



Infantcare

Childcare

Preschool

Before/After School

First Step PreSchool, Inc.



PARENT

HANDBOOK

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to create a positive, challenging learning environment that enables children to develop their abilities and interests socially, emotionally and academically.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our philosophy is based on the humanistic approach in dealing with the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth. We do this through a developmentally appropriate program. We believe that children develop and learn best through create play.

Young children are active learners who learn through hands-on experiences of their own choosing. They benefit from supportive interactions with teachers who provide them with stimulating materials and ample time to explore their environment and to interact with their peers.

The greatest learning achievement for a child is success. In making learning a lifelong joy, our goals are to develop confidence, enthusiasm and a genuine enjoyment in the total learning process. Each child has a beautiful potential to love, laugh and learn.

DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

First Step Preschool is committed to the full utilization of all human resources and to a policy of equality towards children. First Step Preschool will not discriminate against children or their families on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability.

ENROLLMENT POLICY

First Step Preschool promotes the enrollment of children from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds as well as from diverse communities. First Step Preschool prides itself in providing a wonderful environment for all children and admits all children. We service children 6 weeks to school age. Infants will stay together for a period of 18 months if they begin as a newborn.

OPERATION POLICY

First Step Preschool is open weekdays from 07:00 a.m. to 06:00 p.m. This is an 11 hour day and a very full one for the children. Please remember that by the time 6pm comes around, the children are looking for their parents.

First Step Preschool is closed on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- President's Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Fourth of July
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving and the day after Thanksgiving
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day

If severe weather occurs during the course of the day making travel hazardous, you will be called to come and pick up your child early. In the event that inclement weather forces us to not open the school for the day, it will be announced as a school closing on WRKI (95.1 FM) radio, WFSB (channel 3 TV) as well as our FaceBook page (<https://www.facebook.com/1ststeppreschool>).

Arrival and Departure Time

Children should be brought to their classrooms and assisted by their parents in taking off their coats and hats, etc. Clothing should go to their cubbies and lunches in the refrigerator (if they don't have an ice pack in them). Parents **MUST** sign their children in. Teachers are available if you need to speak to them.

During this period of COVID-19 parents will not be allowed in to the building. You should come to the front door to drop your child off.

When you pick your child up, please assist your child with coats, hats, etc. Be sure to **sign your child out** and notify the teacher before you leave.

It is important that you establish a consistent departure time for your child.

Children learn routines quickly and feel more secure knowing their parents will arrive at the same time every day. A child will watch other children leave with their parents and will start to look for their own. First Step Preschool is open until 6:00 pm. If you are running late, please call to let us know. If you know ahead of time that your pickup will be different than the usual time, please let your child and us know.

First Step Preschool currently closes at 5:00 pm to allow staff time for enhanced cleaning due to COVID-19. If you have not arrived by then, we will call the persons you have designated as your emergency alternates to pick up your child. If you are late 3 times, on the 4th time (and any time after) you will be charged a late fee of \$10 for every 15 minutes. The staff attends trainings during the week at night that are mandatory so we need your help in getting them to their training in a timely manner.

Failure to contact First Step Preschool regarding your tardiness forces us to abide by state law: **A child is considered abandoned and the police must be notified if a parent is more than 30 minutes late.**

Parking Lot Safety

When picking your children up please be sure to park in a designated spot in the parking lot. Parking along the store fronts is illegal as those areas are designated fire lanes. Your children should be supervised at all times in the parking lot and children should never be left alone in a vehicle. Vehicles should not be left on to idle in the front of the building as fumes could enter in to the center.

Tuition

All tuition is due in a timely manner. If you are paying weekly, tuition is due during the week of care. If you are paying bi-weekly, tuition is due during the beginning of the 2nd and 4th week of the month. If you are paying monthly, tuition is due by the second week of the month unless we have made previous arrangements with you. Please note that some months have 5 weeks in them; therefor your tuition payment should reflect that. Parents will bear the cost of bank charges on checks returned for insufficient funds.

