

Early Preschool Family Handbook

Welcome to the Early Preschool (EP), an outreach ministry First Presbyterian Church/Nashville.

VISION

First Presbyterian Early Preschool values all people as unique children of God. We endeavor to be a community of life-long learners where children, families, and relationships are respected, nurtured, and highly esteemed. God's grace is the foundation of this community.

OUR CORE VALUES

- Learning Through Play: Powerful Interactions
- Outdoor Exploration: Expanding the Horizons
- The Whole Child: Our Curriculum
- Community: Building Life-Long Learners
- Family Engagement: Connecting Through Relationships

Stop by the EP office to see our Vision statement in its entirety or read it online at

<http://childrens.fpcnashville.org/preschool/about/#philosophy>

EARLY PRESCHOOL COMMITTEE and VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

The EP functions under the direction of the Early Preschool Committee. This committee consists of two elder or deacon representatives, parent representatives, teacher representatives, and church member representatives. The EP committee passes recommendations to the Christian Education Council and then to the FPC Session, for final approval.

Our active Parent Team consists of parent and family volunteers. Volunteers are needed for year-long commitments or short-term commitments. The goals of the Parent Team are to appreciate and recognize teachers and staff, respond to life events for EP families, and serve as host/hostess for parent-involved activities. Feel free to ask the director or assistant director about volunteer opportunities throughout the school year.

LICENSING and ACCREDITATION

The EP is licensed by the Tennessee Department of Human Services and follows best practices, teacher/child ratios and class sizes as described by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and TN 3 STAR Quality Rating System. The EP received NAEYC accreditation in September 2014 and is dedicated to maintaining this prestigious accreditation. Health and safety standards are maintained, and the EP is regularly inspected by the local Fire and Health Departments. Copies of the most recent inspections are always available for you to read in the EP office.

REGISTRATION AND ADMISSION

Registration is held in January for the upcoming school year. A registration form must be completed and submitted along with the non-refundable registration fee. All currently enrolled children are guaranteed a place for the next year as long as all deadlines are met, and appropriate fees are received. Every effort will be made to honor your first choice of class days. In the event that your first choice is unavailable, you will be placed on the waiting list for your first choice and enrolled in your second choice. Children are assigned to a class in August for the entire school year. We offer a summer program with a separate registration process.

WITHDRAWAL

There are many reasons that a child may need to leave our program after the school year has started. Written notice must be received by the EP Director at least 30 days in advance of the child's withdrawal from the program.

TUITION AND FEES

A non-refundable deposit (one month's tuition plus supply fee) must be paid upon accepting a spot to secure your child's space in the EP. The tuition portion of the deposit is applied to the September tuition payment of the school year enrolled.

Tuition payments will be automatically be drafted from your checking account through Brightwheel's autopay feature. This payment will be drafted on the first of each month, October-May of the school year enrolled. The 15th of the month can be an alternative pay date. Those who wish for a midmonth draft must notify, in writing (email) the preschool office. Exceptions to this policy may be discussed with the preschool director.

FINANCIAL NEEDS

It is the Early Preschool Committee's wish that no child be excluded from the program because of financial hardship. The Early Preschool Financial Assistance Committee (EPFAC) approves grants on an as needed basis. Submit all requests for financial assistance to the EP Director. Each request is confidentially considered by the EPFAC, with assistance determined by need and availability of funds.

EP DESIGNATED FUND

The FPC Session has designated a specific fund to assist the EP families' financial needs and to satisfy other unbudgeted needs of the EP. The fund offers an opportunity for donations of monetary gifts to the Early Preschool in honor of a child's birthday, to honor the teachers, or as a way to give back to the preschool in a way that will directly benefit the program. For more information on giving to the EP Designated Fund, contact the EP Director or Sandy Nelson in the finance office (snelson@fpcnashville.org). To donate directly to our scholarship fund. Text EP to 707-475-3005.

DROP OFF AND PICK UP PROCEDURES

You will have a specific drop off and pick procedure depending on the classroom that your child is assigned to. We plan to use multiple entry points so that physical distancing is possible, and groups of children are not mixed. (more on this after classes are assigned)

Children should arrive for school ready to learn. Children are more likely to have a successful day if they are well rested and fed a substantial breakfast before they come to school.

For the safety of all, please make sure your vehicle is turned off when the driver leaves the vehicle. Also, never leave a child unattended in a vehicle.

