



# Parent Handbook

2023-2024

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Date: 7/8/2023

# WELCOME

Dear families,

We are honored that you have chosen to enroll your child in our program! Here you will find a rich, nurturing environment where learning is fun, the curriculum grows as skills increase, and passionate teachers turn every learning moment into a positive one. In short, it's a place where you can be confident your child will thrive.

When starting a new program, it's natural to have questions. Many of the answers are right here, and we encourage you to store this handbook for easy reference. No handbook can anticipate every situation or question about all of our policies. A Step Ahead Child Center reserves the right to add new policies and to change or cancel existing policies at any time. We will notify you immediately of any changes to this handbook as they occur.

We will try our best to keep the lines of communication open between all of us and all of you. Please feel free to discuss any concerns you may have. After all, you know your child better than anyone else and we value your insights.

We look forward to being a small part of your child's life and creating bonds and memories with them that will last a lifetime.

Sincerely,

A Step Ahead Child Center

## **My Promise to You**

“I promise you every day your  
child will be learning something.  
some days they will bring it  
home in their hands.  
some days they will bring it  
home in their heads,  
and some days they will bring it  
home in their hearts.”

# ABOUT US

A Step Ahead Child Center is housed under a non-profit organization called Elcam, Inc. that operates a Shelter Workshop under the PA (2390) state regulations. We have two facilities; one on Industrial Drive in Dubois and one located next to A Step Ahead Child Center on West Creek Road in St. Mary's. Elcam employs over 100 employees between the two facilities many of which have different levels of mental and physical disabilities. Here at Elcam, we strongly believe that all children, families and staff members have a right to the same opportunities for participation, acceptance, and belonging. Research shows that children who are exposed to people with disabilities at a young age— either directly or indirectly — have more positive attitudes about those with special needs. Inclusion in the classroom results in greater empathy and acceptance of differences among all children and improved academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for those with disabilities. The St. Mary's facility is a training location for Cameron and Elk Counties Behavioral and Developmental Programs and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide the following services:

- Pre-Vocational Services
- Community Habilitation Services (Elcam Community Center)
- Supported Employment Services
- Job Coaching Services
- Small Group Employment Services
- Community Participation Supports Services

This training may be utilized at A Step Ahead Child Center at any time under the direct supervision of the daycare staff or by a one on one job coach. All of the necessary state child clearances must be completed before any vocational training can begin. This Center recognizes and values the differences and similarities that exist in children, families, staff members and the community and does not tolerate behaviors, language or practices that label, stereotype or demean others. If you have any additional questions, or would like more information about any of these services, please contact the Center's Director or Elcam's Executive Director.

## **Mission**

The mission of A Step Ahead Child Center is to provide safe, high quality child care for the community. In doing so, we support families in their efforts to reach their goals. We offer a cognitively based program for children ages six weeks to 12 years old and a home like environment where children are encouraged to develop at their own pace. Our staff is committed to the families we serve, providing support and encouragement.

## **Certification**

A Step Ahead Child Center is annually licensed through the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. A current certificate of compliance is posted at the entrance of our center. We are also a participant of the Keystone STARS program. We are currently a STAR 3 facility. For more information about this, please visit [www.papromiseforchildren.com](http://www.papromiseforchildren.com)

All staff are required to maintain current clearances, first aid and CPR certifications as well as a minimum of 12 hours of annual training on topics including health & safety and child observation. All new staff complete a 10 hour training module on the Better Kid Care Program from Penn State.

## **Security**

Keeping our children safe and secure is our number one priority at A Step Ahead Child Center. Each room is equipped with functioning cameras that are always recording. There is a live feed that the Director is able to see throughout the day with the ability to replay the day's event. Each door within the building also has a keypad system that requires fob entry to staff members and authorized families only. Unique ID codes are assigned to each key. Parents will have access to all areas of the childcare center during operating hours with the use of their key fob. Codes may be disabled at any time, providing a safe, secure environment for children and peace of mind for parents.

