

**Early Learning Center for Research and Practice
Parent Handbook
Policies**

Inclement Weather Policy

The University of Tennessee does not close except in the most severe weather conditions. In most cases, the Early Learning Center will comply with the University of Tennessee's decision and when extreme weather conditions necessitate an administrative closing, the Early Learning Center will be closed. Listen to local radio and television stations for announcements. Hours of operation will coincide with the University of Tennessee's class schedule. Therefore, we may be opening late, closing early, or be closed all day, depending on the University of Tennessee's decision.

In cases when we are concerned about the safety for children, families, and staff we reserve the right to make a decision to close the Early Learning Center even when the University of Tennessee remains open. We will contact parents by e-mail and text alert with this information. Families should notify their children's teachers to request a notification phone call in the event that we are opening late or closed. We also encourage parents to call us to check on our open/closed status if weather conditions are questionable.

Babysitting Disclaimer Policy

The Early Learning Center will take every reasonable precaution for the safety and well-being of children while they are in our care. The program's responsibility, however, does not extend to any private employment arranged between the parents of children in the program and any staff or students of the program. Any such private arrangements for care between families and students must take place outside of ELC grounds.

Late Pick Up Policy

The Early Learning Center opens at 7:30 a.m. and closes at 5:30 p.m.

Everyone needs to be out of the building by 5:30 each day!

Late Fee Policy

All Early Learning Center for Research and Practice programs close at 5:30 p.m. and all families must exit the building by this time. Parents are asked to schedule pick-up so they may have adequate time for conversation with staff and still be able to leave the center by 5:30 p.m. When you are late, you will be asked to sign a slip indicating the time you leave the program with your child. The late fees charged will be added to your next billing statement.

ELC Kindergarten families have the option of selecting between two tiers of aftercare: Tier 1 ending at 4:00 p.m. and Tier 2 ending at program closing at 5:30 p.m. Arriving past your child's scheduled pick-up time will result in a late fee. Program late fee assessment follows the same criteria regardless of the aftercare tier selected.

ELC late fee charges are as follows:

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- Arriving within the first ten minutes following closing or pick-up time: \$15.00 assessment
- Additional \$5.00 fees in 5-minute increments

Parents who receive more than three (3) late charges within a year or who establish a pattern of lateness will meet with a director to be counseled in an attempt to solve the late pick-up problem. If the problem cannot be resolved, parents will be asked to find a program with hours of operation more suitable to their needs.

Early Dismissal

On limited occasions before a holiday closing, the Early Learning Center will dismiss 2-3 hours early. Late fees will apply if children are not picked up by the announced closing time. These early dismissals are noted in the annual program calendar.

Extended Leave of Absence

The ELC cannot reimburse fees for days missed for illness, vacation, or unexpected temporary closure of the facility.

If a child needs to be out of the program for an extended period of time – more than a month consecutively - parents may choose to:

1. Continue to pay fees and hold the child's spot until s/he returns

or

2. Withdraw the child and attempt to re-enroll when the child returns. However, there is no guarantee that a spot will be available when the child wishes to re-enroll.

Withdrawal Procedure

When you are planning to withdraw a child from the Early Learning Center, please complete the Notice of Withdrawal form and return it to the ELC Business Office. We require 60 days' notice in order to make arrangements to enroll another child. This notice must be in writing.

Parents will be responsible for paying two months' tuition if 60 days' notice is not given.

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Attendance

Regular attendance is important for children to receive the maximum benefit from our programs. Children are expected to attend regularly and be present for the majority of the day. Furthermore, we strive to maintain a consistent positive relationship with your child. Group participation and attendance brings energy to our curriculum and the life of our classrooms!

In order for teachers to effectively plan for the day and to be aware of scheduling needs for each individual child, we request that parents notify the center by 9:30 a.m. when a child will be absent or arriving late. As is it is our goal to design procedures and routines that support each child's development, we will communicate with families when we observe that a particular routine or schedule is unsupportive or stressful for the child. ELC teachers will work with the child's family to develop a plan that more effectively meets the child's needs.