In the event that any person picking up a child is deemed impaired in any way or exhibits risky behavior, the EP staff will:

1. Ask the driver to come to the EP office until such time as he/she is determined to be in a suitable condition to drive.
2. Require the driver to contact another approved person, as noted on the child's enrollment form, to transport the child.
3. Notify proper authorities if met with resistance.

BRIGHTWHEEL FOR SIGN IN AND OUT

Each classroom will post a QR code for non-contact sign-in and sign-out of children, through the Brightwheel app.

You will need to have your smart phone for this. Health screening questions will be asked on the app as a part of the sign in/sign out process. This app allows an easy digital check-in and out with personal passcodes for each caregiver. Parents must add all approved caregivers to their Brightwheel account. Brightwheel will email passcodes to these designated caregivers. It is not necessary for a caregiver to have the Brightwheel app in order to sign your child in or out.

INCLEMENT WEATHER/ EMERGENCY AND DISASTER PROCEDURES

The Early Preschool follows the Oak Hill School inclement weather closings. Snow days are built into our school calendar and are not made up. An all-school Brightwheel message will be sent to families to alert them of school closings. Every effort is made to update the EP Director's phone message (298-9580) with closing information. If OHS opens on a delay or closes early, the EP will open or close at the same time.

We have regular fire and tornado drills for the staff and children. Evacuation and Emergency Shelter plans are on file in the EP Director's office. The First Presbyterian Church staff participates in all the EP drills and is prepared to assist in leading the children to the safest place quickly in the event of emergency.

ATTENDANCE

If your child cannot come to school, please email the EP director or contact your child's classroom through the Brightwheel app before 9:30 if possible. We will contact you if we don't hear from you by 9:30 to explain your child's absence. There are many good reasons to keep a child home. Our goal in contacting you is to be aware of illness in the program and to help assure the safety of the children.

CALENDAR

The EP school year begins in September and ends in May. A yearly calendar (subject to change) is issued annually listing all closings and early dismissals. You can find an up-to-date calendar on the EP website. Occasionally, the EP will be closed so that our staff can have an opportunity for professional development. Not only is training a requirement for accreditation and licensing, most importantly, it assures that your child's teacher is learning and growing as an early childhood specialist.

CLASSES

The EP program serves children who are 18 months to 5 years of age. Children are most often placed in classes based on their chronological age. To keep children on track for entrance into kindergarten, August 15 is used as the birthday cut-off date. The EP Director will consider input from families and teachers when making classroom assignments. Class assignments are made in August. Children will stay in the same class with the same teaching team for the entire school year.

STAFF: CHILD RATIOS

The EP maintains the following teacher to student ratios:

Toddlers	1:4	3-year olds	1:8
2-year olds	1:5	Pre-K	1:10

Exceptions to our teacher: student ratios may occur when class sizes are low, unexpected events or high teacher absences occur. We then use minimum ratios allowed by DHS and do so only until substitutes can be located.

SICK AND INJURY POLICY

Expect your child's teachers to ask you about the health of your child every day. The more information they have about your child, the better equipped they will be to care for your child. Teachers are interested in how your child slept, ate,

and what his/her disposition was before arriving at school. It is important that teachers know if your child has taken medication before arriving at school.

The EP requires you to pick up your child for the following symptoms:

1. Diarrhea - more than one (1) abnormally loose stool
2. Severe coughing - red or blue in the face or makes a high-pitched croupy or whooping sound after coughing
3. Discolored mucus
4. Unusual rashes or spots
5. Difficult or rapid breathing
6. Yellowish skin or eyes
7. Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
8. Fever (temperature of 100 degrees or higher)
9. Unusually dark urine and/or gray or white stool
10. Stiff neck and headache
11. Sore throat
12. Vomiting
13. Lice, scabies, or other parasitic infestation
14. Headache
15. Unexplained listlessness, sluggishness or other behavior suggestive of illness

The EP is not prepared to accommodate sick children. Please do not send your child to school with a communicable illness. Before bringing your child back to school after an illness, he/she must be fever-free (without medication) for at least 72 hours and free of any vomiting or diarrhea for at least 24 hours.

If your child becomes ill at school, every effort will be made to contact a parent/guardian of the ill child so that arrangements can be made for the sick child to rest at home. If a parent/guardian cannot be contacted, a call will be made to the emergency contacts on the child's student data form. Children must be picked up within one half hour of our notification to you.

Please report all illnesses to the EP Office. We do everything possible to alert families of their child's exposure to any illness that may be present in the EP. The EP Director or classroom teachers will inform through the Brightwheel App of any possible exposure to a contagious illness.

