ELC is a multi-faceted one, embracing university students and children, our philosophy must be equally encompassing. Therefore, we consider the following statements as the guide and focus of our experiences with both children and adults.

We believe that children and adults are:

- Capable, competent, rich and powerful in ideas and abilities
- Uniquely individual, yet similar to others, in thinking and development
- Active organizers of experience and thoughts
- Interested in learning primarily through meaningful human relationships
- Constantly constructing and re-constructing their own theories and understandings of how the world works

Our overall goals focus our efforts on providing learning opportunities that can enable the individual to work towards developing the competencies needed to function successfully and meaningfully in a changing world.

We aim to help children and adults:

- Trust, respect, and invest emotionally in meaningful personal relationships
- Acquire and use effective and satisfying problem-finding and problem-solving skills and strategies
- Be curious about the natural and social world and derive skill and pleasure from learning-exploring and developing ideas, theories and competencies

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- Understand and organize information about their physical, social and intellectual environment
- Develop abilities and interests in representing their ideas in many varied and complex ways, using many media (languages)
- Develop the ability to act and think independently with assurance and confidence in their ideas, convictions, abilities, and strengths
- Develop effective means of self-regulation and control, which will enable them to learn, think and act with feelings of self-worth and self-confidence
- Skillfully communicate ideas and feelings

We hope to achieve these goals by:

- Providing children and adults with open-ended, process-oriented activities and investigations that acknowledge and value play as the preferred medium of learning for young children and beneficial to adults
- Providing adequate amounts of time for exploration, skill building, and thinking
- Having an intellectually complex and rigorous curriculum filled with possibilities
- Using a variety of quality materials designed to promote active exploration and challenges
- Expecting learners to direct and construct their own learning with the assistance of perceptive, reassuring, and responsive teachers
- Offering a variety of solitary, small, and large group settings within carefully prepared indoor/outdoor environments that enables children and adults to learn from each other
- Providing many opportunities to explore and develop competence in the use of representational media (art, construction, music, movement, literacy, play)
- Providing a developmentally appropriate foundation in the content areas of math, literacy, science, and social studies

In order to successfully accomplish this mission, we expect to create a social and physical environment, in which teachers can:

- Develop strong, collaborative and empowering relationships with each other, children, and their families based upon mutual respect
- Observe children's behavior to determine interests and emerging understandings as the basis of curriculum planning
- Act as a facilitator for learning by observing, questioning, modeling for, provoking and reinforcing children's efforts, interests and ideas
- Encourage children to use each other as facilitators of learning and a source of important social relationships
- Structure aesthetically pleasing and intellectually rich environments that meet children's needs, capitalize on their interests, and guide their behavior
- Provide curriculum possibilities that utilize creative and enticing materials and concepts for children to explore and become skilled at using
- Document the actions, thoughts, theories, and strategies used by both children and adults as they attempt to make sense of their environments and ideas
- Use documentation and reflection as collaborative tools for curriculum development

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- Encourage the use of problem solving skills in all situations including social conflict and relationship building
- Enjoy and have passion for their valued work with children, families and each other.

**Curriculum**

The following are components of the curriculum used within the Early Learning Center.

**Resources from which we draw:**

*Early Childhood Curriculum: A Creative Play Model by Catron & Allen* provides the roots from which our curriculum and programming has grown and matured.

*Developmentally Appropriate Practices* with its focus on age and individual appropriateness provides boundaries for us as we navigate the immense possibilities for curriculum.

*Social Constructivist beliefs* - how children construct their own understandings of their world through the relationships they form with peers, adults, and materials - permeate our approach.

The exceptional *practices and principles of the Reggio Emilia* approach continually inspire us with possibilities for children's learning.

*The Creative Curriculum, by Teaching Strategies*, provides resources to support preschool teachers' efforts to engage children in activities that are both meaningful and connected to early learning developmental standards.