Tuition is based either on a half day or full day rate; not hourly. For example, if your child is with us before or after school, your tuition is the same whether your child leaves at 4:30pm or 6pm. However for school-aged children, your tuition does include late arrival and early dismissal; and includes days where public school is closed. There is no DAILY rate at First Step unless your child is a drop-in, therefor your payment should reflect your weekly or monthly tuition rate.

Tuition is owed whether your child attends or not. You are paying for a spot in the school, as we have to staff the classrooms on the assumption that your child is attending. If your child is absent from the center due to illness, snow, vacation, power shortage or any unforeseen circumstances which may prohibit us from operating, no tuition refund will be made.

Department of Social Services funding is available for those who meet the criteria (please see the Director for more detail). Every 6 months, we will ask for verification. The parent's fee will then be established and approved by both parent and Director.

Failure to pay tuition in a timely manner will result in your child being dis-enrolled and First Step Preschool reserves the right to take all legal action in our effort to collect monies.

School Readiness Grant

If your child is on the School Readiness Grant and they are going to Kindergarten AND they stay with us all summer before going to Kindergarten, their last day of the program with us would be August 31. New children enrolling on the grant would start September 1.

Vacation

Each family who is enrolled for the full year is entitled to two (2) weeks' vacation without paying tuition. This vacation resets at the beginning of the school year (September).

Switching Days

Families who attend part-time have the flexibility of switching attendance days. Switching a day due to illness, holiday, family issue etc. will be accommodated only if class size allows, and can only be switched within the same billing week. We reserve the right to not allow the switching of days if it puts our classroom out of ratio. Tuition is still due as normal in this situation.

During COVID-19 we are not allowing for the switching of days due to not being allowed to change cohorts of children. We will let you know if this changes for the 2020-2021 school year.

Summer Vacation

First Step does run a summer camp that starts during summer vacation and ends the Tuesday before the last week in August.

If you are taking your child out for the summer or going to an abbreviated schedule, this must start the last week in June. Once you have taken your child out or moved him/her to an abbreviated schedule, if your child is school age, they can return to their original schedule the last Monday in August. All other children can return to the normal schedule the Tuesday after Labor Day.

Withdrawals

First Step Preschool has the right to discontinue service to any family. Any child admitted to the program will be enrolled for up to a month trial period to ensure proper adjustment. We will do everything we can to help your child adjust to their new environment. A family may be asked to leave if their child has behavior problems, parental problems, payment problems, etc.

First Step Preschool will make every effort to recommend suitable alternatives that may better suit the family's needs.

Aging Out

Children are to age out of our program the summer they finish 6th grade. The legal age to stay home alone in CT is 12 years old.

Clothing

To avoid the possibility of a mix-up in sweaters, coats, etc., please identify all extra clothing with your child's name. We request that each child have at least one extra complete set of clothes at the center including socks, underpants, shirts, pants, etc. Please label each piece of clothing, put them in a Ziplock™ bag and keep them in your child's cubby.

Meals

A lunch menu will be posted. It stays the same throughout the year and never changes. It is reviewed by our Nutrition Consultant, Christine Gallichotte. You can purchase hot lunch for your child at a cost of \$3 per day.

Good foods to include in lunches are: sandwiches, yogurt, fruit (canned or fresh), hard boiled eggs, crackers, sliced cucumbers, etc. Thermoses will keep soups, macaroni, etc. warm for lunch. Also, we have a microwave available for heating food.

Infants' parents should provide all their formula, juice and baby food. Bottles and cereals should be clearly labeled and put into the refrigerator. Baby food jars should also be labeled.

Disposable diapers for infants and toddlers must be supplied by parents. If you wish to bring in bulk supply, we will notify you when your child's supply is getting low. Please also send in wipes and any ointments (note: medication administration form must be signed by both the child's doctor and a parent).

