

Little Explorers Preschool

Parent Handbook

2023-2024



COMMITTED TO GROWING YOUNG HEARTS AND MINDS

This handbook is the property of Little Explorers Preschool and Covenant Life Church
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This program accredited by Florida League of Christian Schools (FLOCS) #63829534

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Welcome

We are thrilled to welcome you to our program. You and your child are very important to us. Our desire is to welcome all who come seeking service. We want to offer a valuable program to serve our community.

Please feel free to inquire about our policies and procedures as well as offer your suggestions. Our goal is to provide a healthy, safe, and stimulating learning environment for your child.

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to serve you and your family.

Blessings to You,

Little Explorers Preschool

And whoever *welcomes* a little child like this in my name *welcomes* me.
Matthew 18:5

Mission and Purpose

Little Explorer's Preschool will provide a safe, caring and educational environment for children to discover and learn.

We believe that each child is a special gift from God (Psalm 139:13-14). Therefore, our program will not only instill academics and school readiness skills, but Biblical worldview.

The balance of teaching and facilitating the discovery of cognitive, social, and physical skills and Biblical truth will contribute to the development of a well-rounded child. Additionally, we value partnership with parents, recognizing their role to train and teach their children and will seek to encourage them as we all invest in the lives of their children (Proverbs 22:6).

Our purpose is to facilitate the balanced development of children today for a better generation tomorrow.

Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men. Ephesians 6:7

Our Students

Our program is for all two, three, and four year old children. Children must have their birthday by the end of August to be admitted to their respective age group. We offer a three day program for all age levels and various aftercare options.

Our Vision

Young children are naturally active, inquisitive, and motivated. Children need to be affirmed and stimulated. We, at Little Explorers Preschool, want the children to grow and mature in a Christian environment of positive learning.

Our preschool is run with accountability and quality kept at the forefront of our priorities.

We seek to serve parents and children alike with an authentic and caring community.

Teacher and School Certifications

The Little Explorers Preschool program is accredited by the Florida League of Christian Schools (FLOCS) and Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). We are committed to meet the Bylaws and cooperate with FLOCS guidelines. Therefore, we agree to promote spiritual and moral values as well as educational excellence.

Teachers are required to have a Level II FBI fingerprint screen and FDLE background check. We also request references on each teacher hired. The State of Florida requires 40 hours of Introductory Child Care Training classes. These classes consist of the following: Child Care Facility Rules & Regulations, Health/Safety & Nutrition, Child Abuse & Neglect, Child Growth & Development, Behavioral Observation & Screening. Also required is 5 hours of Early Literacy and Fire extinguisher training. Teachers are required to complete 15 hours of in-service training annually. Teachers are certified with CPR and First-Aid.

All teachers are expected to work together as a team. This creates the appropriate environment and sets a good example for the children in the classroom. In order to achieve this, clear communication is vital. We refer to the Little Explorers Preschool staff as the Little Explorers Preschool Team.

Student Forms Required

In order to register, the following forms are required. These forms are provided in your enrollment packet:

- Enrollment form
- Medical release form
- Authorized pick up form
- Parental Authorization & Agreement Form
- Tuition and Fees Agreement Form
- Photo/Media release form
- Distracted Driver Information
- Influenza Information Sheet
- Auto Payment Plan Form

These additional forms must be turned in with completed enrollment packet:

- FL DOH School Entry Health Exam Part I and II: (current physical from Doctor's office)
- Florida Immunization Record or Exemption Form (from Doctor's office)
- Copy of Birth certificate
- VPK Certificate of Eligibility from Early Learning Coalition (for VPK age)

All student records must be updated yearly and physicals must be current. Immunization records must be kept current to be in attendance, failure to do so, will result in your child having to withdraw until they are received. Immunization exemptions must be on file and are available through the Health Department.

Exemption: Any child may be exempt from medical or physical examination, or medical or surgical treatment upon written request of the parent of the child who objects to such treatments.

Student Records are kept in a lockable file cabinet and are accessible to the Director and authorized personnel only.

Medicine Policy

Little Explorers Preschool will not administer any medication unless it is necessary for life threatening cases (ex. EpiPen for allergies). Proper paperwork and a signed doctors order must be in the child's file. Please do not send any medicine with your child for them to administer it to themselves. This may result in immediate dismissal from Little Explorers.

