



# Grace Lutheran

Early Education Center Handbook

Whatever you do, work at it, with all your heart, as  
working for the Lord, not for men.

*Colossians 3:23*

Let the little children come to me,  
and do not hinder them,  
for the kingdom of God  
belongs to such as these

*Jesus ~ Mark 10:14*

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## Arrival

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**Procedure:** **Preschool classes begin promptly at 8:00.** Classroom doors open at 7:45 to allow for a 'settling-in' time. This gives children a chance to put their things away and greet classmates and teachers before coming together to learn. Families are asked to park in designated parking spaces and walk students to classrooms during the 10 minute period.

For families needing care before 7:45 am, we offer Morning Care beginning at 7:00 am for an additional fee.

**Punctuality:** We offer a preschool, rather than a daycare, experience. One standard that helps to reach this goal is to establish an official start to the school day. We encourage families to arrive at the designated start time to allow for the school day to begin without disruptions. Tardiness is not only disruptive to the class, but can bring discomfort to the individual student. We ask that you calmly leave your child in the capable care of our staff at the start of each school day.

**Rainy Days:** On rainy mornings, look for a staff member under the awning by the door closest to the office. If you see a teacher available, please pull your car under the awning and we will escort your child to class for you.

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## Dismissal

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**Procedure:** During all dismissal times, you may choose to park your car in a designated parking spot and walk to the dismissal area to pick up your student or remain in your car to use the car pick-up line. If you choose the car pick-up line, please follow the car line and **remain in your vehicle.** A teacher will escort your student and ensure that he/she is buckled in properly. **All VPK students must be signed in and out.**

**Punctuality:** Half day dismissal occurs at 11:05 am. Full day dismissal is at 2:50 pm. At 3:15, any children remaining will be sent to Extended Care and families will be billed accordingly. If you are delayed, please call to help eliminate any anxiety for your child. (727) 526-2538.

**Pick-up Designees:** A list of individuals permitted to pick up your student should be included on registration information on file. We will not release your child to anyone else unless we have received notification from you via a note or phone call. In those situations, identification will be verified. In legal situations where a biological parent is not permitted to pick up a student, a signed, notarized, legal court document must be on file in the office.

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## Early Pick-Up

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If you must pick your child up from school before dismissal, please call the office or notify the teacher that morning so that necessary materials may be gathered. Parent/guardian must come to the Early Education Center (EEC) to sign the child out. Office staff will get the child from the classroom to minimize disruption.

**11:30am Dismissal – Shortened School days:** On half-days, all classes will be dismissed at 11:30 am. Any child not picked up will be sent to Extended Care, when it is available, and parents will be responsible for any fee that is incurred.

**Preparing Your Child for School:** School is going to be a great experience for your child. Since new situations can sometimes be stressful for children, parents can help ease the situation by preparing children in the following ways:

- Be sure your child has a good night sleep and is healthy before arriving at school.
- Always speak of going to school as a pleasant and exciting event.
- Take time beforehand to talk over the new experience of going to school so that the event will be anticipated with pleasure and excitement.
- Prepare your child for the fact that you will have to leave but will return promptly when school is over.
- Get to know the teacher. Your child will be happy and secure knowing that his/her teacher and parents are friends.

It is recommended that you keep your good-byes as brief as possible. A prolonged farewell can create unnecessary difficulty in separation. Your child will adjust to the situation quickly. Please help him/her by remaining firm, calm, and understanding about the school experience. It should be something exciting to look forward to each day. The teacher will advise the Director if your child continues to be unhappy. We will be sure to give parents a call if it is needed. You are welcome to call the office, after departing, to be reassured that all is well.

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## Your Child's Progress

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You will learn about your child's progress by means of:

**Conferences:** Individual conferences are planned in the fall for each parent. In addition, a parent may also request a conference at any time. Teachers will also confer with a parent over the phone or via email when the need arises.

**Classroom visits:** Visits may be arranged with the classroom teacher after September 30th.

**Conversations:** Converse with your child about happenings at school. Please remember that some children, especially very young ones, will not always share details about their day at school. Do not be concerned as this is normal.

**Classroom Folders:** Each child will have a folder. Please check and empty this folder daily. It will contain your child's artwork, projects, and communications from the teacher or the Director's office.

We are committed to working with families. We strongly encourage you to participate in every aspect of your child's program. Our main focus is your child. It is vitally important that you, as parents, openly and honestly communicate your needs and desires regarding your child's development. Let your child's teacher or the Director know of any changes at home that might have an effect on your child's actions at school (i.e. sickness, changes in custody, a family death, etc.) Changes at home often lead to changes in behavior at school. If you have any concerns or questions, please contact a staff member immediately.