If your child is seriously injured, we will call 911 and then the emergency contact listed on Brightwheel. If a child goes to the hospital for care, he/she may return to school with a doctor's note of approval. It is important that the contact number in Brightwheel is current. It is the number that we will call first in an emergency.

MEDICATION POLICY

We administer medication for emergency cases only. If a child needs medication for an emergency situation (such as an allergic reaction) a medical action plan must be completed and signed by the child's physician. The action plan will direct the staff on how and when to administer the medication. This action plan is kept with the child's medication and a second copy is kept in the child's file. All medications are kept on the top shelf of the bookshelf in the EP Office.

PRE-ENTRANCE PAPERWORK

The following forms must be submitted electronically to the EP before the child can begin school:

1. TN state immunization form (your child's pediatrician can give this to you)
2. Registration (online)
3. Family Information, Routine & Cultures, and Agreements & Permissions Form (one per family)
4. Child Health & History (one per child)
5. TEAM-FPC Visitor Release (Permission to visit the Horse barn)
6. DHS's Influenza Information Notification Form
7. Food Allergy Action Plan (if necessary)
8. Asthma Action Plan (if necessary)
9. Medication Permission (if necessary)

These forms can be found online. Contact Leanne (cmadmin@fpcnashville.org) for the link for electronic submission. They will be kept in children's files and kept in the locked preschool office. They are considered

confidential and only available, with proper permissions to staff, legal guardians, and regulatory authorities.

IMMUNIZATION

All children must have a physical examination by a licensed physician that is signed and dated prior to entering the EP. All children must meet Tennessee's immunization requirements prior to entering our program.

A Tennessee Child Health Record must be completed by a physician before the first day of attendance, and the EP must receive an updated form with each new round of immunizations. Please request a new health record for the EP records each time your child has a well-child visit to the doctor that requires an immunization.

UNDER-IMMUNIZATION

If your child is unimmunized or under-immunized, *it is still a requirement that your child's physician sign the Tennessee Child Health Record.* In addition, the parent/guardian is required to sign a statement that explains why the child is under-immunized. (There is a sample form in the preschool office).

ALLERGY AWARE

We are an "Allergy Aware" facility, keeping our facility as safe as possible for all of our children.

- No peanuts, peanut butter, tree nuts or nut spreads should be sent to school.
- No products that "may contain" peanuts or tree nuts should be sent to school.
- If a soy or sun butter product is used in a sandwich it must be labeled each time it is sent to school. Because these products are so similar in looks to peanut butter, we will not serve it to the child if it is not labeled.

LUNCH

We ask that you provide nutritious foods and a beverage (protein, vegetable, fresh fruit, milk) in well-labeled, non-breakable containers. (preferably a hard container that can be easily sanitized) We cannot provide refrigeration or heating for lunches. TN state rules require that food is never used as punishment and cannot be "withheld" for any reason. We will present the child with his/her entire lunch. We talk a lot about healthy food choices and encourage children to eat their "healthy" food first. We will not withhold a dessert until the rest of the lunch is eaten. We highly suggest that you only pack nutritious food choices for your child and save dessert treats for afternoon snacks at home.

In addition, we must be highly alert for choking hazards. Grapes and hotdogs must be cut in quarters. Other choking hazards like popcorn and marshmallows should not be sent in lunches. Also, please remember not to send anything with peanuts or tree nuts in accordance to our Allergy Aware policy.

REST TIME

A rest time is provided in each classroom. The EP day is strenuous, and a quiet time is important for everyone. Children are never required to sleep. After 45 minutes of rest, a non-sleeping child will be given a quiet activity. You will need to supply a blanket and clean crib sheet weekly to cover mats or cots, and if necessary, bring one sleep "lovey".

POTTY TRAINING

Children are not required to be potty trained to attend the EP. When you are ready to begin working on potty training at home, notify your classroom teachers and they will gladly work with you. If your child is still in diapers, we ask that you provide a sufficient amount of disposable diapers for each week. If you use cloth diapers, we will gladly use them too. Our health standards require that we send all soiled diapers and clothing home without rinsing, in a plastic bag.

OUTDOOR PLAY AND EXTRA CLOTHING

Outdoor play is part of our daily schedule. Children will play on the playground and various places around the church campus. Please send your child with appropriate outerwear. At least one change of clothing should be kept in your child's cubby. Send your child in comfortable, casual clothing and sneakers. If your child is sensitive to

temperature change, it is suggested that a sweater be kept at school for occasional use. We also ask that you provide a raincoat and rain boots to be kept at school so that when the weather permits, rain walks and puddle stomping can occur!