Little Explorers Preschool
Well-Child Policy (Health Policy)

In an effort to maintain a healthy environment for our children we ask that you follow these well child guidelines. **Please do not bring your child to Little Explorers Preschool if they are sick** or have any of the following sign and/or symptoms:

Fever, temperature of 99.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher **without medication**

Cough (dry or bringing up phlegm)

Congestion or Runny nose (yellow, green or clear, etc.)

Shortness of breath, difficulty breathing or rapid breathing

Fatigue

Muscle or body aches

New loss of taste or smell

Chills

Sore Throat

Headache or Stiff Neck

Nausea or upset stomach, including diarrhea and/or vomiting in last 48 hours

Conjunctivitis (pink eye): reddened eyes, producing mucus, or persistent itch/irritation

Exposed, open skin lesions

Yellowish skin or eyes

Please allow your child at least 48 hours to recover (symptom free) before returning him/her to our program. LEP reserves the right to extend the duration of mandatory absence, if necessary. Any child with above symptoms shall be removed from the classroom. The child will be isolated and the parent/guardian will be contacted immediately for pickup.

Lice and Nits (Eggs)

If lice or nits (eggs) are noticed while a child is in class, we will inform parents of our findings immediately and ask for the child to be taken home and receive at least one treatment before returning to school. **We will treat the matter as confidential.** We will inform all parents of the problem, through a letter being sent home, in order for them to monitor their own child. The affected students name will **not** be mentioned.

If parents detect lice or nits (eggs) in child's head, we ask that the child receive one treatment to head before returning to school and then inform the Preschool Director or Teacher, so they may inform all parents through a letter. **We will treat the matter as confidential.** The affected student's name will **not** be mentioned.

Drop-off and Pick-Up Procedures

Our doors open at 8:55am. We expect that every child will be dropped off at the latest by 9:10am. **If you anticipate being any later, please keep your child home, as it is an interruption to the class already in progress. The teachers have the right to refuse entry to your child if you are late!!! We also receive the right to dismiss your child from the program for excessive tardiness.**

All parents are required to sign-in their child(ren) daily on the attendance sheets with their full signature (**initials are not acceptable**) and time of arrival. All children must be signed in before the parent/guardian is allowed to leave. Drop-off and Pick-up is in the lobby. The teacher will welcome and direct your child to their designated area. All adults will remain on the tiled area, unless directed by the director/teacher. This helps to make transitions smoother in both the morning and afternoon. In particular circumstances, exceptions will be made, but please wait to be directed by the director/teacher.

The classroom teacher or assistant will bring your child to the lobby for pick up. All parents are required to sign out their child(ren) daily on the attendance sheets with their full signature and time of pick up before leaving with the child. Once your child has been released to you, please exit the building.

Only authorized individuals will be allowed to sign out and remove your child from the Little Explorers Preschool program. An Authorization for Pick-up form must be completed and in the student file. Any authorized individual other than parent/guardian picking up a student after school must bring a picture I.D. to be matched up with the authorized pickup form filled out by parent/guardian. There will be **no** exceptions to this rule, so please be sure to communicate this to everyone authorized to pick your child up. If a picture ID is not presented, the child will be escorted to Late Care until the required information is obtained. Late Fees will apply.

In the event that you know that another person will be picking up your child please inform the director/teacher during drop off so we can confirm that the person is on the approved pick-up list prior to pick up time. If unexpected situation arises, we ask that you email **and** phone the Director with name of person picking up and we will again ask for ID.

All children must be picked up no later than 5 minutes after selected program time or they will be escorted to Late Care, and late fees will be applied. If parent/guardian is running late, they must call to inform the Preschool Director or church office. We understand emergencies and undue circumstances will arise and we are willing to work with you, but we ask you to be respectful to the hours of the program and the teacher's schedules, as well.

For security, the main doors to the church and classroom areas (upstairs and downstairs) will be locked during program hours. They will open 8:55a – 9:10a, 11:55a-12:05p and 1:55p-2:10p. If you need to drop-off/pick-up outside of these hours, someone will buzz you in through the main office entrance at the south end of the building.