When children are enrolled, the parent or guardian will provide a list of persons authorized to pick up the child. Children will only be released to individuals on the "Authorizations for Pick Up" list. If anyone that we do not recognize tries to pick up your child, we will ask for a picture ID, and verify that they are on the list. All parents and authorized pick up persons MUST have a key fob to pick up. Two keys are given to each family at the time of enrollment. Any extra or replacement key fobs are \$5.00. For the security of all children and staff in the Center, we encourage parents to never let anyone into the building who does not have a key fob. If someone you don't recognize is asking to be let in, parents should bring it to the attention of a staff member who can take it from there.

## **Hours of Operation**

Operating hours are Monday through Friday from 6:30 AM to 5:30 PM.

## **Holidays**

We will be closed on the following holidays: New Year's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Black Friday, Monday after Thanksgiving (no charge to families on scheduled shut-down days) and Christmas Day.

If a holiday falls on a Saturday, we will be closed the Friday before. If a holiday falls on a Sunday, we will be closed the Monday after. Regular tuition is expected **only if the holiday falls on one of your child's scheduled days.**

In the event that the Center shuts down due to low attendance around the holidays, parents will be notified in advance and will NOT have to pay. (Example: The Monday After Thanksgiving)

In the event that the Center is forced to shut down due to an emergency such as a power outage, parents will have to pay only if the child(ren) are here over 4 hours. Parents will need to pickup their child(ren) as soon as possible after being informed.

## **Admission & Enrollment**

Based on availability and openings, our facility admits children from 6 weeks to 12 years of age.

### **All Infants must be Full-Time due to the state regulations of the 4:1 ratio**

All admission and enrollment forms must be completed and enrollment paid prior to your child's first day of attendance.

An enrollment fee of \$25 per child is due at the time of enrollment. This fee is non-refundable.

If there are no openings available, a family may choose to place their child on our waiting list. In order to be placed on our list, families must fill out a Wait List Registration Form as well as a \$50 non-refundable deposit fee (\$25 per other children) in order to keep your child's spot. If you already have children enrolled, they will not have to pay the \$50 waitlist fee. The waiting list operates on a first come, first serve basis however priority will be given to children seeking full time care and children with siblings who are already enrolled. When a space becomes available for your child/children, we will notify you immediately via the contact information you have given us. Families will then have 48 hours to accept/decline. If we do not hear from you, the space will be given to the next child on our list.

Parents/Guardians must read, complete and sign the following prior to the first day of service:

- \$25 enrollment fee
- Emergency Contact/Consent Form (update every 6 months)
  - All sections of this form must be filled out including addresses of others allowed to pick -up/drop-off
- Agreement form (update every 6 months)
- Application /Contract
- Infant Feeding Instructions (if applicable)
- Drop Off/Pick Up Form
- Permission for Sunscreen/Diapering products
- Facebook Permission Form
- An up to date health report must be submitted for each child within 30 days of enrollment

- Handwritten/Signed Exemption from Influenza Vaccine
  - Must state “strong religious belief” or “strong personal objection” and “forever” if never planning on them getting the vaccination.
- Receipt of Parent/Family Handbook
- Shaken Baby Syndrome
- Emergency Preparedness Letter to Parents (annually)
- A special request form must be completed for each school aged child to allow bus transportation (yearly)

**\*You can find extra copies of these forms on our website**

**Parents are responsible for providing 2 changes of clothes, sunscreen, diapers, wipes, diaper cream, infant bottles, formula or breast milk, as needed. Please label all items brought from home with your child’s name so we can avoid any mix-ups. \*\*\***

Pennsylvania State Law requires that every child in a day care/child care setting have an up-to-date physical examination. An up-to-date Child Health Report and documentation of immunizations is required within 30 days of enrollment for each child in order for the child to remain in our care. These reports must be renewed every 6 months for children under the age of two and annually for children over the age of two. School age children must follow the guidelines set forth by the school system.

### **Non-Discrimination**

At A Step Ahead Child Center, equal education opportunities are available for all children, without regard to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, national origin, or disability.

### **Language Development**

An expanding world opens up to toddlers as they begin to walk and their language development begins to form. Our facility supports language development through the use of labeling the environment, 1 on 1 conversations, group activities, the teaching of sign language, etc. We recognize the importance of home language use for children who are dual language learners. Because of this, we will do our best to support and encourage the child’s home language at our facility.