ELC Food Policy

In designing and implementing our food service program, we work within the parameters of national recommendations for child care food programs, collaborate with researchers from the university's department of nutrition, and attempt to incorporate (some of) the food preferences and customs of our diverse population of children. We regularly review and initiate improvements in our menus and intend to continue to pursue healthy and appetizing options for children, and to facilitate healthy relationships with food from children's earliest experiences.

- It is the ELC's expectation that all children fully participate in the food program. We do not pressure children to eat, but feel that research and established practice has substantiated the benefits of family-style meals in childcare settings. Times around the common table are priceless in terms of developmental opportunities. Teachers also highly value these times for their opportunities to observe and assess many of children's developmental skills.
- We ask that parents do not send foods/beverages from home with the request that teachers serve it in addition to or in lieu of the scheduled meal or snack. Due to the heightened supervision that is required at meal times, teachers cannot be distracted by attending to alternate foods that parents may have provided for their children in addition to the normal food service offerings. Alternate foods also create an unfair distraction for other children at the table.
- The ELC provides all children with a morning snack, lunch, and an afternoon snack. The morning snack provided a few hours prior to lunch. This snack is not designed to serve as a child's breakfast. Therefore, if your child arrives to the program after the scheduled snack, please make sure that he or she has had suitable nutrition prior to coming to the program. Breakfast items from home may not be brought into classrooms.
- If your child has a documented need for a medical substitution or restriction of diet, such as for a food allergy, or a widely held religious dietary requirement, we will work

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with you to develop a written food plan. We will try to make reasonable accommodations in providing alternatives for your child – working in concert with your family, your child’s health care provider and/or representative of your religious practices.

Rest Periods

The Tennessee Department of Human Services’ regulation stipulates that a child may not be in a group care program for more than five hours without an opportunity to nap. All children in the programs have an opportunity to rest for 1 to 2 hours each day. Each child is encouraged to sleep. Infants sleep as often as necessary and according to individual schedules.

Children who do not nap or who awaken early may look at books, play quietly with small toys, or work quietly at a table. Be prepared with quiet “ideas” for these children.

Diapering, Toileting, Potty Learning

Adults and children participate in many routines throughout the day. The routines, such as diapering and learning to use the toilet provide opportunities for meaningful interaction, learning opportunities, and contexts for communicating an ethic of care.

Diapering, toileting, and potty learning are clearly a regular part of daily life within programs serving very young children. These are all opportunities for learning as well as requirements of good care for children. Each of these routines is handled in a clean, safe, and developmentally appropriate manner. Please follow the specific guidelines set out in each classroom very carefully.

Teachers and parents of each individual child discuss the appropriate timing and process of diapering and toileting for the particular child. Parents supply diapers and wipes for their child until the child is toileting independently. Teachers alert parents when a child’s supply of diapers or wipes is getting low. Different classrooms have different methods for this.

Toileting: Children are typically ready for potty learning some time between the ages of 2 and 3½, but readiness can vary greatly. When a child is showing the appropriate toileting readiness signs, teachers and parents discuss the potty learning process. This discussion may be initiated by teachers or parents. A plan is created for each child and teachers & parents communicate frequently about a child’s progress.

Boys and girls share restrooms and toilet together within all the programs. This approach provides a very natural way for children to appropriately learn about physical differences in boys and girls.

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Arrival and Departure

Arrival

- The centers open at 7:30 am. Teachers should arrive in the centers 5-30 minutes before the children in order to prepare for the day. Parents should not enter the classroom before 7:30.
- Parents should accompany children inside the building to their classroom and deliver them to a teacher. We do not assume responsibility for a child who has not been turned over to a teacher.
- Parents must sign in upon arrival.