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### Parental/Guardian Responsibilities

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- Notify the Director of any changes in home or work address, phone numbers and other changes that should be made to your child's registration form: emergency/pickup persons, doctors, etc.
- Be sure that we have a telephone number where you or a designated person can be reached in case of emergency, sudden illness, etc. Give cell phone numbers when possible.
- Call the office to report any absences, especially if they are contagious.
- Keep sick children home.
- Notify the Director and the teacher immediately of any change(s) in your home or family situation which may affect your child's behavior.
- Make tuition payments in a timely fashion.
- Read your teacher's newsletters carefully for important events and class activities.

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### Allergies

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Please make sure that we are aware of all allergy concerns and that it is in writing for your child's student file on the Enrollment Form. Snack menus are posted in each classroom along with a food-allergy list. If your child has multiple food allergies, you may want to provide special snacks from home. Those that require an Epi-pen must provide one to be kept permanently at the school. It must be current and in the original packaging and a medical form must be completed. You may pick up the form in the EEC office

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### Appointments

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Please when possible schedule medical appointments, etc. outside of school hours. Realizing that this is not always possible, please check the school calendar for official days off. If a child must leave for an appointment during school hours, parents should notify the teacher personally or by a phone call to the office. When picking your child up, come to the office, sign him/her out, and office personnel will get your child from class for you.

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### Parental/Guardian Involvement

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Parents are encouraged to share their time, talent, hobbies, cultural backgrounds, etc. Your involvement is valued and greatly encouraged. You are invited to volunteer your help on a scheduled basis. Teachers can surely use your help for projects at home and at school. Parental/school partnerships add to the continuing success of our program.

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### Substitute/Aide

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Please let the Director, or your child's teacher, know if you are interested in being a substitute aide for your child's class and/or other classes during the school year. You must have a level II background screening (good for 5 years). There is a fee involved. Please come to the school office for information. Your assistance is very much appreciated. *Requirements:* must have Local, Federal, & FBI criminal records checks (current within 5 years), this will be done as a result of being fingerprinted; must have at least a high school diploma, college diploma, or transcripts

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### Notifications/Communication

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In an effort to best serve the families, we utilize electronic (email) communication. All school news, updates, events, and reminders will be provided to the email address(es) you provide. This is a great solution for getting the information out to multiple parents/caregivers. It has proved to be very useful when we have had weather alerts as we are able to instantly update parents about our status and the safety of the children. Please make sure that the staff has a family email address so the email system will work.

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### Children's Files

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Florida laws (Statutes 232.0315 and 232.032) require that students attending Florida schools have the following documentation on file in the student file:

- **Enrollment record** Enrollment form C-0030 provided by the PCLB Child Care Licensing Program shall be kept current and on file.
- **Influenza Brochure** the children's center director must provide parents with information detailing the causes, symptoms, and transmission of the influenza virus.
- **Emergency Release Form** A notarized Emergency Medical Release form must be on file for each child in care. The form is valid indefinitely unless there is a change in legal guardianship of the child. If there is a change in legal guardianship, a new Emergency Medical Release Form must be completed by the new legal guardian and the signature of the new legal guardian notarized within seven (7) days of the children's center becoming aware of the change in guardianship.
- **Food Experience Permission**
- **Health Form (DH-3040)** must be completed and signed by a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or ARNP. The exam must be within the 12 months prior to the child enrolling in Florida schools. Children are not admitted to school without this physical exam form.
- **Immunization Form** must include all immunization dates or proof of all immunizations on an official immunization card. Students entering the designated grade levels are required to show proof of these vaccines or valid yearly medical/religious exemption before entry into school.

*Note: These immunization regulations are mandatory and apply to all new students and returning students.*

All children's records shall be kept confidential. Grace Lutheran staff and other employees, shall not discuss or disclose personal information regarding children and facts learned about the children and their relatives except: (a) with parents or the person(s) authorized by the parent(s)/guardian(s) to receive such information, or (b) with the agency assisting the parent(s)/guardian(s) with planning for the child.

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### Reporting Child Abuse

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In order to protect children, the law requires certain persons who may have frequent contact with children and their families, and who are in position to identify child abuse and neglect, to report it. All child care employees are required to report any suspicion of abuse to Child Protective Services. Please be aware of this requirement and legal obligation. The staff will be morally and legally required to report any signs and suspicions of abuse.