It is the parent's/guardian's responsibility to determine their child's need for sunscreen and/or insect repellent. These should be applied by the parent or guardian before the child enters the school. Sunscreen and insect repellent should never be kept in a child's bag or cubby. If a parent/guardian believes there is a need for reapplication of these products during the school day, special arrangements must be made with the EP director or assistant director.

TOYS FROM HOME

Children are discouraged from bringing toys to school from home, unless for a scheduled sharing.

SEASONAL ACTIVITIES

Classrooms will celebrate with age-appropriate activities at various times throughout the year. These celebrations may include Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas New Year's, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Valentine's Day, Easter, and Memorial Day. Families will be invited to share in many of our celebrations and are occasionally asked to contribute items for special activities. Each celebration is unique and appropriate to the age group. If at any time you have a question or concern about how a holiday is celebrated, please talk to the EP Director.

BIRTHDAYS

We like to celebrate birthdays in special ways, making sure the child knows that we are happy he/she was born. The birthday celebration is a tool for building pro-social skills that promote a sense of classroom community. Each child will have the opportunity to celebrate his/her birthday.

Normally, we highly encourage families to give a "gift of time" to their child on his/her birthday. Parents are welcome to visit the classroom to read a favorite book, eat lunch, and/or share a family tradition. This year we invite you to zoom with us during lunch and read a favorite book with us. We encourage families reserve goodie bags and food treats for celebrations at home.

Please do not send party invitations to school.

Please do not send birthday gifts to school.

FAMILY PARTICIPATION

Research shows, and our experience concurs, that a child's success in school is correlated with their family's involvement. We encourage families to participate fully in your child's school experience. Get to know your child's teacher and classroom friends. This year we will be exploring virtual ways to involve families.

FAMILY SURVEY

The Early Preschool distributes a family survey annually in the spring. We value families' feedback on their preschool experience. The results of the survey are shared with staff and the Early Preschool Committee. This helps in the continual evaluation and improvement of our program. Of course, it is not necessary to wait for the survey to give us feedback, we welcome your input at any time.

COMMUNICATION

Good communication is key to the successful collaboration of families and EP teachers and staff. We use multiple communication tools with families. Our classrooms utilize an app called Brightwheel, which streamlines daily communications between parents and EP teachers. Brightwheel is connected to parent email addresses. Monthly

newsletters are sent to parent email addresses. Additionally, family conferences are held at least twice a year. The EP has an open door policy but most meetings will be held through zoom, phone, and brightwheel. We can be reached by telephone (615-298-9580) or by email (blutz@fpcnashville.org) and encourage you to contact us at any time you have a question, concern or comment.

FAMILY CONCERNS

The EP is a community of children, families and staff, all interacting and sharing lives together. We all work closely together and hope that our interactions are positive, helpful, kind and understanding. Sometimes differences occur. When a family member has a concern, it is best to speak directly to the person that is causing the concern. Teachers need and want your input, suggestions, questions and concerns. The EP Director and Assistant Director operate with an “open door” policy. They are interested in your concerns and are always willing to talk with you. All staff are willing to schedule conferences whenever one is needed.

ASSESSMENT

At the Early Preschool, we believe that the better we know our children and their families, the more effective we will be in providing experiences that enrich each child’s learning and build skills that develop lifelong learners.

Assessment is an ongoing process that includes collecting, synthesizing and interpreting information about students, the classroom and their instruction. Educators are trained to assess children’s progress throughout the school year by observation, collecting art and writing samples, and utilizing the Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards. <https://www.tn.gov/education/instruction/academic-standards/early-learning-development-standards.html>

We believe that children’s learning is influenced by their environment both in school and outside of school, their temperament, and their experiences. We integrate information from the Family Information Form, Child Health & History Form, and conversations with families (email, phone, written notes and face to face), with our ongoing classroom assessments, to inform our planning for children.

PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Formal conferences are scheduled in the fall and spring of each school year. Results of all assessment tools will be shared with families through letters, emails, phone calls and at parent/teacher conferences. Information shared with families is always kept confidential. Written assessments are kept in the child’s file in a locked filing cabinet the preschool office.

If at any time an additional conference is needed, teachers, parents or the Director can schedule one.

