

# EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

## PARENT HANDBOOK

Coral Gables Congregational Church

**EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER**

3010 Columbus Boulevard  
Coral Gables, Florida 33134  
(305) 444-9792

[ECC@GablesUCC.org](mailto:ECC@GablesUCC.org)  
[www.gablespreschool.org](http://www.gablespreschool.org)

mailing address: 3010 De Soto Boulevard, Coral Gables. FL 33134  
LIC C11MD0107



**Accredited since 1993 by the  
National Academy of Early Childhood Programs  
A Division of the  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
[www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)**

Si necesitan una traducción, por favor visiten nuestra oficina.

## **Our Philosophy of Early Childhood Education**

The Early Childhood Center believes that children are active and curious by nature and will become engaged learners in the realm they know best - the hands-on world of play. We believe there is a critical link between a child's early experiences, the development of a love for learning, and their later success in life. We strongly affirm that everyone, including children, families and society, all benefit from enriched and high-quality early childhood programs.

That is why we offer a program that provides a child with the ability to learn through play with many opportunities for socialization and intellectual growth. We feel it is important to provide activities for social-emotional growth, positive self-image and the development of school readiness skills, which can lead to future academic success and create the curiosity of a life-long learner.

Art, music, early literacy and physical play are important pathways for our curriculum. We provide developmentally appropriate activities, which are geared to each child's individual abilities and their unique learning styles and needs. We strive to create a classroom environment that feels safe and comforting and that will promote self-discovery and exploration. The staff is here to stimulate, support and nurture each child as they grow physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially.

We recognize that a unique family is at the center of each child's life and those parents and caregivers are the child's first and foremost teachers. We strive to work with parents to find the best way to advance their child's emerging potential. We want to help children value their own and their families uniqueness and to appreciate and celebrate the differences among other people. We aspire to have children leave our school with the skills and disposition to be enthusiastic life-long learners and positive, resourceful members of a community.

## **TOPICS INCLUDED IN THE GUIDELINES ARE:**

- AUTHORIZED PICK-UPS
- BIRTHDAYS IN SCHOOL
- BOTTLES & PACIFIERS
- CALENDAR & NEWSLETTER
- CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS
- CLOTHING AND SHOES
- CONFERENCES, OUR OPEN DOOR POLICY
  - GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CHILD FORM
- CONFIDENTIALITY
- DAILY ROUTINE & EXTENDED CARE
  - Drop-Off
  - Pre-Care
  - Pick-Up
  - Aftercare
  - Enrichment classes
- DISCIPLINE & GUIDANCE AT ECC
- EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING
- FIELD TRIPS & IN-HOUSE PROGRAMS
- FIRE DRILLS
- GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CHILD
- HEALTH - IMMUNIZATION & DCF Requirements
- ILLNESS & INJURY
- MEDICAL EMERGENCY PROCEDURES
- PARENTS ASSOCIATION & ADVISORY BOARD
- POTTY TRAINING
- PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES
- SAFETY AT THE PRESCHOOL
- SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
- SNACKS
- SUNSCREEN AND INSECT REPELLANT
- TUITION PAYMENTS
- WEBSITE & INTERNET USE
- YOUNGER SIBLING REGISTRATION

## **BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS**

### **AUTHORIZED PICK-UPS & REGISTRATION FORMS**

It is essential that all pertinent information on your child's authorization for pick-up list be kept up to date! Remember that we cannot release your child to any person who has not been designated by you on the registration form in writing. The names of persons designated to pick up your child must be in your own handwriting. If we have not met this person we will ask for identification. No exceptions will be made! You may update your information in the office.

**Please be assured that we keep all information confidential and secure.**

### **BIRTHDAYS IN SCHOOL**

Each of our classrooms has their own tradition of honoring a child's birthday in unique & developmentally appropriate ways. You are always welcome to visit the school on your child's birthday but we ask that you do not send in any food items. Please remember, gifts for the birthday child are inappropriate at preschool and we ask that you please do not bring "goodie bags" for the children for birthdays or holidays.

If you are planning a "home birthday party" we will be glad to pass out the invitations via the cubbies, only if all children on the classroom list are invited. Otherwise we ask that the invitation be mailed to the child's parent.

**BOTTLES & PACIFIERS** are not used at school. Teachers will help your child transition from a sippy cup to a regular cup when you decide together that your child is developmentally ready to do so. Please have your child's name on any sippy cup they bring in.