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### **Custody Issues/Policies**

In the event of a change in custodial arrangements for a child, both parents are asked to notify the Director, in writing, of the specific changes. We ask that staff members be kept informed of custody arrangements and changes in circumstances. This will help the staff ensure that notes about next day events or field trips, etc. make it home to both parents and it will also provide an opportunity for us to provide a higher quality of care for your family.

It is important to note that the preschool is legally obligated to release a child to either parent unless there is a court decree on file at the center that states otherwise. Any court order on file will be followed and enforced. Pick-up attempts by person(s) listed on a court document will result in a call to the police and a lock down at our preschool. We ask that all documents and changes be copied for the office and the staff immediately and kept current. The preschool must limit its involvement in domestic disputes. Our intention is to remain a neutral and safe place for your child

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### **Withdrawals & Re-enrollment**

Written notice is required when a child is withdrawn from school. If a child is absent for more than two weeks without notice, we will assume that the child has been withdrawn and will proceed to register another child from our waiting list. If a child is withdrawn and later wishes to re-enroll within a three-month period, the registration will be waived. After the three-month period, the full registration fee will be required.

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### **Sibling Priority**

Siblings of enrolled children have priority status on the waiting list so that we may better serve their families. Family payment history will be considered before an offer of enrollment is made. The exception to sibling priority occurs when commitments have been made before a parent request has been made. Due to the fact that Grace Lutheran Preschool frequently has a waiting list, it is in the family's best interest to request a spot in the preschool as soon as possible and have their name placed on the waiting list.

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### **Accident/Incident Reports**

Accident or behavioral incident reports will be filled out for situations that occur during your child's time with us. Accident reports will include details of the accident and how the staff managed the situation. Incident reports will explain and document behavior issues. The person picking up the child at the end of the day is required by License Board to sign each report. Reports are kept in the child's file to track accidents and incidents.

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### **Photo Release Policy**

At various times throughout the year, we will take photographs and/or videotapes of the children for educational and decorative purposes (e.g. we will post photos on bulletin boards, in cubbies, etc.). In addition, parents are permitted to take pictures or video when we have special assemblies or events. Your child's photo may also occasionally appear on the preschool website. A form is available if you choose to exclude your child from such activity.

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### **Emergency Procedures**

Fire drills and severe-weather drills are held monthly. In the event of a severe-weather warning, tornado watch/warning, or other state-wide emergency, established emergency procedures are mandated by the

administration. These procedures are rehearsed monthly throughout the school year so that all students and personnel are familiar with them.

If severe weather persists, especially if rising water is evident or expected, you are encouraged to pick your child up early even if school is still officially in session. If we must evacuate due to fire or other emergency for which it would be dangerous or prohibitive to remain in the building, we will evacuate to the 16<sup>th</sup> street parking lot area. Permission has also been granted for us to evacuate the children to Riviera Day School. It is imperative that all home, work, and cell phone numbers be kept current at all times on your child's registration form for you and your designates.

When public schools are closed due to prohibitive weather conditions, we will also be closed. If public schools remain closed for reasons that do not affect our school, we will be open. To protect children and adults from air pollution and other hazardous weather elements, Grace Lutheran School will access weather.com and/or television stations when seeking air-quality and/or ozone levels due to smog or smoke. The children will be kept inside during hazardous weather alerts or warnings.

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### Attendance

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It has been said that "85% of success is showing up." Children are expected to attend school every day that they are healthy. Please avoid scheduling trips that do not coincide with our scheduled vacations/holidays/breaks. Absences disrupt a child's sense of routine, and, upon their return, children often find it necessary to re-adjust. Good attendance habits now help set a precedent for later school years.

Excessive absences will cause your child to falter in his/her lessons and will make it difficult to maintain a normal pace. We desire to work with families, especially those with special circumstances. **Please call the school if your child will be absent at 727-526-2538.** This will help teachers to better plan and keep track of classroom illnesses. *Exceptional attendances will be recognized at the end of the school year.*

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### Typical Day

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A day at Grace Lutheran is filled with various age-appropriate, stimulating experiences. Different areas of interest, in balanced time periods, are made available for the child to pursue. Of course, regular trips to the bathroom, playground time, meals, snacks and rest time are part of the day. As required, a detailed daily schedule is posted in each room. The consistency of routine and knowing what to expect during the day helps children develop a sense of trust and understanding of their environment.