We will no longer be serving snack so please send your child with a morning snack, a snack to go with lunch and an afternoon snack.

State law: Ice packs must be in your child's lunch bag.

Toilet Training

When children are ready to being toilet training, there must be a joint effort between parents and First Step Preschool staff. The Preschool classrooms are not licensed to provide diaper changing services. Children must be toilet trained in order to enroll in the Preschool program. Exceptions are made only for those students with identified disabilities.

Outside Time

All of our classrooms go outside everyday (weather permitting) for large motor activities. The children will go outside on the playground, up on the hill for activities or walk around the plaza for 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon for a total of 60 minutes. If we cannot go outside due to weather or the temperature going below 32 degrees, the children will be engaged in 60 minutes of large motor activity in their classroom or throughout the building. Classroom large motor activities will include, riding trikes in the hallway, dancing, balance beam, tunnels, obstacle course, balls, exercise, yoga, etc.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

Records

Health records will be kept for each child. These are required by the **State of Connecticut Department of Health** and are maintained by the center's registered nurse consultant. Each child must have a physical examination and current immunizations prior to admission and **yearly** thereafter. When your child's physical is close to expiring, you will be notified so that you can arrange an appointment for your child's annual physical.

Medications

In order for medication to be administered (both over the counter and prescription) to a child, it must be prescribed by the child's doctor or dentist. A medication administration form with the physician's written order and signature and the parent's signed permission to administer a specific medication must be brought to the child's teacher with the medication (in the original box) to be administered. Please **do not** put the medication in the child's lunch box as it must be stored in a designated safe area. When staff administer medication to your child, they will log it in a form that is kept with the medication order. Only staff who are trained in Medication Administration will administer medications to your child.

We suggest you keep a supply of medication administration forms at your pediatrician's office. A new form is needed with each prescription.

All medications are kept in a storage bin in a locked closet.

Due to COVID-19 we will not be able to administer asthma meds through a nebulizer machine. If your child requires the use of a nebulizer they must stay home until they are well enough to not need it during the school day.

Illness

Your child's health is important to us. For the protection of all children, your child **should be kept home if he or she displays any of the following symptoms: nausea, temperature over 100, vomiting, diarrhea, a rash or conjunctivitis, heavy nasal discharge, discharge from the eyes or ears.** Please exercise caution and keep your child home for **24 hours** before they return to school.

If your child becomes ill while at First Step Preschool, we will call you immediately and ask you to pick up your child. The child's teacher or Director will attend the child while waiting for the parent. If the parents are unable to be reached, we will call the persons designated by the parents on the enrollment form. **Your child must be picked up within the hour.**

Due to COVID-19 we will be very strict and vigilant with our illness policies. If your child presents with vomiting, diarrhea, or a fever they must be out for 72 hours. If they have a fever they must see a doctor to return or have a negative COVID-19 test. This policy will be strictly enforced.

Disease and Illness Exposure

Infectious diseases (also known as transmissible diseases or communicable diseases) is illness resulting from an infection and are caused by microscopic germs (such as bacteria or viruses) that get into the body and cause problems. Some — but not all — infectious diseases spread directly from one person to another. Infectious diseases that spread from person to person are said to be **contagious**. Contagious diseases (such as the flu, colds, or strep throat) spread from person to person in several ways. One way is through direct physical contact, like touching or by direct contact with an individual's discharges.

Some of examples are Chicken Pox, Group A or B Strep, Measles, Hepatitis, etc. Should we have a confirmed case of a communicable disease the center, we would be responsible for reporting such cases to the Department of Public Health. Besides reporting the communicable disease to the Department of Public Health we will also take the following steps:

1. Use Universal Precautions such as handwashing, sanitizing all surfaces and toys in the affected classroom(s), wearing gloves during meals, diaper changes and cleaning up any bodily fluids.
2. The child(ren) or staff member with the communicable disease would have to remain absent from the center until they are cleared by a physician.
3. Report the communicable disease to the classroom(s) in which there is a confirmed case.