Attendance Policy

Having your child attend school on a regular and consistent basis is an important part of their educational experience. If your child will not be attending school because of illness or vacation, you are **required** to inform the preschool director in person, email, or by phoning the main church office at 941-926-4777 and leaving a message. If your child has unexplained excessive absences without proper notification/documentation for a valid reason (doctor's note), Little Explorers Preschool reserves the right to remove your child from the program. If for some reason your child will be starting the program late or will be absent for an extended period of time, *you will be billed the regular scheduled amount for the program in order to reserve his/her place, even for months not in attendance.* The financial agreement (page 14) is still in effect. Financial arrangements can be made with the Director and/or Covenant Life Church Executive Pastor.

School Calendar

Little Explorers Preschool follows Sarasota County School Calendar, with some exceptions – Little Explorers starts on the same week of public school year, we take off the third Thursday and Friday in November for FLOCS Educator Conference. Open House - First day of school and Last day of school, and days with Special Events - may have early dismissal. If Sarasota County schools close for severe weather or additional professional days, etc. , then Little Explorers will be closed. A school calendar will be provided mid-June.

Discipline Practices / Behavioral Issues

The goal of discipline is to assist children in becoming self-directed, self-disciplined individuals in society. This self-control is vital for children to learn now for the future. Although we cannot protect children from negative experiences and feelings, we can teach them to cope in appropriate ways. The goal for each child is self-discipline. If one anticipates behavior and provides guidance and redirection, many issues can be circumvented. We support creative discipline methods. When explaining what proper behavior is, we utilize the Bible to show the commands of our Lord. We know how to behave because Jesus Christ tells us.

Our goal is to set the child up for success. The teacher must aid children in developing self-control over their actions, through consistent routine, clear understanding of the rules, and loving redirection. At the same time, there are strict limits to ensure safety of students and staff members.

Severe discipline issues will be documented with the date, time, location, individuals involved, actions taken, and preventive measures implemented in the classroom. All incidents will be documented, and parents will be informed and a

Discipline Practices / Behavioral Issues—continued

copy of the report provided. Due to confidentiality the “offended party’s” name will not be released. All documented information will prove to be useful for parent conferences and other situations. If particular incidents and/or behavioral issues continue to arise with a student in the classroom, a meeting will be scheduled between the Preschool Director, teachers, and parents. We will always be willing to work with any student and family on **any** issues, as long as we see progress and effort on the student and parent/guardian’s part. However, excessive aggressive behavior will not be tolerated. We reserve the right to ask the student to withdrawal from the program and terminate enrollment in the event that a child’s behavior is harmful to other students, teachers, and/or the child’s needs are not compatible with our program.

Below is a list of acceptable discipline practices:

- 1 Positive reinforcement
- 2 Redirecting
- 3 Removing privileges
- 4 Natural consequences (consequences should be fair, consistent and logical)
- 5 “Think about it” Area (a quiet spot to regroup themselves)
- 6 Removal from classroom (take child to the preschool director)
- 7 Director can make a telephone call to the parent/guardian, if necessary

Below is a list of unacceptable discipline practices:

- 1 A child shall not be subjected to discipline, which is severe, humiliating or frightening
- 2 Discipline shall not be associated with food, rest or toileting
- 3 Spanking or any other form of physical punishment is prohibited
- 4 Belittling a child

Many scripture passages in the Bible refer to discipline and the necessity of it. Our Father in heaven disciplines us, His children, and we are expected to discipline our children.

‘Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.’
Proverbs 29:17

Expulsion/Dismissal from Program Policy:

Covenant Life Church and/or Little Explorers Preschool reserves the right to dismiss the student or family from the program and terminate further enrollment for the following reasons, not limited to, but including and for any other reasons:

1. Non-payment or excessive late payment of tuition and other fees.
2. Failure to adhere to policies and procedures as outlined in the Little Explorers Preschool Parent Handbook.
3. Excessive tardiness or absenteeism.
4. The child's behavior is harmful to other students, and/or teachers.
5. The child's needs are not compatible with our program or we do not feel equipped to handle behavioral/developmental concerns.
6. The parent/guardian exhibits behavior which is detrimental to the health and well-being of the children and/or staff in a classroom or negatively interferes with the normal functioning of the Church, Preschool, classroom and/or program.
7. If parent does not seek outside help as established at conference and behavior/developmental concerns continue, the child may be asked to withdraw from the school.

In the event of dismissal from the program, there will be no refund of tuition paid.

Child Abuse Policy:

Any significant physical changes will be documented. As such, Little Explorers Preschool and its staff is mandated by law and will comply with the State as it relates to reporting suspicions of child abuse, neglect or abandonment to the Florida Abuse Hotline in accordance with s. 39.201 of the Florida Statutes (FS.).