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### Birthday/Class Parties

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In the life of a small child, birthdays are extremely important. If you would like to bring in simple refreshments for your child to share with his/her class, please make arrangements with the teacher in advance. Due to the Health Department policy, we require that birthday treats be store bought. Summer birthdays may be celebrated prior to the end of the school year as determined by the classroom teacher.

We ask that no birthday invitations be passed out unless all children from the class are invited. Please arrange siblings' care during all parties and each time you volunteer to assist in the classroom. This makes it possible for your full attention to be given to the child(ren) in your charge without distractions (same policy applies to Field Trips). Your child relishes this special "Mommy & Me" time. In addition, we must follow License Board policies regarding student-teacher ratios.

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### Recess

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The children will spend 30 minutes on the playground with their age group in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon every day, weather permitting. Physical activity is very important for the children and helps to develop motor skills and social skills.

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### Rest Time

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Children will be given up to a 2 hour or less rest period depending on age of children. Sleeping is not mandatory, but children must rest quietly on their cots. The center will provide cots in each classroom. Cot sheets will be provided the first day of school.

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### Music & Art

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Our educational philosophy embraces both art and music. Learning should be physically and mentally active; that is, children should be actively involved in learning activities. Music and art both create opportunities for active involvement. Brain research shows that music and movement is one of the only activities that utilizes both sides of the brain and increases understanding and learning. The children will be exposed to a wide variety of music incorporated into their learning activities. This year we will be using the "Music Together" curriculum.

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### Behavior & Discipline

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**Student Conduct:** Early education needs to occur in an environment that is conducive to learning. Any behavior that prevents learning from taking place is unacceptable. Correct behavior will be positively reinforced with encouragement and praise. All inappropriate behavior will be corrected immediately. Unacceptable behavior includes fighting, hitting, kicking or rough play of any kind; obscene or vulgar language; deliberate disobedience or disrespect to any adult; disruptive noises or sounds; throwing items inside; running inside; damaging property; leaving the classroom or playground without permission; and lack of cooperation.

**Discipline:** We use positive discipline, redirection of behavior and providing alternatives. We guide the children toward acceptable actions and words rather than focusing on the "don'ts". They are instructed on ways to solve problems and conflicts using words rather than hurting others. We never use physical punishments. If necessary, a teacher will redirect a child from a particular situation. The goal of any necessary "discipline" or guidance at the preschool is to promote life-long self-control and self-discipline in children. We want children to learn to make appropriate God-pleasing choices independently and not to rely on adults to control behavior for them. In accordance with our goals of discipline, we utilize supportive and fair discipline techniques that help children acknowledge the behavior, make choices about the solution and be responsible for consequences. We recognize that this is a process.

**Violence:** Violent behavior such as excessive hitting, kicking and fighting will not be tolerated. Every effort will be made to restore a child and help them to make better choices and to solve problems in nonviolent ways. Conferences will be held with parents to work cooperatively to resolve problems and support change. However, we reserve the options to dismiss any child due to behavior which disrupts the learning process of the class or threatens the safety and well-being of other children and/or staff members.

**Biting Policy:** Children sometimes bite other children. Although not all children bite, biting is considered a normal two year old stage in a child's development. Children may bite for a variety of reasons, rarely with the intent to hurt another child. They may bite for any of the following reasons:

- Self-assertion: This is probably the most common reason two-year olds bite. It is a way to express frustration when they do not yet have the language skills to do so.
- Cause and Effect: Two year olds are eager explorers. They are constantly studying cause and effect. Biting produces a predictable response. Often, the response is dramatic; there is a lot of noise and attention from adults.

Due to the serious nature of biting, our staff will implement the following procedure:

- When a child is bitten, that child is immediately comforted and the bite is washed with antibacterial soap and a Band-Aid is applied if the skin is broken.
- The child who bit is told very firmly that it is not okay to bite and biting hurts very much.
- If possible, the teacher will try to encourage the child who was bitten to express his/her feelings. "It hurts" or "Don't bite me" are sentences teachers will model for the child to repeat.
- The child who bit is then redirected to another area of the classroom and no positive or negative attention is given for a short period of time.
- An incident report will provide documentation for both families. Consistent with the privacy policy, parents are told only of the incident in relation to their child.
- Teachers will work with the parent of the child who bit to prevent further incidents.
- If biting continues, there will be a parent teacher conference which may include the Director.
- For the safety of all the children in our center, we will work together. Teachers will work with the Director to evaluate room procedures to ensure that the environment meets the needs of all the children.
- If a child requires more attention to prevent bites from occurring than teachers can provide, **that child may be suspended for a period of time** until they have outgrown the need to bite or it is no longer a problem.