**Principles of the Early Learning Center curriculum:**

- Central to our approach is an idea borrowed from the Reggio Emilia approach – all children are competent, capable, and ready to learn, having rich & powerful ideas;
- Observation of children - their skills & interests - is the foundation from which our curriculum emerges;
- Analysis of our observations of children provides the road map that shows us the direction to go when planning curriculum;
- Thorough knowledge of child development in the following areas – emotional well-being, socialization, communication, cognition, perceptual motor, and self-help provides detail for what children need to master and at what ages;
- Noticing and appreciating the uniqueness of each child – ability, personality, temperament, style – keeps us focused on providing a range of possibilities for children;
- Play is the vehicle through which young children can learn most effectively;
- Challenging learning opportunities in the major content areas – literacy, math, science, music & art ensure create a foundation for later formal education;

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**What do the classroom and the day look like?**

- Learning centers such as drawing & writing, blocks, puzzles & games, books, housekeeping, dramatic play, science, discovery, painting and art are found in each toddler & preschool classroom.
- A wide variety of challenging, enticing, creative materials are available in each of the learning centers for children to examine, manipulate, and construct with,
- Investigations
- Children are free to choose the areas and materials they would like to work on and may move independently around the classroom, however, there are times during the day when only one choice exists,
- Images of children studying & gaining understanding of their world and examples of their work are carefully presented for viewing & reflection,
- The day includes a balance – individual, small & large group activities, quiet/active experiences, indoor/outdoor, child initiated & teacher initiated activities, focused investigative work, physical care and routines,
- Routines such as lunch & snack times, diapering & toileting, clean-up, rest time, and transitions indoors & outdoors are considered opportunities for learning,

**Children in the Early Learning Center:**

- Form a community living and working with others in their classroom group,
- Actively engage in situations which require them to think, plan, experiment, analyze, problem solve, and reflect,
- Creatively use words, materials, & art supplies to construct, express, and represent their ideas,
- Learn about, interact with, and experience children & adults who are different from them,
- Develop skills and dispositions for learning – questioning, study, hypothesis-building, and analysis

**Child Assessments and Monitoring System**

**Assessment: Our goal is to provide an authentic picture of each child's progress on a regular basis from which to understand children's development and learning and to build meaningful curriculum. Our assessment is on-going, dynamic, and linked to curriculum. The teachers in each class work together to collect, analyze, and communicate data about each child's development.** Knowledge of each child's interests, abilities, strengths, and levels of development is a critical link in our ability to set goals for each child and to plan effective learning experiences for children. Assessment of children is conducted on an on-going basis by all staff members.

In general, this assessment can include:

1. Regular classroom observations made of each child on an on-going basis
2. Videotapes, photographs, and anecdotal notes

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3. Samples of children's work: artwork, constructed projects, conversations
4. Information gathered from parents of what is seen at home
5. Checklists, skill acquisition lists, and individual goal setting
6. Additional assessments as necessitated by the child's developmental progress or by specific approved research projects.

**Monitoring: As part of our academic mission, graduate students and senior practica students are assigned a specific group of children to assess and monitor on a semester basis.**

Monitoring teacher responsibilities include:

1. Closely observe the child's overall learning, growth, and development
2. Gather and compile anecdotal records, observations, samples of work, conversations
3. Collaborate with other classroom teachers to interpret observations of children
4. Conduct regularly scheduled parent conferences with the child's parents (at least one per year and as needed)
5. Help set individual goals and plan program activities appropriate for each child
6. Make every effort to see that parents receive day-to-day information on their child's experiences in the program
7. Review the child's folder to be sure it is complete and up-to-date
8. Bring any problem or concern regarding the child's development to the attention of other ELC teaching staff

**To support our efforts to accomplish these goals, we use the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment system, which provides tools for collecting, analyzing, and communicating data about each child's development.**

**Parents may request a conference at any time. It is not necessary to wait for an end of the semester assessment conference.**

### **Classroom Management and Guidance Techniques**

**Goal:** Help children develop social skills they can use throughout their lives.

**Understanding and Preventing Challenging Behaviors:**

Establish strong, supportive, caring relationships with each child

Provide a stimulating, challenging, age-appropriate learning environment – plenty of materials