### **Inclusion**

A Step Ahead Child Center welcomes all children to our programs, regardless of ability. Some children have special needs such as physical disabilities, intellectual delays, social and behavioral challenges or communication difficulties. Disabilities may be visible or invisible. Children may be born with disabilities or they may emerge later on or change over time. We work in partnership with families to find ways to include all children and remove barriers that prevent children from actively participating in our programs. When a child needs extra support, we work with our community partners to find additional resources.

If you have any concerns about your child’s development and progress, we encourage you to speak with your teacher or the Director.

Some children may need more support than we can provide. If your child’s needs are not being met by the program or if your child’s participation affects the safety and needs of the group, the Director will meet with you. We will then work in partnership with you to find solutions, explore options and, if necessary, make appropriate referrals to a more suitable program.

### **Confidentiality**

Unless we have received your written consent, information regarding your child will not be released. All records concerning children at our program are 100% confidential.

## **Child to Staff Ratios**

Children are supervised at all times.

We maintain the following standards for child to staff ratios:

### Age

Infants 4:1

Young Toddlers 5:1

Older Toddlers 6:1

Preschool 10:1

School Age 12:1

## **Communication and Family Partnership**

Daily Communications. Daily reports are provided for each child to keep you informed about your child's activities. These notes will be placed on our application Brightwheel.

Facebook Page. "Like" our Facebook page for reminders on important things happening at the daycare. If you do not wish for your child to be photographed for the page, you must notify us and update the Facebook Permission Form for your child(ren).

Elcam Website. Information regarding upcoming activities, employment opportunities and community resources are available on the Elcam website [www.elcaminc.com/AStepAhead](http://www.elcaminc.com/AStepAhead).

Conferences. You may request conferences at any time regarding your child's progress and we encourage you to communicate any concerns that you may have throughout the year.

Family involvement. Parents are encouraged to participate in any and all parties that we have at the facility. We are happy to partner with you as well as advancing your child's knowledge on community helpers by asking you to visit and share your expertise in this area. If you may be interested in doing so, you may contact the Director.

## **Community Resources**

When completing screenings or assessments on your child, we will discuss the results with the parent/guardian to work together to determine next steps. If it is determined that outside assistance is warranted the Director will assist you in all referrals. Steps in this process include:

- The staff member will communicate the need, in confidence, to the director or administrator.
- The director or administrator will maintain a list of approved organizations and resources for outside services. If no resources are on the list for the particular need, the director or administrator will make inquiries to find the appropriate resources.
- The staff member and director or administrator will confer on the subject and determine if the circumstance indicates need for a third party professional. If a professional is required, the director or administrator will contact the professional and assume responsibility for the referral.
- If no third party professional is required, the director or administrator and staff member will confer and agree who will communicate the referral to the family.
- After a reasonable amount of time, the person who communicated the outside resource will check back with the family to make sure the referral was helpful. If it was not, additional resources will be sought.

\*Resource pamphlets can be found in the foyer of the Center.

# Tuition and Fees

## Childcare Rates

### Infant

\$30 per day

### Toddler-Pre-k

\$29 per day

### School Aged Children

*K-12 years old*

\$12 a day for before and after school care

\$29 a day for a non-school day including summer, snow days, and holidays

### For private pay families with multiple children:

The full rate will be charged for the first child

**Each additional child will receive 5% off the full rate if Full-Time.**

***Please note: The sibling discount only applies if both children are enrolled at the same time.***

## Credit/No Credit

- Credit will be given for Excused Absences – A child’s absence may be excused under extreme circumstances only. Excused absences will be given at the discretion of the Director.
- Credit will NOT be given for Sick Days – there are no credits for sick days. Sick days are considered in determining tuition and are not refundable.

Please inform the Director immediately if your child is absent due to any of the reasons listed above.

## Scheduling

If your contract is for a FIXED SCHEDULE OPTION (5 days a week/all year round) – You are considered full-time and will be charged a minimum of the days reserved in your contract regardless of attendance. If your child does not attend on a reserved day, fees for that day are still due, and will appear on your bi-weekly invoice.

If your contract is for a FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE OPTION (varied weekly schedule/3 or 4 days only) – You are considered part-time. Parents with a FLEXIBLE SCHEDULE are required to pay for a minimum of the time they schedule, regardless of attendance. If your child attends more than what is scheduled due to adding a day, that time will be added to your bi-weekly invoice. If your child does not attend on a scheduled day, fees for that day are still due, and will appear on your bi-weekly invoice.