Departure

- Parents should inform the teacher when picking up a child. Also, parents should leave the classroom/playground with their child and accompany him/her out of the building at departure time.
- Please do not allow children to run ahead of parents and leave the building alone. The ELC teachers do not assume responsibility for children after they leave the classroom with parents.
- The Early Learning Centers do not assume responsibility or liability for any activities of children while they are with parents on the premises.
- Parents must sign out upon departure.

Parents should never leave another child unattended in the car while picking up or dropping off a child!

If someone other than parents arrives to pick up a child:

- We must have written permission to release a child to anyone other than parents.
- Upon enrolling in the program parents are asked to complete a release form authorizing emergency persons and others to pick up their child from the program.
- Any person other than parents who arrives to pick up a child must be listed on the form or parents must provide another written notice before we can release a child to anyone else.
- Teachers will ask to see a photo identification of anyone we don't know before releasing the child. Unless we can verify parents' approval, we will not release the child to anyone else.
- We will not release a child to anyone under the age of 18.

Release of child to someone incapable of caring for child:

Our concern always lies in the children's safety. In the event someone arriving to pick up a child appears to us as incapable of caring for the child (ill, intoxicated, under the influence of drugs, etc.) we are obligated not to release the child. We will offer assistance, offer to call someone else, or contact another adult on the emergency contact list.

Use of Car Seats:

- In compliance with the law in the state of Tennessee, children under the age of 8 or who weigh less than 40 lbs. must be secured in an approved child safety device when traveling. We expect all parents to transport their children in this responsible manner.

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Release Form Policy

Our concern always lies in the children's safety.

Only a parent, guardian, or authorized person may pick up a child. Authorized persons to pick up a child are listed on the release form. Only these people are permitted to pick-up a child from the ELC. It is understood by the parents that their child will not be released to anyone other than the person(s) listed on those documents.

If a person shows up to pick up a child who is unfamiliar, check the release card and form to assure that person is on the list and ask to see photo ID.

If a person comes to pick up a child who is unfamiliar and not on the list, a staff member must call a parent before that child can be released into their care. We will ask to see photo ID and get a verification and description of the person from the parent to be sure you are speaking of the same person. *Some parents noted that a phone call with a description and name of the person is not okay for release, please be sure to read the emergency card for parent preference* It is required for parents to send a signed note to the teacher in advance or the child will not be released.

Release of child to someone incapable of caring for the child:

In the event someone arriving to pick up the child appears to us as incapable of caring for the child (ill, intoxicated, under the influence of drugs, etc.) we are obliged not to release the child. We will offer assistance, offer to call someone else, or contact another adult on the emergency contact list.

Dispensing of Medication

At times it may be necessary for your child to receive medication at the center. We must have a signed authorization from the child's parent and/or physician before we can administer medication, even non-aspirin products. Specific instructions regarding dosage, frequency of administration, and the symptoms or conditions for which medication is indicated should either be listed on a prescription or on a ELC medication form signed by a parent. Dispensing of medication forms are available at each location. Parents also may come to the center to give medication themselves, should this be more convenient.

Child Abuse Prevention, Education, and Reporting Policies

All teachers in the Early Learning Center are trained in the prevention, detection, and reporting of child abuse, neglect, and child sexual abuse as required by the Department of Human Services Day Care Licensing Unit. The topic of child abuse is one component of our educational program and includes training for teachers, parents, and children as follows:

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- An in-service training session on child abuse prevention, detection, and reporting is conducted for each new teacher and student during the orientation period.
- An approved, developmentally appropriate education program is included in the Preschool curriculum. Staff members are trained in the content and teaching strategies utilized. The curriculum is a fully integrated part of the program and the emphasis is on the fostering of positive self-esteem and the sharing of information about safe touches in an open, warm, and reassuring climate.
- Parents are invited annually to training concerning child abuse prevention, detection, reporting, and the Early Learning Center safety curriculum. Parents are encouraged to discuss concerns or suggestions related to this topic with appropriate staff members at any time.
- The law in Tennessee states “Anyone having reason to believe child abuse has occurred is required by law to make a report to the Department of Human Services Child Protective Services unit”. Teachers will document any concerns and discuss these with the Program Director or Executive Director. When child abuse or neglect is suspected, a staff member will contact DHS Child Protective Services and make a formal report. After a report is made, Child Protective Services is required to investigate the claim.