Positive teacher attitudes and age-appropriate expectations of children's behavior,

**Establish a Climate of Trust**

*Build Positive Relationships*

*Demonstrate mutual respect*

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Take time for fun  
Provide encouragement  
Communicate love

*Communicate Effectively*

Be on child's level & have his/her attention  
Speak slowly, distinctly, clearly, and with patience  
Say what you mean – use words children understand  
Use I messages – speak with respect  
Listen to what children say to you – avoid being judgmental  
A touch provides emphasis  
Match your demeanor & nonverbal messages with your words

*Provide Clear Limits*

Here we talk, clean up, take care of materials & each other, inside we walk

*Prevent Inappropriate Behavior*

Anticipate trouble and give gentle reminders  
Ignore minor annoyances  
Praise effort and accomplishment  
Inject humor  
Offer choices

**Goals for children:**

Communication – use words instead of hurting actions to solve problems,  
Emotional Well-being – identify, express, & manage feelings/emotions, develop coping strategies  
Socialization – learn socially acceptable ways of solving problems, how to be part of a group,  
Cognition – analyze situations and solve problems, cause & effect

**Specific Techniques**

*Redirection* – offering other alternatives which may be more appealing or may meet the child's need in an appropriate way

*Logical Consequences* – provide solutions or outcomes to situations, helps children make responsible decisions

*Conflict Resolution* – process allows children to identify the problem, what caused it, how it made them feel, how others felt, and how to handle it more appropriately the next time.

*Cool Down/Alone Time*– demonstrates respect for the child's need to be alone, and allows for a "cool down and collect yourself" time

**Classroom Management:** The goals of the classroom management approach used in the Early Learning Centers are to teach children to evaluate and make choices, to take responsibility for their own actions, to recognize and express their feelings appropriately, and to be considerate and fair in solving problems with others. The classroom management program is based on the recognition that a stimulating, balanced, age-appropriate learning environment, an atmosphere of mutual respect and caring, and positive teacher attitudes and expectations will encourage cooperation and prevent most behavior problems. The following procedures are observed in the Lab programs to ensure the safety and welfare of all children and to help the teachers in each program be consistent in setting limits and using management techniques that convey the values of respect, trust, honest, and caring for others.

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**1) Establish a Climate of Trust**

Young children need the security of knowing that adults will set and maintain limits fairly and consistently. Children need to be able to trust adults to give help when help is needed and to be involved in what they are doing in order to protect them from losing control of their actions or emotions. Children need to be able to trust adults to empathize, to allow them to fail, to give encouragement when they are ready to try again, and to give recognitions when they succeed. A trusting climate is one in which there are humane and rational rules for guidance and supervision.

A trusting climate also is one that is open, honest, and caring—where feelings and relationships are important—where adults give clear messages, mean what they say, and keep the promises they make. Trust is demonstrated by both verbal and nonverbal communication.

**2) Build Positive Relationships.** The following four ingredients are essential for effective adult-child relationships (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1982, pgs. 11-12, 33, 45):

- a) **Demonstrate Mutual Respect:** Demonstrating respect for children involves seeing children as worthwhile persons, accepting children as they are, minimizing negative expectations and unreasonably high expectations, and communicating effectively. Treating children as we treat our friends creates positive relationships.
- b) **Take Time for Fun:** In the busy days adults and children spend together it is often easy to overlook this important aspect of building positive relationships. The most important ingredient of time together is quality. Take time for fun! Jointly select some activities both you and the children enjoy to ensure some special quality time together each day.
- c) **Provide Encouragement:** We must believe in children if they are to believe in themselves. Encouragement is the process of focusing on the assets and strengths of children to build their self-confidence and self-esteem. Adults who provide encouragement help children accept and learn from mistakes; they help children develop the courage to be imperfect and fully human.
- d) **Communicate love:** It is important to communicate to children often, through words and actions that they are cared for. To feel secure children must have significant adults to love and to be loved by. Express caring through words and through non-verbal signs such as pats, hugs, and kisses.