***\*Please note: Summer Part-Time children must attend at minimum of three (3) DAYS .***

Remember when switching to part time that space may not always be available if you need to go back. Exceptions will be made only in extreme circumstances.

## Extra Days

Unfortunately, we cannot switch around your child’s scheduled days on an occasional or semi-occasional basis. In other words, your days contracted are your days and cannot be altered on a weekly basis. If you feel you need and/or want a more flexible schedule then you may want to consider going to full time. However, keep in mind you can also pay for extra days on an as needed basis **provided that space is available**. Extra days or a schedule change may not always be obtainable due to enrollment, staffing, or program operations. Please notify the Center as far in advance as possible as extra days will be given on a first come first serve basis.

## Payment

Payment is always due as outlined in the *Agreement Form*. A bi-weekly bill for services will be provided. Payment is required by the due date listed in the top left-hand corner of the bill. Any payments received after 5:30 on the day that it is due will receive a late payment fee.

## **Late Payment Fees**

Late payments can pose serious problems for our programs. Therefore, we have put strict procedures in place to reduce their impact. If payment is not received on the day that it is due, a late fee of \$10 will be added to your next invoice. If your outstanding balance has not been paid in full within 5 business days, child care services may be terminated. If payment is more than 10 business days past due, we may attempt to recover payment in small claims court and/or your account may be sent to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party collections agency.

*\*Please make all checks payable to Elcam, Inc.*

## **Late Pick-up Fees**

Your child looks forward to your arrival at the end of the day. Please make every effort to pick up at the times you have listed on your Agreement Form. If you know you can't arrive on schedule, please arrange to have your child picked up by another adult who has been authorized to do so. If a late pick-up is unavoidable, please notify the center as soon as possible. Consistent drop offs and picks ups are crucial when staffing the Center. All children must be picked up by 5:30PM.

The daily rate includes 9 hours of care. A \$5.00 fee per child will be assessed for every 15-minute interval after 9 hours.

## **Special Activity Fees**

From time-to-time there will be additional fees associated with special activities or field trips. Permission slips and activity fees are due one week prior to the day of the field trip. Some special activities and field trips have a limited number of spots available and require prior registration. If a permission slip is not turned in, your child may not be able to attend.

## **Holding Fees**

If a child will not be attending during the summer months, parents are required to pay a holding fee to maintain their child's spot while they are gone.

Full time families: \$200 a month per child

Part time families: \$100 a month per child

The holding fees guarantee their child's spot when they return in the fall and parents may utilize the daycare throughout the summer on an as needed basis for the full rate. Parents can also choose to send their child throughout the summer for the minimum amount of days allowed (3; Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) to avoid the holding fee. Days must be agreed upon by the parent and the Director.

# **Curricula & Learning**

## **Learning Environment**

We provide a rich learning environment with curricula that are developmentally appropriate to the specific ages in each classroom. We have a flexible day routine that allows children to advance at their own pace. We strongly believe that learning happens through play. Learning and exploring are hands-on and are facilitated through interest areas. Our program is designed to enhance children's development in the following areas: creativity, self-expression, decision-making, problem-solving, responsibility, independence, and reasoning. We encourage openness to that which is different from us, and the ability to work and play with others.

## **Curricula & Assessment**

All classrooms utilize the Creative Curriculum approach to learning, which is a comprehensive, rigorously researched curriculum model that honors creativity and respects the role that teachers play in making learning exciting and relevant for every child. Each classroom environment is set up around learning centers such as dramatic play, blocks, art, and reading. We believe children learn and develop skills and confidence through active engagement with these centers and each other. Children are encouraged to explore activities and materials at their



own pace which have been planned to stimulate each of the five developmental areas (social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive). It is our goal to create a nurturing environment where a child's natural love of learning will thrive. Each room plans weekly to create developmentally appropriate plans that are approved by our Curriculum Specialist and that focus on the developmental needs of the individual children, as well as the group, and that are embedded in the children's interests. We utilize the Creative Curriculum's learning objectives, which are aligned with national Core Curriculum objectives. We desire to partner with you regarding your child's care and education. Ages and stages screenings will be conducted at the time of your child's enrollment and observations will be shared with you within 45 days. Gold assessments and Child Service Reports will be done every 6 months. If any red flags are identified we will assist in referrals for further assessment and evaluation. During parent/teacher conferences we will share this information as well as ideas for transitioning when appropriate. If your child has an IEP or IFSP we request that you share this information with us to best suit your child's learning goals. When IEP or IFSP meetings are planned for your child, we are willing when able to attend these meetings with you.