We will also report contagious illnesses to families and staff on an as needed basis where we have cases in the classroom. These illnesses will include Conjunctivitis, Strep, RSV, Fifth Disease, Impetigo, Flu, and any other illnesses that are pertinent.

Infant Sleep Policy

All children in our infant room will be put down for a nap at their own individual time and will sleep in a crib with a firm mattress and sheet that fits tight to their mattress. All children 12 months old and younger will only have a breathable blanket put on them for nap (e.g. receiving blanket). No nap toys, stuffed animals, bottles, pillows, quilts or any other soft items will be placed in a crib with a sleeping child. All children 12 months old and younger will be put to sleep on their backs.

If an infant arrives to our program in a car seat and they are sleeping, they will be taken out of the carrier immediately and placed in a crib. Children will not be put to sleep or sleep in a swing, car seat, bouncer, stroller or any other type of infant seat.

FAMILY POLICY

Parents and First Step Preschool, Curriculum and Assessment Plan

You are important to us. We want you to feel at ease with us and know that you are welcome to visit us any time. There is so much that we have in common that spending a little extra time visiting now and then will give us a chance to talk about events that might not get covered in the daily comings and goings. If you can, you might consider bringing your lunch to First Step Preschool and joining your son or daughter for our midday meal.

Parental input is valued and actively sought by staff members. It is so important that you share with us information about your child or family that may influence the behavior of your child here at the center. We will conscientiously share information with you about your child's center-based experiences. Supplementing daily written communication in all our programs are articles teachers distribute regularly that address parenting concerns for each age group. We also issue a monthly newsletter that focuses on the needs of the entire community.

For curriculum, we use the CT ELDS. The ELDS is a set of standards that tell us what children birth to 5 should know. The teachers use these standards in planning learning experiences, observing the children and documenting their progress. Each child will be observed throughout the year and assessed 3 times per year using these observations (November, March and June). Only their classroom teachers observe the children while doing group work, during solitary play, during outside time, and any other important times throughout the day. The child assessments are used to inform you of your child's progress here at our program, to individualize learning experiences for your child as well as the group, to improve our instructional practices and to plan for program improvement. After each assessment period, the classroom teachers will provide you with a parent teacher conference to let you know how your child is doing. At this conference you will receive a written report regarding your child's progress and development in the program. Included in this written report are areas of strength for your child, areas that need to be worked on and any suggestions that you and your classroom teacher come up with to help your child's experience in the classroom be successful. The information gathered and discussed is kept confidential and is used to help meet the needs of your child. During the conferences, we encourage you to ask questions or speak with your child's teacher about any concerns you might have regarding the assessment, the process in which the information was compiled and how it will meet the needs of your child.

Please feel free to talk frankly with us about any concerns you may have regarding your child at any time of the year. First Step Preschool staff has your child's interests at heart and will work with you to meet your child care needs. The Director is available to talk with you at your convenience, on the phone or in person. We want this to be a great experience for your child and for you.

Parent Board of Advisors

The Center maintains that all parents should participate in the decision making policy of the Center. The Parent Advisory Board is made up of parents, teachers and staff of the Center and works to enrich the program. Parents choose to participate through volunteerism, special events and field trips. Parents can serve for one year on the parent advisory board. An annual Parents Questionnaire is provided to every parent to help us assess the effectiveness of the program.

Family Literacy

First Step Preschool has an established relationship with the public school to increase literacy and the benefits of reading for the whole family. Monthly newsletters include a book list to borrow from. First Step Preschool also provides each child with their own town library card. Events at the library are posted and families are encouraged to attend. Parents are encouraged to come in and read their child's favorite story, or any story, to the children. The staff provides the children with experiences in communication through play by sharing, reading, conversing, writing and drawing. The children are exposed to these experiences in both thoughts and wishes.