**3) Communicate Effectively.** The following are general guidelines for good communication to be followed when interacting with young children (Cherry, 1983, p. 30-31):

- a. Always be sure you have the attention of the child or children to whom you are speaking. Place yourself on the child's eye level.
- b. Say exactly what you mean using words that are appropriate to the age and understanding of the child. Enunciate clearly.
- c. Speak slowly and with patience. Modulate your voice so that it is low and gentle.
- d. Use "I" messages; let children know how you feel. Help them expand their vocabulary for expressing feelings by your own use of varied, accurate terms. (Avoid ambiguous words, such as "upset," which might really mean worried, frightened, or angry; or saying

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you feel “good” when you really mean enthusiastic, relaxed, or amused. Striving for accuracy conveys your own honesty as well as your respect for your listeners).

- e. Solicit verbal feedback and look for nonverbal feedback. Don’t go on until you’re sure that what you said was comprehended.
  - f. Listen to what children say to you. If you don’t understand them, help them to clarify it for you by repeating or rephrasing what they said. Don’t rush them. Give encouragement. Reserve your response until you are sure you understand their intent.
  - g. Don’t be judgmental. Don’t base your response on predetermined conclusions, but rather on what is said to you at the time.
  - h. Touching is an important form of communication, especially with children. A gentle touch while you are speaking adds emphasis and improves children’s ability to recall what you say.
  - i. Other types of nonverbal messages are also important. Your demeanor and expressions should match your words so you don’t give conflicting messages. Nod. Smile. Lean toward the child slightly. Look directly into his or her face. Attend—don’t let your attention wander.
  - j. Always speak to children with respect.
- 4) **Set Clear Limits.** With the cooperation and knowledge of the children, set explicit and understandable limits and rules for personal and group conduct, such as the following:
- a) Here we talk.
  - b) Inside the building we walk.
  - c) Here we replace our materials
  - d) Here we clean up.
  - e) Here we take care of each other.
- 5) **Prevent Inappropriate Behavior.** Positive alternatives to punitive discipline include the following strategies for preventing behavior problems in the classroom (Cherry, 1983, pgs. 73-98, 99-107, 117-121):
- a) *Anticipate Trouble:* Know individual children and their responses to situations, plan and arrange materials and activities to motivate productive behavior, minimize stress and promote trust and cooperation, and be alert to changes in the emotional environment.
  - b) *Give Gentle Reminders:* Use short phrases as gentle reminders (example: Inside we walk). Gentle reminders are never sarcastic or demeaning. Not all gentle reminders need to be spoken. Some effective nonverbal techniques for giving gentle reminders are:
    - a. Nodding your head,
    - b. Catching a child’s eye from across the room,
    - c. Smiling as you gently shake your head,
    - d. Touching gently on the shoulder
  - c) *Ignore Minor Annoyances:* Deliberately ignoring minor annoyances and misbehaviors (examples: pleading, crying, tantruming) means not giving any reinforcement. That means:
    - You don’t say anything to the child,
    - You don’t look at the child,

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- You don't display any emotional reaction to what the child is doing,
- All adults present cooperate in ignoring the behavior,
- You are careful to give the child praise and acknowledgement during periods of acceptable behavior.

- d) *Praise Effort and Accomplishment*: Pay attention when children are behaving appropriately, doing something difficult, or helping another child. Verbal praise should be sincere and given in as few words as possible. To be meaningful, praise should not be overused. To express nonverbal praise:
  - Smile approval at a child,
  - Nod approval at a child,
  - Give a squeeze, a hug, or a gentle pat on the shoulder.
- e) *Inject Humor*: A cheerful attitude, lighthearted phrases, and controlled humor can often alleviate a tense situation. Children flourish in an atmosphere that allows laughter, joy, and a little silliness. Gentle humor can go a long way to helping adults and children cope with stressful days.
- f) *Offer Choices*: In order to help young children develop decision-making skills they need to have opportunities to make choices about things which affect only them (examples: which story to read, whether to point, play with dolls, or build with blocks). Whenever possible, offer children small, simple choices. It is just as important to help children recognize that there are times when you can't give them choices. Be clear and explicit in telling children when there can be no choice and the reason for not giving a choice.