### **Transition from home to center**

Your child's transition into child care should be a positive and exciting one. We will work with you as much and as often as you need to ensure that the smoothest possible transitions occur and as new routines and new people are introduced. Prior to your child's first day, you will have an opportunity to tour the center, meet with your child's peers and teachers, and communicate any anticipated concerns.

### **Transition between rooms**

Children are transitioned to the next room based on age and developmental readiness. Because each child develops at a different rate, an impending birthday does not mean that a child is necessarily ready for the next classroom. A collaborative transition conversation will be held between the parents and staff to assess whether or not the child is ready to transition, and the final decision will be made by the ASACC staff. Resources regarding transition tips and the new classroom expectations will also be provided. Activities are planned between classrooms to assist in continuity of care. Children have a chance to get to know each teacher before moving into that classroom to ensure smooth transitions. Infants must be off the bottle and walking before they are able to move to the Young Toddler Room and Older Toddlers must be fully potty-trained before moving to the Preschool room. We also have a Buddy System put into place that allows for the children to transition to their new room with a buddy whom they are familiar with to help make the transition easier. We are pleased to provide resources for families and assist with referrals as needed for outside services. You may utilize the Family Resource Center in the main entrance or ask the Director for assistance.

### **Transition to Kindergarten**

Our Curriculum and program planning supports children developing skills that will help them successfully transition to Kindergarten. We aim to make transition into any new setting from our facility as fluid, positive and smooth as possible. We help our children to explore positive ideas about school by positive discussions in circle times, introducing 'school' role-play materials during the summer term, reading stories about starting school, and listening and responding to the children and their thoughts.

### **Nap Time**

Infants sleep according to their own schedule and are put to sleep on their backs. At 12:30 all classrooms, except the infant and school aged rooms, participate in a quiet rest time.

### **Toilet Training**

The most important factor in making the toilet learning experience successful and as low-stress as possible is a family/teacher partnership that supports the child. Research indicates that children cannot successfully learn how to use the toilet until they are physically, psychologically, and emotionally ready. Most positive toilet training occurs only after children show signs of physical control or awareness of their bodily functions and when they demonstrate an interest or curiosity in the process. We are committed to working with you to make sure that toilet training is carried out in a manner that is consistent with your child's physical and emotional abilities and your family's concerns.

# Guidance

## General procedure

A Step Ahead child center is committed to each child's success in learning within a caring, responsive, and safe environment that is free of discrimination, violence and bullying. Our center works to ensure that all children have the opportunity and support to develop to their fullest potential. Communicating consistent, clear rules and involving children in problem solving help children develop their ability to become self-disciplined. We encourage children to be fair, to be respectful of other people, of property, and to learn to understand the results of their actions.

## Challenging behavior

Children are guided to live by the Golden Rule. To treat others the way that they would want to be treated. Each child at A Step Ahead Daycare has the right to

- Learn in a safe and friendly place
- Be treated with respect
- Receive the help and support of caring adults
- When a child starts to become verbally and physically aggressive, we intervene immediately to protect all of the children. Our approach to helping children with challenging behaviors is to show them how to solve problems and using positive alternatives to react.

## Notification of Behavioral Issues to families

If a child's behavior starts to intervene with the learning process, communication will begin with the parents as the first step to understanding the child's individual needs and challenges. We will work together to evaluate these needs in the context of our program. We may also reach out to outside services offered by our STARS personnel to assist our staff in dealing with the challenging behavior. Our next step is to call parents to pick their child up. If all options have been exhausted, this may warrant the need to find a more suitable setting for child care.

## Referrals

If red flags are observed or if behavioral issues arise, we will assist you in connecting with the appropriate resource to best support your child and family. This could include social and mental health, educational, wellness, and/or medical services. All referrals are confidential and will be finalized through the Director.