### **CALENDAR & NEWSLETTER**

Annually you will receive a year's calendar which includes ECC's major dates. We follow the Dade County Public School calendar as closely as possible with a few exceptions. Before the beginning of each month you will receive a calendar/newsletter by email and in print which will keep you up on events and dates of special happenings.

### **CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

It is our custom to have a program with the children around holidays and other special times. It is not our philosophy to put pressure on children to "perform" for parents. We like to share the songs they have been singing and learning all year. This sharing must be a relaxed, low-keyed time in a pleasant atmosphere. Please be aware that your child may or may not wish to participate on this day in your presence. This is a normal reaction for preschool age children and we feel it is totally acceptable.

You will find these special days of celebration in the newsletters. All the classes

come together for these special events. Remember that these are not "performances" for parents but occasions to learn and share a social experience for the whole school regardless of age. Parents are invited to observe and take pictures if they choose.

We enjoy sharing diverse cultures and customs with our students and always welcome an opportunity to have a special day for the country of your family's origin. If you would be interested in sharing your heritage with the children, we would be appreciative and help in any way we can. Please see the Director.

### **CLOTHING AND SHOES**

Remember that your child may get dirty during play or art time, so please send them to school in simple play clothes that you can easily wash. Your child's cubby in the classroom should have a bag containing extra clothing and shoes for a quick change. Be sure to have your child's name printed clearly on any items that they bring to school. This is especially important for coats and sweaters.

**Non-slip athletic shoes suitable for running and climbing are imperative.** Sandals, open-toed shoes and long dresses are dangerous for children on the playground and will not be allowed.

Belts and any other tight clothing make it very difficult for children to be independent in the bathroom. Make sure clothing is loose fitting enough to help a child become self-sufficient and build self-esteem. **If your two-year-old child is still in diapers, we ask that you do not send them in clothing that makes it hard to change them - overalls, belted pants, complicated buttons or zippers, etc.** Children love to dress up in imaginative costumes which we encourage. Please check to see that they are playground safe.

### **CONFERENCES AND OUR "OPEN DOOR" POLICY**

Open communication between parents and school is so important to your child's success and happiness. Parents are always welcome to drop in to visit and observe. Please remember that a very brief classroom visit is best for a child who is having difficulty separating from parents. Parents are welcome to come to the classroom and there are many opportunities to speak with your child's teachers. Please note that while school is in session a teacher must give full attention to the children and will not be able to confer with parents for any lengthy discussion. This is especially true at dismissal time each day. If you do not have a chance to see your child's teacher in person, you may call or email the school and we will gladly transfer the message.

You will receive two written reports each year about your child's progress and an opportunity to have a conference with the teacher. If at any time you have concerns about your child and wish an additional conference about your child's school experience, please feel free to make an appointment with the teacher.

Generally, our conferences are in English, but we will make every effort to accommodate your family's needs. Please speak to your teacher if you or your spouse needs assistance in another language. You are also welcome to bring other family

members or friends to translate for you.

We are always open to talk to you about any concerns that you may have about your child's development and to share referral resources if indicated. If your child sees a therapist for any reason, please know that they are welcome to visit ECC to observe your child in the school setting once you have arranged the time and date with the director. We always appreciate the opportunity to work with therapists and to receive their guidance.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

In accordance with Department of Children & Families (DCF) regulations, all records for your child, including health, financial & assessment reports, are kept in locked cabinets and are destroyed when no longer needed. On occasion DCF or another licensing agency may need access to child files, but only in the presence of the school directors.

Medical information is kept confidential but readily available for emergency personnel. Please keep the office informed of any changes in health insurance information, medications taken or allergies.

No information regarding school attendance, children's progress or financial standing will be given to other schools or authorities, without your written permission or a court order. When applying to other schools, please remember that a *Release of Information Form* must be signed before the information will be released.

The only personal or family information that will be given to other ECC school families is that which you authorized in writing for the Classroom Directory.