REFERRALS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT

If at any time during a child’s time in the Early Preschool a teacher or director suspect that the child would benefit from a Developmental Assessment, the parents will be contacted. A conference by phone or in person will be arranged. When a child is younger than 3-years-old, Tennessee Early Intervention System (TEIS) is the state agency that provides a free assessment. After the child is 3-years-old, the county school district in which the child is zoned provides the free assessment. A parent always has the choice of an independent assessment. The EP director has more information about these programs in the EP office.

The EP recognizes the benefits of working in partnership with families when educational decisions are being made for the child. In addition to referring children for more in depth assessments, we are also willing to participate in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meetings or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings.

Often we find that with early intervention and some minor supports at the EP, a child with special needs can successfully and fully participate in the Early Preschool Program. When it is in the child’s best interest to move to a program that is better equipped to provide the special services that the child needs, the EP will assist the family in any way possible to make a smooth transition for the child and family.

DISCIPLINE AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The philosophy of the EP reflects and promotes problem-solving and social skills in young children. The goals of this philosophy include teaching 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 their problems with others.

Positive teacher attitudes and expectations encourage cooperation and prevent most behavior problems. In each classroom, we seek to establish a climate of trust, to communicate positively and clearly, to set clear and positive limits, to offer choices whenever possible, to prevent inappropriate behavior with redirection and gentle reminders, to praise efforts and accomplishments, to use natural and logical consequences, and to assist with verbal problem solving and conflict resolution. We will always communicate with families and ask for input about what works for them at home. A child will not be purposely humiliated, isolated, or shamed. We will never use physical punishment, psychological abuse, or coercion.

The EP is constantly evaluating and adjusting our discipline policy according to our current research and needs of the children in our care. We have an emphasis on the social emotional development of children rather than the “discipline” of children. We have found that this approach is the best way to help children deal with strong emotions. We have developed school wide language and practices that support the social emotional development of the children in our care.

Some of the recent additions to our practice includes:

The use of chimes to designate a transition time.

Breathing techniques – “smell the flowers, blow out the candle”

Helping children identify their feelings through the use of the Mood Meter.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Occasionally, a child enters our program with special needs. Sometimes these special needs are diagnosed, and the families are aware that certain adaptations will be needed for the child to succeed in our environment. Often, we are the first to observe that there may be a need for intervention on behalf of the child. Teachers and administration will always be willing to work with families to determine a plan of action that will support the education of each child.

The EP’s primary goal is the healthy development and success of each child. The EP is limited in the number of children that it can successfully serve and may not have the resources necessary to accommodate the special needs of all children. In the event that the EP cannot serve the needs of a child, the EP will refer the family to other programs or agencies that may better meet the child’s needs. Families, teachers and the EP Director are always involved in this decision. We are dedicated to assist in creating a positive transition plan.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All assessment information, medical information, and family information will be kept in the child’s file in a locked cabinet in the Early Preschool office. This information will be shared only with the child’s teachers and will be treated with the utmost confidence and respect. Allergy information will be posted in the child’s classroom and the preschool office so that staff has this important information readily available. Student information will not be shared with agencies, schools or individuals without written permission from the child’s legal guardian.

KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE/KEEPING STAFF SAFE

First Presbyterian Church is committed to protecting the rights of children and adults who work with children. This can be seen in our building design. Classroom doors have large windows for observation. Entrance doors to the Children’s Ministry wing are secured at all times with a keypad lock. Background checks are required for all staff. Volunteers are never left alone with children. In the event that a staff member is accused of abusing or neglecting a child, the utmost care will be taken to protect the rights and of all involved.

According to Tennessee law, all persons (including doctors, mental health professionals, child care providers, dentists, family members and friends) must report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Failure to report child abuse or neglect is a violation of the law. The Child Abuse Hotline number is 877-237-0004.

SAFETY

During this time when the church is not open to visitors, we will be keeping all exterior doors locked. If you need to come to the preschool at an unusual time, alert your child's teacher through the brightwheel app or email the director (blutz@fpcnashville.org)

The entrance doors to the EP wing are always locked. There are cameras on the church property. Unknown persons picking up a child from the EP will be asked for proof of identification.

SUPERVISION

Children will never be left unattended at the Early Preschool. Staff working with Toddlers and Twos will supervise children by sight and sound at all times. Children are closely supervised by EP staff on the playground, moving from one room to another, as well as in the classroom and during rest time. Children who desire privacy while using the bathroom will be able to use the bathroom privately, but a teacher will be close by to assist and check in on children often.

We are delighted that your family has chosen to be a part of the EP community.

Should you have any questions about the policies in this handbook, or need translation services for this handbook, school forms or conferences, please contact the director.