# Attendance & Withdrawal

## Absence

If your child is going to be absent or arrive after 9am, please call us to let their teacher know. We will be concerned about your child if we do not hear from you. If a school age child will not be attending before or after school, please notify us as well. 10 unexcused absences within a 90 day period will result in the termination of care and your child's spot given to the next family on our waiting list. Regular tuition/fees will be charged for absences. This policy has been adopted because costs for staff and programs remain the same even when children are absent.

## Vacation

Families will receive vacation days after 6 months of full time continuous care. 5 vacation days are given to private pay families who meet these guidelines.

1. Operate on our fixed schedule option (5 days a week/all year round)
2. School age children who attend before and after school throughout the year and full time throughout the summer.

Vacation days will reset every December 31<sup>st</sup> and do not carry over. Families who are full time throughout the year and part time in the summer, will still maintain their vacation days. Families who are part time throughout the year and full time in the summer, will not receive vacation days. Children who are only enrolled for the summer and children who are off for the summers will not receive vacation days.

## **Withdrawals**

Parents may withdraw a child from the program at any time. A written notice, **2 weeks in advance**, is required when a child is being withdrawn. Even if your child does not attend during that two week period, payment is still required.

## **Terminations**

Termination of a family's contract with A Step Ahead Child Center may result from, but is not limited to the following:

1. Nonpayment of fees. Parents/Guardians will receive communication from the program Director if invoices are past due.
2. Failure to comply with state licensing regulations as stated in Pennsylvania Code Title 55. Public Welfare, Chapter 3270. Child Daycare Centers. Noncompliance includes but is not limited to providing required paperwork for file (ex. Health assessments, updated emergency contact information etc.)
3. Failure to comply with program policies written in the Family Handbook and the enrollment forms for the child's participation in the program.
4. In the event of any concerns (raised by staff, parents/guardians or even children) a meeting can be scheduled to address the issues. The meeting will involve the Director, and the involved staff member/parent or guardian. The concerns will be clearly stated (ex. Continuous late payments, failure to adhere to center policies, behavioral problems, etc.) and discussed. A plan will be designed to resolve the issue. A second meeting will be scheduled to review the situation. In the event the issue cannot be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, a 2 week written notice of termination of services will be given.

## **Drop- Off and Pick-Up**

### **Signing In/Out**

State law requires that a parent/guardian sign each child in and out of the Center on the days of care. This procedure includes the parent/guardian accurately noting the time the child enters and leaves the Center as well as the initials of the person dropping off and picking up (this can be done on the tablet at the front of the daycare). It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to ensure that any authorized person dropping off or picking up their child is adhering to this policy.

### **Food/Candy/Beverages**

Please refrain from dropping off your child(ren) with any sort of **opened** food, candy, or beverages.

### **Brief Goodbyes**

Transition times can be stressful for some children. In the morning they may not want to say good-bye to you and at pick up time they may not want to go because they are having fun. This is a natural occurrence and may vary with your child's age and developmental stage. To ease the situation I encourage parents to take a minute to help their child feel comfortable and to adjust by offering positive statements. A parent who shows reluctance to depart only makes the transition harder for their child. Although parents should never sneak out without saying "good-bye" to their child, a brief good-bye usually works best. Crying usually stops a few minutes after you depart.

### **Cell Phones**

A Step Ahead Child Center has adopted a "no cell phone" policy inside the building. If you must take a phone call, please remain outside until the phone call is over. Transitions are made easier when your child has your full attention at drop off and pick up, and your full attention allows for clearer communication between teachers and parents.

## **Authorized and Unauthorized pick up**

Your child will only be released to you or those persons you have listed as Emergency and Release Contacts. If you want a person who is not identified, you must notify us in advance. Your child will not be released without prior written authorization. The person picking up your child will be required to show a picture ID as verification. Please notify your pick-up person of our policy.

## **Child Custody**

Without a court document, both parents/guardians have equal rights to custody. We are legally bound to respect the wishes of the parent/guardian with legal custody based on a certified copy of the most recent court order, active restraining order, or court-ordered visitation schedule. We will not accept the responsibility of deciding which parent/guardian has legal custody where there is no court documentation.