## **DAILY ROUTINE & EXTENDED CARE**

- **Drop-Off:** Teachers will be prepared to receive their children at 8:45. Before that time, the playground is open to all children who are being supervised by their parents. **At 8:45, children in the 2's and 3's classes must be escorted to their classrooms.** At 8:45, only the Pre-K4 class remains on the playground. Parents and caregivers are free to leave knowing that their children will be supervised by their teachers. A bell is rung at 9:00 to signal their return to the classroom. **It is imperative that all children be signed in at their classroom. A sign-in sheet is in the classroom and must be signed in and out daily!**
- **Pre-Care:** If you wish to drop your child off early, Pre-care is available every day, with no prior notice necessary. Early arrivals will be supervised in Room #1 from 7:30am to 8:45am, at which time they will be escorted to their regular classroom. A fee of \$10 is charged for this service and will be added to your account at the end of the month automatically. You are welcome to send your child in with a simple breakfast to eat during Pre-care if you wish.
- **Pick-Up:** The morning program dismisses promptly at 11:45 each day. Pre-K4

children are to be picked up at 1:00. Kindergarten pick up is at 2:15pm. Children who are still here at 12:00pm (1:15pm for PreK, 2:15 for Kinder) will be taken to the AFTERCARE room and you will be charged for aftercare on that day, \$10 an hour or part thereof. Remember that only authorized people will be allowed to take your child and that they must sign them out on the **Sign Out sheet by the door with the exact time noted. A late pickup fee will be charged to your account if you arrive after 4pm. \$20 per every 5 minutes after 4pm.**

- **Aftercare:** Aftercare is available until **4:00 PM** every day on an hourly, as needed basis. Aftercare time is a chance for children to have a nap or quiet time and then to extend their day playing with friends and is often the preferred choice for parents. Aftercare is also a safety net for parents when unforeseen events make it necessary to have extended time. Charges are set per hour or part thereof and will be charged to your account at the end of the month. If you know in the morning that you will be using this service, we ask that you let the teacher know. Don't forget to put extra food in your child's lunch box if they will be staying for aftercare. If something arises during the day and you expect to be late and wish your child to stay for aftercare, you need only call the office and we will arrange it.
- **Enrichment Classes for 3's, PreK4 and kindergarten:** Special classes are offered each day of the week during aftercare hours. They generally include Drama Arts or Soccer which are all taught by our own teachers. Ballet and violin are also offered by outside contractors. Enrollment for the fall classes is early September and for the spring classes again in December. Payment for these programs are not included in tuition and are collected during the enrollment period. As an outside contractor, Ballet-At-Your-School requests that payments be made directly to them.
- For the safety of our staff, NO STAFF MEMBER is permitted to take any student home with them, give children rides in their cars, take a child off campus, sign a child out of their classroom or care for the child on campus after hours.

## **DISCIPLINE AT ECC**

We believe that positive reinforcement, teaching appropriate behaviors, good classroom management and a calm, loving atmosphere are essential in helping children to establish inner controls and to socialize in positive ways. Spanking or any other form of physical punishment is prohibited at the Early Childhood Center. Discipline will not be shaming, humiliating or frightening and will not be associated with food, rest or bathroom procedures.

A child's inappropriate behavior which is hurtful and disruptive is handled with care. A short "time out" period in which a child can regain control is helpful. Persistent

challenging behavior by the child will lead to a parent/teacher conference. We feel it is important to keep lines of communication open between preschool and family. A cooperative, loving effort will build your child's trust of the preschool experience and make a big difference.

Biting by a two-year-old child is considered normal. We will address and help the child out grow this behavior. If behaviors such as biting or hitting persist after cooperative efforts by parents and teachers to guide the child have failed, further consultation will be necessary.

ECC reserves the right to exclude a child from preschool, at the Director's discretion. It is important that parents are cooperative in this matter, agree to have conferences and acknowledge the seriousness of biting and other injurious behavior.

### **EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING**

In the event of a community emergency such as a hurricane, or flood we will follow the policy set by the Miami-Dade County Public School System. Please listen to your radio or television news station for school closings. The Early Childhood Center may not be listed individually, but you will know that **if the public schools are closed, due to a major weather event, we will also be closed.**

We will open as soon as possible. Keep in mind that due to extended power outages we may open earlier or later than the Public School System. Please be sure that all of your phone contacts are up to date so that we can contact you.

### **FIELD TRIPS & IN-HOUSE PROGRAMS**

It is not our policy to take children on field trips by car or bus. Occasionally children will take a supervised walk across the street to the Church or Church garden.

It is our preference, in lieu of field trips, to have community resources come to us and to conduct our own in house programs. Look for these special events in our newsletters.

### **FIRE DRILLS**

We have monthly fire drills with all classes to teach the importance of a smooth, calm exit from the school in case of fire. Each classroom is equipped with a fire extinguisher and electric smoke alarms have been installed school-wide. ECC is a "smoke free environment". ECC also practices tornado drills and lockdowns.