- 6) **Logical Consequences**. Logical consequences are based on the recognition of mutual equality, mutual respect, and order in the classroom and can help children develop self-discipline. Natural consequences are based on the natural flow of events and are those which take place without adult intervention (example: after tipping the tricycle over—"When you make a fast turn with this tricycle, it tips over"). Logical consequences are structured and arranged by the teacher. Children must experience these consequences as being logical in nature. It is important that the adult verbalize and clarify the logical consequences of children's behavior (example: after spilling another child's glue during an art activity—"You can share your glue with Betsy since she doesn't have any now"). Consequences involve a learning process for the child and distinguish between the deed and the doer (the child is accepted, but his or her behavior is not). The teacher must remain objective, calm, and be firm yet fair. The use of consequences allows the child to make responsible decisions and helps the teacher remain an educator rather than becoming involved in power struggles with the children.
- 7) **Conflict Resolution**. When conflict occurs, children and adults need to know how to resolve it peacefully and without displaying negative behaviors. Conflict resolution is an opportunity for the children involved to evaluate what caused the disagreement and to figure out an alternative for the next time the same or a similar situation arises; discussing the situation is a means of

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helping children learn to verbalize their feelings and solve their own problems with the support of one another and an adult (Cherry, 1983, p. 148).

“Teaching children to describe their own emotions and motives, to listen empathetically to what others have to say and to find common ground on which differences can be resolved are among the most important skills teachers can impart.” (Cherry, 1983, p. 147).

In a conflict situation, encourage children to (Cherry, 1983, p. 160):

- a. State what they think happened.
- b. Listen to what you think happened.
- c. State what they intended to accomplish by their actions.
- d. State how they feel.
- e. Listen to how you felt.
- f. State how they think others might have felt.
- g. Decide on an alternative behavior to use in the future that would accomplish their intent by more acceptable means.

Prompt and model for children to help them learn to substitute discussions for conflict.

Suggested prompts (Cherry, 1983, p. 152):

“Tell him. Tell him with words.”

“Talk to each other. Tell what happened. Tell how you feel.”

“Listen to each other.”

“Make a plan for what you can do the next time something similar happens.”

Gradually, children will carry on discussions and resolve conflicts with less and less help.

### **Mealtimes and Food Program**

Children in our programs are served a nutritious lunch as well as mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks. Children in the infant program are fed on demand; schedules are established gradually over the year. Both centers have full service kitchens and meals and snacks are prepared on site. Menus are posted on the ELC website

The food service program is administered by chief cook, George Lovell. The chief cook prepares menus, procures food and supplies, coordinates and assists in the preparation and distribution of food, supervises on-site cooks, oversees the professional development and training of all kitchen staff, and ensures that each cook/kitchen maintains TN Health Department, TN DOE licensing requirements, and OSHA standards. All food service related requests, suggestions, and concerns are directed to the chief cook. Each site has a full-time cook—Brenda Houser at White Avenue and Arlene Glanton at Lake & 21<sup>st</sup>.

*ELC Program Philosophies for Meal Time*

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**Honoring Competence**

- Mealtimes offer many opportunities for us to respect the growing competence and independence of children. Allowing children to choose where to sit gives them the opportunity to interact and develop relationships with multiple children; asking children's permission to place a food choice on their plate signals respect for their emerging preferences; facilitating children's ability to serve their own food honors their desire to be treated as competent and capable; providing the appropriate utensil/bowl/plate for the foods served signals our understanding of their rights as competent diners.

**Building Relationships**

- Children build relationships with food just as they do with peers, adults, and their environment. They may not like or even want to try a new food the first few times it is introduced, but it is important to remember that every time the child sees and smells and vicariously experiences that food they are building a relationship with it. For many children the visual relationship must be well established before they are comfortable having the food on their plate or tasting it.