## **Right to refuse child release**

We may refuse to release children if we have reasonable cause to suspect that any person picking up a child is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or is physically or emotionally impaired in any way that may endanger the child. To protect your child, we may request that another adult listed as an Emergency and Release Contact pick-up the child or we may call the police to prevent potential harm to your child. Reoccurring situations may result in the release of your child from the program.

## **Personal Belongings**

### **Cubbies**

Upon enrollment, each child will be assigned a “cubby.” Cubbies are labeled with your child’s name. Please check your child’s cubby on a daily basis for items that need to be taken home. This can also be used to store your child’s extra clothes, underwear etc.

### **Lost and found**

You can look for lost items and bring found items to the Lost and Found box located at the Main Entrance. Please note that we are not responsible for any lost personal items.

### **Toys from home**

We request that you do not allow your child to bring toys from home into the center unless they are part of a show and tell activity. Your child may bring a blanket or stuffed animal for nap time. Again, we are not responsible for any lost, stolen, or broken personal items.

## **Health & Wellness**

### **Meal Schedule:**

Breakfast 7:45-8:15 am

Lunch 11:00-11:30 am

Snack 2:30-3:00 pm

\*Those arriving later than 8:15 am should come already fed. Limiting meal times is the only way we are able to continue with our daily routines. Please be courteous of this policy.

Water is available at all times throughout the day for children. As well as milk is provided at lunch.

## **Infant Feedings**

Infants must have a written, up to date feeding schedule detailing the content and frequency of feedings. Please notify staff and revise the feeding schedule as feeding habits change. Other brands/types of formula, baby food, or breastmilk must be provided by you if you so choose to use them.

We support and encourage the breastfeeding mother's decision to continue to breastfeed her child. We ask that breastfeeding mothers bring all breast milk labeled with your child's full name (first and last), the date it was brought to the program, and how many ounces. Families are welcome to store frozen breast milk at our program to ensure that it is always available. Frozen breast milk will be stored for no more than 2 weeks. Storage containers will be rotated so breast milk with the earliest date is used first.

## **Physical Activity**

A Step Ahead Child Center is committed to our children's health. We recognize the importance of staff as positive role models for our children as they learn to live healthy lives. All children over the age of one are provided at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, including both teacher-led and free-play activities. If children are inactive for long periods of time, they can be at risk for problems associated with being overweight. Therefore, we will follow these guidelines:

- All children will be encouraged to try new physical activities and respond positively when they do
- Staff will be physically active with the children, both indoors and outdoors
- We will provide fun, engaging physical activity daily in our lesson plans
- Physical activity will never be withheld nor used as punishment
- Staff will direct children to safe physical activities and/or involve them in discussions about what to do when safety issues or concerns arise
- Screen time is not permitted for children under the age of two and limited to less than three hours per week for children ages two and older

## **Food Allergies/Special Health Care Needs**

If your child has a food allergy, asthma, or any other long-term health care need, you must notify us in writing so that we can make appropriate accommodations. We must also have a written form signed by a physician detailing the extent of any food allergies. This form must be updated yearly in case of any changes. Food allergies can be life threatening and each child with a food allergy should have an action plan for emergency care completed by the family physician. Special care plans are available if needed for any long-term health care need.

## **Immunizations**

Immunizations are required according to the current Pennsylvania State Law requires that every child in a day care/child care setting have an up-to-date physical examination. An up-to-date Child Health Report and documentation of immunizations are required within 30 days of enrollment for each child in order for the child to remain in our care. These reports must be renewed every 6 months for children under the age of two and annually for children over the age of two. School age children must follow the guidelines set forth by the school system. All child information regarding special needs and allergies must be kept current to ensure the health and safety of the child. Please notify the center of any changes.

## **Illness**

A Step Ahead Child Center reserves the right to temporarily deny any child admittance to daycare for reasons of obvious illness, or to request early departure should symptoms become apparent during the course of the day. Any child who seems unable to participate in our program for any reason will be sent home. This is to ensure the continued good health of everyone at the center. We realize that most of you are working parents and we do try to accommodate you as much as possible. However, for the health and well-being of the children in our care as well as our staff we feel it is vital to maintain a strict wellness policy. We ask for parents to assist by keeping sick children at home.