### **GETTING TO KNOW YOUR CHILD**

Our teaching staff can best help your child when they fully understand the



context in which your child lives. We know that each of our families is unique and comes to us with their own strengths and identities. The more we understand about how you as parents, define your families race, religion, language, culture and family structure, the better we can help tailor our teaching to your child. Please take the opportunity at the beginning of the year to fill out the "Getting To Know Your Child" form. Knowing the home language of your child and your preferences in how we speak to them is critical to our daily planning. We hope that you will continue to speak to your child's teacher throughout the year about your goals and concerns for your child.

### **HEALTH & IMMUNIZATION FORM REQUIREMENTS**

The law requires that you must submit health form DH 3040 and immunization form DH 680 before entry to school. Both forms must be complete for your child and presented before the first day of school. We will notify you if the forms need to be updated during the school year. We must receive the updated forms before they expire. If your child is unable to receive immunizations at that time due to illness or other extenuating circumstance, evidence of an appointment or communication with the doctor must be presented in order for your child to remain in school.

### **ILLNESS & INJURY**

If your child shows symptoms of a communicable disease such as diarrhea, irritated eyes, fever, rash, vomiting, head lice, or other signs of an infectious disease, please notify the office and keep your child at home for the appropriate isolation time. Your child should be free of fever for at least 24 hours, without the use of medication, before they return to school. If your child should develop these symptoms at school, you will be called to come and take your child home. Teachers reserve the right to send children home who are ill even without a fever.

We appreciate your calling the office to inform us when your child is ill and will not be attending school. We will attempt to contact you to inquire about a child who has been absent more than two days. While we miss your children, we appreciate that it is important that they remain at home for the duration of their illness.

It is imperative for the safety of your child that we are informed of any significant injury they may sustain away from school. We want to be able to monitor your child a little more closely and be sure that they can participate in the regular classroom routine. We reserve the right to ask for a medical release for your child to return to school if they are recovering from an infectious disease or have sustained an injury that would curtail their activities at ECC.

### **MEDICAL EMERGENCY**

In the event of a medical emergency, Fire/Rescue 911 will be called and if necessary will transport your child to the appropriate facility. Every effort would be made to contact the parents immediately. Please be sure to update your registration form in the office whenever there are changes with your contact numbers or

emergency contacts. It is also essential that you keep us updated on your health insurance coverage as this information may be required for non-life threatening emergencies.

### **THE ECC PARENTS ASSOCIATION & THE ECC ADVISORY BOARD**

We invite all parents to participate and actively support your child's school. The *ECC PARENTS ASSOCIATION* meets regularly throughout the year. This is a wonderful support group for our preschool and a great way to meet other parents, plan family events & participate in fundraising activities. Everyone is invited to attend and participate.

The *ECC ADVISORY BOARD* is a separate group which functions to help preserve the preschool and its philosophy, to uphold existing policies, to assist and advise, as well as to help innovate new programs. Members include parents, Preschool staff and Church representatives who serve as a liaison between the Church and Preschool. Issues include budget approval, personnel, technology, property, program, and public relations. The board is limited in size but membership is selected from the full range of our families and anyone is welcome to attend to hear the discussion.

### **POTTY TRAINING**

Potty training should be a stress free experience for your child. Most two year olds are in the process of potty training when they begin school. All of our 2-year-old classrooms are outfitted with a changing table and bathroom inside their classroom. Your teachers will work with you as a team throughout the year to help your child to successfully complete potty training. **All three year olds must be potty trained when they begin the three-year-old program.**

### **PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES**

No smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs or firearms are allowed on the ECC school grounds. Smoking is prohibited both inside and outdoors.

### **SAFETY AT THE PRESCHOOL**

**Parking Lot Safety:** It is important that you park your car in the Church parking lot or in a safe area on the swale and walk your child to the classroom to be received by a teacher. **Do not park in or around the intersection, in the walkway of the school or double-park on the street. Never leave your car's engine running while escorting your child to class or leave other children alone in the car!**

Enter and exit the Church parking lot with caution. Use extreme caution when backing up! Remember that in vans and SUV's, it is difficult to see small children from your rear view mirror.

**Exit and Entrance Safety:** The gate by the office is the only gate for entering and

exiting. ALWAYS BE SURE TO CLOSE AND LATCH BOTH GATES! Hold your child's hand when leaving. Do not allow your child or car pool children to run ahead of you! Please ask for assistance if you need help.

**Playground Safety:** There are specific playground rules which are posted on the exterior wall of the office facing the playground and sent home at the beginning of school which will make your child's time on the playground safer and happier. **At dismissal you are responsible for supervising your own child and those in your carpool.** The safety rules apply for anytime your child is on the playground before, during, and after school.