Servicing Children with Disabilities

First Step Preschool has always had an ongoing communication with the early childhood intervention program. We have initiated contact when necessary with possible candidates for the IEP classes. We have welcomed the IEP staff to our center to provide Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy to the children in their own environment. We encourage the parents to have their child screened.

First Step Preschool has been very successful in working with children with disabilities because so much of the disability can be developmental at this stage in their young life – our staff works with all children individually to check for their progress and understanding of basic concepts and preschool skills. If the staff member finds a child who they may have concerns about, they speak with the Director and the parents to see what modifications, strategies and evaluations are necessary at this time. If the decision is made to move forward, the Director contacts the school and the screening is scheduled. The screening takes place at the preschool where the child is most comfortable and in the natural setting for the child.

Transition Plan

First Step Preschool has an ongoing relationship with the public school – the families go on a field trip to the primary school and attend a Kindergarten orientation where they are introduced to the teachers. Input from the school Director and head teacher is also provided to the public school with parental permission to help with placement for the following year. Following the Kindergarten screening, any concerns or inconsistencies are discussed with the family and teacher. Sometimes, samples of work are provided to the public schools to help with the paperwork and assist with the process. We have a developmental file on each child which is passed on to the public school. We also have a chance, through workshops, to meet and talk with the Kindergarten teachers.

Professional Development Plan

First Step Preschool is committed to professional development of all the staff. By educating all the staff from management, head teachers, teachers and teacher's assistants, we can offer the children and parents a tremendous amount of resources. All new staff attends a new hire orientation and training that includes child abuse, benefits of childcare, policy and procedures, nutrition, etc. New staff is also trained on our curriculum and how to use it in the classroom and in lesson plans and how to use our assessment tool. The staff is provided a list of workshops that are offered by School Readiness and other community resource agencies. In addition, individual teachers have a tremendous input on areas they would like to learn more about pertaining to a class or situation. These workshops are usually small in size and coordinated with other preschools in the area. This flexibility offers the staff an opportunity to meet every child's needs and offer assistance where applicable.

The staff receives training by attending workshops sponsored by School Readiness and other community groups. They receive training in curriculum, assessment, literacy, social-emotional development, cultural diversity, special needs, dual language development, etc. First Step Preschool also offers workshops to their staff in CPR/First Aid, administration of medicine and Epi-pen training.

Staff members are encouraged to take the college courses offered by School Readiness through Naugatuck or another college in Connecticut in order to work towards an Associates or Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood. Administrators are encouraged to participate in professional development and attend workshops in best business practices.

CONSULTANTS

First Step Preschool has collaborative agreements with the Greater Danbury area programs and services. The following are some of the collaborating consultants:

- Educational
- Nutritional
- Social Services
- Dentist
- Health Services

Should you need the name and numbers of any consultant, please see the Director. She will provide you with the information. If your child needs to be referred to any services, the appropriate documents to fill out are provided in the office.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT POLICY

First Step Preschool is responsible to protect the health and well-being of each child attending our program by preventing any form of abuse and/or neglect.

Abuse is defined as:

- A child who has had a non-accidental physical injury or injuries inflicted upon him.
- A child who has an injury which is in variance with the history given of them.
- A child who is in a condition resulting from maltreatment, sexual molestation or exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

Neglect is defined as:

- A child who has been abandoned.
- Is being denied proper care and attention physically, educationally, emotionally or morally.
- Is being permitted to live under conditions or circumstances for associations injurious to his well-being.

Reporting Requirements

All staff is **mandated** to report abuse and/or neglect in accordance with General Statutes 17a-101. Staff is protected by law from discrimination or retaliation for reporting in good faith.

Staff will report any incident they feel places a child in danger of abuse and neglect to Department of Children and Families (DCF). The teacher or employee who observed the incident must report it.

An oral report is to be filed within 24 hours of suspecting a child has been abused and/or neglected by calling CARELINE at 1-800-842-2288. A written report (DCF-136 form) must be filed within 48 hours of making the report. A copy will be placed in the child's permanent folder.