### **Symptoms requiring removal of child from day care:**

- Fever of 101° or higher

- 2 or more bouts of diarrhea with blood or mucus, and/or uncontrolled that cannot be contained in in a diaper/underwear
- Vomiting
- Rash with fever, unless a physician has determined it is not a communicable disease
- Pink or red conjunctiva with white or yellow discharge
- Breathing trouble, sore throat, swollen glands, hacking or continuous coughing.
- Head lice
- Chickenpox
- Child is irritable, continuously crying, or requires more attention than we can provide without hurting the health, safety or well-being of the other children in our care.

### **Children who have been ill may return when:**

- They are free of fever (**without medication**), vomiting and diarrhea for 24 hours
- They have been treated with an antibiotic for 24 hours
- They are able to participate comfortably in the normal routine
- They are free of open, oozing skin conditions
- If a child had a communicable disease, a physician's note stating that the child is no longer contagious and may return to our care is required

In the event of a medical emergency, Center Staff will attempt to contact the parent/guardian first. As it is imperative to get medical care for your child as soon as possible, if staff are unable to reach a parent/guardian during an emergency decisions regarding medical care will be made by the director/supervisor.

### **Hand Hygiene Policy**

Hand-washing is the single most effective means of preventing the spread of bacteria and viruses that can cause infections and food borne illness. Proper hand-washing techniques will be practiced by staff and children at A Step Ahead Child Center. Staff will be working with the children on proper hand-washing techniques on a daily basis. Please encourage your child to continue these techniques at home.

### **Medications**

Parents will provide any medications needed by the child, including over-the-counter and prescription medicine.

**Written authorization is needed for us to administer ANY medication.** NOTE: All medicines must be in their original container with pharmacist's or manufacturer's label, child's name, dosage instructions, name of medication, and times to be administered clearly written. All medications should be given to a staff member to store in the medicine cabinet and should never be left where children could access them.

## **Safety**

### **Injuries**

Safety is a major concern in child care and so regular safety inspections are completed inside and outside the center area in order to prevent injuries. First aid will be administered by a trained caregiver in the event that your child sustains a minor injury. You will receive an incident report outlining the incident and course of action taken. If the injury requires medical attention, you will be contacted immediately. In the event of a serious medical emergency, emergency services will be called. We will immediately attempt to contact you to notify you of the situation. A staff person will accompany and remain with the child until a family member or emergency contact arrives.

### **Emergency Conditions**

Should emergency conditions prevent the center from opening or require us to evacuate, notification to the families will be announced on the following FM radio stations:

97.5 The Hound  
 100.5 Mega Rock  
 98.9 The River  
 93.9 B94

## **Clothing**

Please dress your child in practical clothing that allows for freedom of movement and is appropriate for the weather. Your child will be involved in a variety of activities including: painting, outdoor play, sand, water, and other sensory activities. Our playgrounds are an extension of the center, and we are conducted to be outside whenever weather permits. Please don't put them in clothes that you do not wish to get dirty.

## **Suspected Child Abuse**

All staff at A Step Ahead Child Center has completed the mandated reporter training. We are required by law to report all observations of child abuse or neglect to state authorities if we have reasonable cause to believe or suspect a child is suffering from abuse or neglect. The child protective service agency will determine appropriate action and may conduct an investigation. Our center will cooperate fully with any investigation and will maintain confidentiality concerning any report of child abuse or neglect.

## **Fire Drills**

We are required by state licensing to do fire drills monthly as well as other disaster drills once every 6 months. Fire drills are held on random days and times. We practice evacuating the classrooms, meeting on the playground, accounting for all staff and children, etc. We discuss the importance of the drills with the children and talk about any fears they may have. Staff is also trained every year in fire safety.

## **Additional Information**

Child care is a tax deductible expense. A Step Ahead Child Center will provide each family with a year-end total of child care expenses by January 31st of each year.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HANDBOOK

All policies and procedures have been agreed upon by the staff at A Step Ahead Child Center. We/I have read and agree with the guidelines in this handbook and will make a conscientious effort to cooperate with A Step Ahead Child Center and abide by the rules of the Child Center. This agreement may be terminated by the parent(s) or the provider at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE      PRINTED NAME      DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE      PRINTED NAME      DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director Signature      Printed Name      Date