Miscellaneous Policies and Procedures

Peanut and Nut Free Facility

At our facility there are some children that have allergies and we try to make our environment a safe place for these children. For this reason, we have designated Little Explorers Preschool a peanut/nut free zone. We ask that you not send in snacks, Birthday treats, or lunches with your child that are made with nuts of any type. If you have any further questions about approved snacks, please don't hesitate to ask and we will provide you with a list of suggestions.

Miscellaneous Policies and Procedures... Continued

Snacks & Meals

Parents/Guardians must provide their child a snack to school. The children will not be allowed to share their snacks. Many children have allergies to certain foods, food colorings, additives, etc. Safety is our number one concern. We also talk about nutrition and expect that the snack your child brings will be nutritious. Candy is not an allowable snack and gum chewing is not allowed any time at school.

We do not provide lunches. We request that you provide your child with a nutritiously balanced meal. If refrigeration and/or microwaving to heat are required Little Explorers will be happy to accommodate your request. We also request that your child brings a water bottle daily labeled with their name.

Photos Taken in The Classroom

Teachers may take photos during the day's activities and display the photos in the classroom. When we promote the Little Explorers Preschool program to the church family, we may use miscellaneous photos of the children during their busy day. Little Explorers will often use these pictures on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/LEP.CLC/. We also may post them on the app ClassDojo- a communication app used by Little Explorers -to share what is happening in our school.

If you do NOT want us to take photos of your child during the day at Little Explorers Preschool program, please indicate on the photo/media release form.

Class Lists/ Directory

Parents will be given a class list of the students in their child's class. This list will include: parent name, email address and phone number that were provided on enrollment forms. These are to be used solely for LEP families and staff. If you do not wish to have this information shared, please let the Director know.

Animals on Site

Parents will be informed in advance if animals will be brought into the building. At this time, classrooms are allowed to have fish.

Miscellaneous Policies and Procedures... Continued

Emergency Evacuation Plan

In the unlikely event of an emergency, evacuation routes and safe areas have been designated. If the building were on fire, children would be escorted through the designated fire exits in their particular part of the building and moved quickly to several "safe zones" marked on poles in the parking lot. We would contact you to arrive at school as soon as possible and pick-up your child.

We practice our fire drills at least once a month with the students, so that they are familiar with the process and routes that must be taken in an emergency.

Proper transportation practices to and from school

Florida law requires:

- Children age 5 and under to be secured properly in a crash-tested, federally approved child restraint device.
- Children ages 0 to 3 must be in child restraint devices of a separate carrier or a vehicle manufacturer's integrated child seat.
- Children age 4 and 5 must be in a separate carrier, integrated child seat or booster seat.

We request that you follow Florida's rules and regulations regarding proper use of car restraints for your child to and from school.

Also, while dropping off your child(ren) at Little Explorers Preschool you may NOT leave any other minor child(ren) in your car. If you occasionally need to drop off child without getting out of your car, you may arrange for one of the staff to meet you at the drive-up area front of the building. If you have any questions or concerns about this policy, please contact the Director.

Children's Attire

We recognize the need for children to run and play. Children will need to wear clothes that will allow them full movement to run, jump, climb, and crawl and have fun. Shoes should be closed toe with a back like sneakers. **Flip flops and Croc's are not permitted.** Parents must provide a set of clothes/underwear and diapers/pull-ups and wipes (if applicable) to be kept in the classroom and replaced when necessary.

Miscellaneous Policies and Procedures... continued

Dress Code

Because we are a faith-based program, we ask that children dress distinctively masculine and feminine, according to their gender, reflecting a wholesome appreciation for God's creative plan.

Boys may wear: shorts or pants with a shirt and/or a jacket.

Girls may wear: shorts, pants or skirt with a shirt and/or a jacket, dresses.

**Note: Girls wearing dresses or skirts must wear shorts underneath.

Pajamas and costumes may only be worn when classes are having a special day— teachers will give advance notice of these days.

Field Trips

Parents will be informed of up-coming field trips in advance. We would request your permission and request your signature on a field trip form before removing your child from the Little Explorers Preschool facility. Little Explorers will NOT transport any child by vehicle to any field trip. Children will be supervised at all times by LEP Staff. Currently, we are not taking any field trips off campus property.