Grievance Process for Parents- Expressions of Concerns

From time to time parents may have questions, issues, concerns, or problems they want to discuss. We want to hear these so we can work together to solve problems. The grievance process for parents is designed to help resolve conflicts in an effective, respectful, and professional manner. A positive approach to solving problems combined with a civil demeanor will allow us to resolve conflicts in a climate of mutual support and cooperation. The following are suggested avenues for parents to use when expressing concerns and dealing with problems:

Discuss with the Classroom Teacher: Parents are encouraged to think carefully about the situation and define clearly the concern or problem. If the problem relates to your child and the classroom, your child’s teacher is typically the best person to talk to. Please arrange a convenient time to meet with your child’s teacher outside of the classroom to discuss the problem. It is important to clearly communicate your concern, listen to the teacher’s perspective, and discuss various solutions to the problem.

Discuss with your Program Director: You may always discuss an issue with your site’s Program Director – particularly if the issue relates to personnel or a program policy. All the assistant directors have e-mail, voice mail, and private office telephones. Please schedule a mutually agreeable time to meet and discuss your issues.

Discuss with the Executive Director: In the unlikely event parents and the Program Director cannot arrive at a satisfactory solution, parents may make arrangements to discuss their concern with the Director. If the concern relates to a policy issues, the Director will need to include the Department Head of Child and Family Studies. On a rare occasion when a problem cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all persons involved and it is apparent there is not a good match between the family’s needs and the program goals and operation, the parents may be asked to withdraw their child from the program.

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Annual Program Evaluation: Once a year as a regular part our program, parents are asked to formally evaluate the program through an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire examines all aspects of the program including personnel and allows for open-ended feedback as well.

ELC Advisory Board: This committee meets periodically to set policy for the programs and to review new research projects. When parents have a concern about a specific policy, they can attend a policy committee meeting and share their perspective.

Dismissal from the Early Learning Center

The Early Learning Center's teaching staff eagerly view enrollment of a new child and family as 1) an opportunity for learning and relationship building and 2) a responsibility for providing high quality education and care. Most families view their child's enrollment in the ELC as a privilege, carefully uphold policies, and contribute equally at making this partnership a beneficial experience for all. Most children readily adjust to their new environment and begin to flourish cognitively, socially, and emotionally. However, there are some cases when continued enrollment is not in the best interest of the child, family, or the Early Learning Center program. The following conditions or situations would justify a child and his/her family's dismissal from the Early Learning Center:

Child:

- Presents an on-going danger to self and/or others which is developmentally inappropriate or exceeds the capacity of the program's resources.
- Develops a debilitating condition which prevents normal participation in daily activities or requires an inordinate amount of individualized attention from teachers
- Never seems to adjust and thrive in the group setting despite repeated modifications and attempts made to help the child adjust.

Parent:

- Failure to pay tuition following to the Early Learning Center business office's procedures and time frame.
- Clear failure to comply with program policies, including but not limited to Department of Health immunization guidelines.
- Exhibiting threatening or humiliating treatment of staff, children, or others in the ELC setting (Depending upon severity-may necessitate immediate dismissal).
- Continued inability to resolve family personal problems that interfere with the child's ELC placement and/or parent/teacher relationships.
- Failure to uphold security procedures for the ELC facilities (e.g. sharing PINs/access codes).

All children are initially enrolled on a temporary 6 week trial basis to determine whether the program can adequately meet the child's needs. If at the end of this period, it is determined that the program cannot adequately meet the child's needs, the Early Learning Center staff will work with parents and other appropriate individuals to identify another program which will better meet the child's needs. After completion of this trial placement, the continuing enrollment of all children will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.