Administrative Responsibilities

When abuse/neglect is reported to the administration as having been caused or inflicted upon the child by an employee, said employee will be removed from the classroom. Administration will conduct an investigation and a report will be made to the CARELINE. The child's parents will also be notified by the Director. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken in regards to the employee which may include suspension as set forth in the due process procedures.

First Step Preschool will cooperate fully with DCF in their investigation. The employee in question will be assigned duties that do not involve direct contact with the children (if such duty is available) while the investigation is on-going.

If medical services are required, procedures will be followed as outlined in our medical emergency plan.

Staff will receive a copy of this policy and will be required to read and sign annually.

Parents will receive a copy of this policy at the time of registration. A copy will also be posted in each classroom.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

Children need a classroom atmosphere that provides understanding, love, kindness and warmth from both their teachers and their peers. Through this, children will develop intellectually, socially, emotionally and creatively.

It is our goal to guide the children in becoming happy, responsible, cooperative participants in our program through positive, non-threatening teaching techniques.

When a conflict occurs, we will work with the individual children and help to resolve the problem through effective communication.

Acceptable means of behavior alteration will include the following:

- The classroom staff will set clear limits.
- Overlooking the activity that is done as attention-getting when in a group.
- Speaking to the child kindly, yet authoritatively, with direction of what he/she should do.
- Taking the child's hand and gently lead him/her to a more appropriate activity.
- Allowing time after expectations have been set for the child to alter his/her behavior.
- Removing misbehaving child from the group to be with a staff member who will redirect his/her behavior.
- Inviting the child back to the group when behavior is acceptable.

If a discipline problem persists, parents will be asked to attend a conference to try and work out an appropriate solution to the problem. A parent's unwillingness to be supportive and cooperative may result in the removal of the child from the program. If a child's challenging behavior becomes unmanageable or unsafe to themselves (the child is violent in the classroom showing behaviors of hitting kicking, excessive violence to teachers and peers, cursing, threatening teachers and peers, throwing objects or furniture, and refusal to follow the classroom routine) or their peers it may be necessary to suspend the child or expel them from the program. The use of suspension or expulsion is a last resort option and is only to be used after the following measures have been taken:

1. All steps in the discipline policy stated above have been taken assessing the function of the behavior.
2. The parents and classroom staff have met to discuss the child's behavior to work on possible solutions and come up with an action plan to alter the behavior. The family and classroom staff will come up with positive behavior strategies.
3. A referral is made to the local school district and or birth to 3 to identify if any cognitive or developmental delays are causing the behavior.

4. A 3rd staff or one-on-one will be brought in to the classroom to work with the child and assist the classroom staff in altering the behavior. The team will work on positive behavior strategies as outline in the meeting with the family.

5. Outside community resource referrals are made for the family such as Children and Family Aid, ECCP, Favor, Wellmore, etc.

A grace period of up to 60 to 90 days will be given with constant communication between classroom staff, parents, the director and any outside agencies involved. Positive behavior strategies will continue to be used in the classroom setting. Should the behavior not improve the decision to suspend or expel the child will made, and the program will seek out an appropriate placement for the child (local school district program, counseling services, or a specific program that will be able to cater to the child's needs).

This policy does comply with federal and state civil rights laws.

It is the policy of First Step Preschool to never subject a child to verbal or physical punishment such as hitting, spanking, pinching, biting, pulling on limbs or hair, squeezing and kicking. It is the policy of First Step Preschool to never subject a child to psychological abuse such as calling children names, humiliating them in front of staff and peers, threatening them, scaring them, ridiculing them and making them feel ashamed. It is the policy of First Step Preschool to never subject a child to coercion by forcing them to do or not do something such as eating and cleaning up, physically forcing them to perform an action, rough handling them, and restraining them. The child will not be subjected to neglect or frightening punishment under any circumstances.