During school hours visitation

Parents are welcome to visit the classroom and observe their child* – please arrange with the teacher. The staff may ask for your involvement in projects, events, and educational information sessions (i.e. career day). *subject to change –in event of pandemic, health guidelines.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Little Explorers Preschool does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national or ethnic origin.

Enrollment Policy

Enrollment begins in March. Completed enrollment forms and non-refundable registration fee must be paid to secure placement for the next school year. Early Learning Coalition -VPK registration begins in January. A VPK Voucher must be obtained from the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota website: www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org. This must be signed and submitted to Little Explorers Preschool to secure placement. All outstanding balances must be paid in order for your child to enroll for the next year and must be kept current.

FINANCIAL AGREEMENT

Little Explorers Preschool is a non-for-profit center dedicated to a quality educational experience at a reasonable cost. The number of days in a month that school is in session does not affect the monthly rate and there are no adjustments in tuition for holidays or days missed. As long as your child is officially enrolled in the preschool, tuition is billed regardless of illness, vacation, school holidays, scheduled breaks-(as noted on the school calendar), early dismissal days or school closures.

If you choose to withdraw your child from Little Explorers Preschool or decrease their enrollment in the program, you must give written notice to the Director. However, you are still responsible to pay 2 additional months tuition from dated written notice and any outstanding balances.

There is a yearly non-refundable registration fee that is due at the time of enrollment or re-enrollment. There is no registration fee for those children enrolled in the 3 day VPK program with a voucher from the Early Learning Coalition. However, there is a non-refundable registration fee for those enrolled in VPK with Monday and Friday care.

We utilize an auto payment system for tuition and after care billing. The form is included in the enrollment packet. Tuition will be withdrawn on the 1st of each month: August – May.

As needed Aftercare for 2 and 3 yr olds (12-2p) is billed at the end of the month and charges will be withdrawn by autopay within the first week of the month.

Late Pick up Fee (after 2:10pm) of \$10/first 5minutes then \$5 each minute there-after, per child, will be billed the next business day.

All banking or debit/credit card information must be kept current. Any account that comes back as NSF will be charged \$35.00 per occurrence.

Credit card usage will incur a 3% surcharge.

All accounts must be kept current or your child may be asked to withdraw until payment is made in full.

Refund Policy: Registration fees are non-refundable. After the required written notice of withdrawal, Paid in Full Tuition refunds will be prorated- (minus 2 months tuition amount).

VPK

Volunteer Pre-Kindergarten Program is a **FREE** educational program created to prepare every four-year-old in Florida for kindergarten and build the foundation for their educational success. This program covers 540 instructional hours and is **FREE** for all children four-years-old on or before **September 1** of the program year who reside in Florida.

When participating in Little Explorers Preschool VPK parents must agree to abide by these rules and regulations.

- All parents must submit to Little Explorers Preschool, a VPK voucher from the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota website: www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org - to secure their placement.
- All enrollment information must be up to date and current at all times when child is enrolled in VPK program.
- Parents must agree to make an effort to have child attend school every day that it is in session and phone 941-926-4777 to inform staff of absence.
- If your child has unexplained excessive absences without proper notification/ documentation- (doctor's note), Little Explorers Preschool reserves the right to remove your child from the program.
- If family has a preplanned absence for the student, the parent must inform the Director before the intended absence.
- Parents will sign child in and out every day with full signature.
- Parents will, at the end of each month, sign the Child Attendance and Parental Choice Certificate Form (CAPCC) to confirm that their child has attended Little Explorers Preschool during the month and the parents intend for the child to continue attending Little Explorers Preschool.
- Must comply with all Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota regulations regarding VPK (see www.earlylearningcoalitionsarasota.org)
- Must be responsible for ensuring child participates in Kindergarten screening test.
- Must comply with all other Little Explorers Preschool rules & regulations out-lined in Parent Handbook and Enrollment Package.

School Closing Policy

FLOCS requires us to share with families the policy if a preschool were to close. The following policy has been adopted by FLOCS for all preschools to observe:

“Upon the decision to close a center, the center must:

- Notify parents in writing –Giving a 30 day notice
- Transfer student records to the parent or legal guardian
- Maintain incident reports for a minimum of 180 days
- Maintain all state documents (i.e. fire drill records, inspection reports, attendance, etc.) for a minimum of 365 days
- If records cannot be maintained by the center, then records should be forwarded to the FLOCS office.”