We recognize how upset parents may be when learning their child has been bitten or has bitten another child. Despite our concerted efforts to prevent biting incidents, they occasionally occur. Our goal will always be to maintain a safe and nurturing environment for all children.

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### Snacks / Lunches

**Snacks:** The school provides a nutritious morning and afternoon snack daily. All children are given the appropriate food portions for their age and offered more when it is available. If your child has food allergies or special food needs, accommodations will be made. Allergies must be included on your child's enrollment form. Make sure your child's teacher knows of the allergy. If your child is not allowed certain foods for religious or personal reasons, please document that through a written note.

**Lunches:** Parents can provide a lunch for his/her child or purchase a hot lunch through our food service. Details regarding the purchase of hot lunch can be found in Grace Lutheran School's Family Handbook. The Pinellas County License Board has requested that no candy or gum or soda is included in school lunches. Refrigeration or warming of food is not available in the classroom, so please pack lunches accordingly.

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### Uniform/Clothing Policy

All Grace Lutheran School students must follow the uniform policy. In addition, one complete change of clothing should be kept at the school in case of accidents or spills and replaced as needed. Children should wear sneakers or other rubber-soled, closed-in shoes. NO JELLIES, CROCS, SANDALS OR COWBOY/COWGIRL BOOTS PLEASE. Label all sweaters, etc. Please dress your child according to the weather as the children play

outside each day unless it is raining. The Grace Lutheran School uniform policy emphasizes modesty, neatness, cleanliness, safety, and Christian values. In order to accomplish these goals, the following statements represent general, governing guidelines:

- All students of GLS are required to wear school uniforms except designated days
- Students should wear clean clothing in good condition and appropriately sized.
- All shirts must have the GLS logo.
- Shorts, skirts, skorts, and jumper Pants, slacks, Approved colors are khaki and navy blue girls are encouraged to wear shorts under skirts and jumpers.
- Socks (White, khaki colored, black, navy blue): Must be worn with shoes.
- Boys' hair may not exceed the length of the collar.
- Girls': Leggings and tights – solid white or navy blue only.

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### Illnesses

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**Please do not send your child to school if your child is ill or has a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, skin rash, severe sore throat, discolored nasal discharge or bad cough.** Staying at home when sick will help your child get well and protect classmates and staff. Should your child become ill at school, we will call to arrange for pick-up. A child with a possible contagious disease will be isolated in the office until a parent can be reached. In the case of vomiting, diarrhea, and/or a fever, your child must be free from symptoms for **24 hours without medication** before returning to school. If your child has a communicable illness, please notify the school so that we can release that information to the other families in an attempt to stop the spread of illness, while maintaining privacy. Every effort is made on our part to prevent the spread of illnesses. Toys and surfaces are regularly treated with germicide.

**Please note:** In the event that your child experiences a health emergency and the supervising adult considers it necessary to contact the paramedics, parents will be financially liable for all emergency service costs.

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### Lice Policies and Procedures

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- If you know your child has lice, do not bring them to school. Notify the office of this fact so that steps can be taken for prevention of spreading.
- If head lice are detected, the child will be discretely removed from class and will stay in the office. Families will be called immediately for pick up.
- If head lice are detected or reported, a written notice will be sent home with the children in the classroom(s)/playgroups involved.
- If someone is absent that day, the teacher will call the parents.
- Toys in the classroom with hair or fur will be bagged for one month or put into a dryer on high for a minimum of thirty minutes, dress-up clothes will be laundered by the teachers, and rugs will be sprayed and vacuumed.
- Home and car checks will need to be done until all nits are gone. Parents are encouraged to regularly check your children for head lice.
- Children may return to school when they are deemed nit free. Please bring your child directly to the office upon returning to school to be checked by school personnel before returning to the classroom.

- If no nits are found, your child will be readmitted to the classroom. If nits are found, the child will not be readmitted to the classroom.

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### **Potty Training**

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Two-year-olds do not need to be potty trained to participate in our program. Teachers in these classes will work with your child throughout the year to achieve this important milestone before he/she goes into a three-year-old class.

Children in our three-year old classes and above must be independently potty trained. We expect and plan for occasional accidents. Check with your teacher for needed supplies and return clean replacement clothes the following day. Any child having consistent toilet accidents (four times in succession) will have a conference with the parent and teacher to talk about options.