Remember that the playground is reserved for our classes from 8:45 to 11:45 and again from 12:25 to 1pm.

### **SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

There are specific guidelines for scholarships and financial aid that are available on request.

**SNACKS** Children bring their own snacks (and lunch, if they stay) each day in a bag or lunch box for mid-morning nourishment. **Please be sure to have your child's name printed clearly on the outside of their lunch box.** Reminder: **No sodas or glass containers. NO NUTS OF ANY KIND AND NO NUT PRODUCTS ARE PERMITTED. This includes nut based milk products.**

- ❖ Please be aware of items that might possibly be causes for choking. In accordance with NAEYC standards and the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics & the American Public Health Association, the following items are prohibited from being served to children younger than four and may **NOT** be brought from home:
  - hot dogs & other meat sticks (that are either whole or sliced into rounds) **they must be diced**
  - raw carrots in any form that cannot be swallowed whole,
  - whole grapes (must be cut in fourths)
  - hard candy
  - nuts
  - raw peas
  - popcorn
  - pretzels
  - spoonful of peanut butter
  - chunks of meat larger than can be swallowed whole.

Food for toddler/twos needs to be cut into pieces **one-half inch or smaller** to prevent choking hazards. Raw vegetables are good for your child but for your child's safety, they must be cut in small, thin strips. Please be sure that food you send is prepped and ready to eat.

Please avoid sugary snacks, candy, chocolate, and gummy fruit snacks. Choose nutritional items such as cheese, bread, crackers, diluted fruit juices, apple slices, bananas, etc. Remember that snacks high in protein and complex carbohydrates will sustain your child's blood sugar levels better than those high in sugar, fat and salt.

If your child eats a full healthy breakfast, then a light snack is in order. If not, then you may want to include a sandwich or something more substantial. Uneaten food, if any, will come home in your child's lunch box. This may help you gauge what and how much your child will want for snack time. If your child will be staying for aftercare don't forget to add enough food to their box for lunch.

The staff is here to assist your child with snack but remember that packing foods which your child can open and handle with ease will promote self-esteem and self-reliance, one of the main goals for our children.

Don't forget to sanitize your child's lunch box regularly. Hard plastic boxes that can be immersed in hot soapy water or run through the dishwasher are best. Be aware that children frequently spill juice and food in their boxes. Soft-sided, covered foam bags easily absorb liquids that are spilled in them and are very hard to keep clean over time.

## **SUNSCREEN AND INSECT REPELLANT**

ECC is not permitted to apply sunscreen or insect repellent to your child during the school day. You must apply it yourself at home before you arrive at school.

## **TUITION PAYMENTS**

For your convenience, the year's tuition is broken down into 10 equal installments, in order to arrive at a standard monthly fee. (The amount you pay each month is not reflective of the number of days in that particular month but represents 10 percent of the yearly total cost.) Each increment is due on the **15th of the month** starting with registration. The last payment of the school year is due on April 15th.

We are asking all families to sign up for Tuition Express which can automatically debit your payment from your credit card or checking account. We can also take one time credit card payments over the phone or in person. Checks are accepted but discouraged.

Remember that we are a nonprofit school and we cannot offer reimbursements or refunds for times a child may be absent from school. Salaries and programs are carefully budgeted and the flow of monies is important to the continuance of good programming.

If you need to withdraw your child from school, we will need a two week notice in

writing. A full tuition installment will be applied as an early withdrawal fee. The only exception is if we are notified in writing of the withdrawal before August 15<sup>th</sup> of the current school year. We will refund 50% of the first month's tuition.

### **WEBSITE & INTERNET USE**

Please visit our website at [www.gablespreschool.org](http://www.gablespreschool.org). We believe it will become an invaluable tool to you as a parent, helping you to stay informed, getting a glimpse into your child's day and appreciating the fullness of their life at school. We know you will want to visit the site often. You can contact the office through email at [ECC@GablesUCC.org](mailto:ECC@GablesUCC.org).

**YOUNGER SIBLING REGISTRATION** If you have younger children that you want to attend ECC, the time to pre-register them is now. Please contact the office for the form. It is a \$40 fee. We do honor returning families by giving their children priority along with church families in the registration process. However, please be aware that this is no guarantee of admittance. We make every effort to hold a place for younger siblings but may not always be able to do so. This is especially the case for last minute requests. Early pre-registration is your best assurance. We look forward to caring for your family for many years to come.

Revised November 2019