**Offering vs. Forcing**

- Children must be offered each food that is available at meal time; however, they do not have to accept every food. For example, if a child is offered carrots and declines the teacher should not put carrots on the child's plate. Instead, the teacher may say, "Okay. I am going to place the bowl of carrots next to you in case you change your mind." We must respect the child's choice.

**OUTDOOR CLASSROOM PLAY**

**Playscapes:** Outdoor spaces at the ELC are designed to serve as extensions of our classrooms and curriculum. We are actively transitioning our outdoor spaces to natural playscapes, increasing children's exposure to natural materials and a variety of plant life, and providing multiple avenues for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. The playscapes feature varying natural surfaces that include grass, wood mulch, packed dirt, tree cookie pathways, and stationary boulders. There are areas of loosened dirt, sand, and gravel. Natural loose parts are available in abundance, such as small tree trunk sections, small branches, hollow tree sections, pieces of bark, natural wood blocks, and smooth stones available for the children's use. Other materials are introduced as available throughout the changing seasons, including collections of pumpkins and gourds, leaves, pods, and seeds.

Children need chances to move in big ways, to think and create play opportunities, to breathe open air. In natural outdoor classrooms these are inherent possibilities. Physical challenge, motor stimulation,

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coordination, balance, strength, risk taking, divergent thinking, imagination, resourcefulness, social responsibility, caretaking, compassion, negotiation, collaboration, reasoning, spatial awareness, kinesiology, mathematical thinking, biological understanding, physical knowledge—the experiences and understandings available from the outdoor classroom are vast and varied; the freedom of play unequalled. We consider these experiences a right of childhood, and our responsibility to ensure them for every child at the Early Learning Center.

**Weather:** Children in our programs spend time in outdoor play each day – even in very cold and hot weather. A daily responsibility of ELC teaching staff is to assess the many factors that must be considered in providing safe outdoor play opportunities for young children. Our general rule is to provide extended outdoor play opportunities when the temperature range is between thirty-two (32) degrees and ninety-five (95) degrees Fahrenheit after adjusting for wind chill and heat index. Because we are committed to natural play experiences and consider these experiences a vital part of curriculum, we will also provide shortened outdoor play when the combination of temperature and wind chill or heat index is between twenty (20) and one hundred (100) degrees Fahrenheit.

Children will participate in outdoor water play if the temperature is eighty (80) degrees Fahrenheit or above. This will include opportunities to play in the rain and go for rainy day walks and stroller rides if no storm activity is present.

**Appropriate Clothing:** Adjusting to changing weather temperatures and conditions will necessitate a variety of clothing weights and layers for young children. Be sure to provide appropriate selections—lightweight clothing for warm weather; socks, hats, mittens, jackets and coats for cold weather; rain boots and rain jackets for wet conditions—for your child each day.

Our classrooms—indoor and outdoor—provide a wealth of hands-on play opportunities with natural materials, and children will engage in various messy experiences throughout the day. It is important that children’s clothing not interfere with their ability to have full, rich experiences in our programs. Please dress your child for active and messy play, in clothing that you understand may be potentially stained or damaged. You will also need to label and provide multiple changes of clothing to be kept at the center so your child can be changed into his or her own clean clothing as necessary. Teachers will assist children in changing out of clothing that is wet, messy, or very dirty.

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**No Game Playing or Bargaining**

- Children should not be tricked into eating. For example, initiating a game during lunch by saying, “Who can drink all of their milk before I count to 10?” is not an acceptable way to encourage eating. Likewise we do not want to bargain for children’s food consumption. Few can be expected to grow to love broccoli by being forced to eat some before they can have more peaches.

**Healthy Encouragement and Modeling**

- Meal times are a great time to encourage and model trying new foods and the importance of healthy choices. For example, a teacher may say “I have never eaten parmesan tilapia before, but I am going to try it,” or “Green beans are not my favorite vegetable, but I know that they are good for my body so I am going to eat a few.” Talking about the relationships that we have with foods encourages children to explore their relationships with foods in a positive way.

**Meal Times are Relaxed and Conversational**

- Meal times should be a time of conversation and enjoyment. In our culture sitting down for a meal with your family or a group of friends is an important time of the day. We share stories about our lives and strengthen our relationships. Modeling this behavior during meal times teaches children about our cultural practices. It also shows the children that we are interested in their lives and the communities, practices, and events they experience.

**Overview of Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement is a vital, enriching, and necessary component of any good early childhood education program for young children. Parent support, participation, involvement, and ideas are desired, needed, and valued in our programs. We search for ways to honor parents and the variety of ways they contribute to our programs and to their child’s education.

**Our goals:**

1. Welcome all parents and family members into our centers and help them experience our environments as warm, inviting spaces for children and adults alike.
2. Provide many avenues and opportunities for parents to be a part of the child’s early childhood education and to work with us to improve our programs.
3. Draw upon parents’ expertise as their child’s first teacher and collaborate with parents to provide the best early learning experience for each child.
4. Create a sense of community among parents, teachers, and children.
5. Keep channels of communication open among parents, teachers, and program administration in order to build positive relationships.

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6. View parents as resources and ask for their support, participation, and input into our educational programming.

**Opportunities for Involvement:**

*Communication-* Daily conversations, parent conferences (Pre-enrollment, assessment, other), bulletin boards, classroom charts and journals, documentation, parent advisory committees, informal discussions with teachers and staff, newsletters, listservs, memos

*Participation-* Field trips, walks, assisting in the classroom, sharing family holidays/traditions and special talents, visiting the program, attending parent meetings, participating in committees, attending events, and planning/organizing special events and projects.

*Resource-* sharing professional expertise: medical, legal, technical, musical, educational, etc..., procurement of supplies and materials, arranging opportunities for children (fieldtrips to workplaces, zoo mobile, your farm, etc...), generation of ideas, recommending our program to others.

**UT Principles of Civility and Community**

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville affirms the value of each member of the university community and recommends that all UTK community members adhere to the following Principles of Civility and Community.

**1) Inclusivity**

We are welcoming to all and hostile to none. We foster an open community in which educational goals may be pursued.

**2) Diversity**

We respect the diverse backgrounds of all members of our community and welcome the opportunity for interpersonal and group interactions.

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### 3) Dialogue

We value and encourage, and facilitate free exchange of diverse ideas and points-of-view along with free speech and expression. However, we discourage uncivil speech or expression that infringes upon the ability of others to express themselves.

### 4) Collegiality

We value an environment that facilitates collegial relationships, encourages mutual understanding among diverse individuals and leads to addressing issues and differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility.

### 5) Respect

We believe that a person's views, ideas, and behavior best reflect the goals of the academic community when the dignity of each individual is respected and when members of the community are considerate of the feelings, circumstances, and individuality of others.

### 6) Knowledge

We encourage development of a civil community that values critical inquiry, debate, discovery, and innovation to better the world through teaching, research and service.

### 7) Integrity

We value academic honesty and integrity by all members of the academic community.

### 8) Learning

We believe that learning is an interpersonal growth experience that fosters appreciation for diversity.

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**9) Awareness**

We believe it is important to recognize how others view and relate to the community and recognize that we are part of a larger community.

**10) Response**

We encourage all community members to speak out against incidents involving bigotry and other types of incivility so the university can fulfill its responsibility of responding in a fair, timely and consistent fashion.

**Adopted Fall 2011**

Designed to work in concert with existing University of Tennessee, Knoxville codes of conduct including: [UTK Faculty Handbook](#) (Chapter 1.1 Nature and Purpose and Chapter 2.25 Professional Conduct); [UT Faculty and Staff Code of Conduct](#) (HR Policy HR0508); and [Hilltopics Student Handbook](#) (General Standards of Conduct).