

Parent Handbook



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Fort Worth, TX 76244
817-562-4600

www.TheSteppingStonesAcademy.com

Mission Statement is:

We pledge to make the world a better place through young children; to love every child in our care, to educate children in all four areas of development: physical, social, emotional, and intellectual; to build a solid reputation in the community for doing all the above.

Our Philosophy:

We believe each child is unique and special with the potential to grow and learn. Our developmentally appropriate environment is designed to provide learning opportunities that encourage curiosity, creativity, and spontaneity. These experiences are extended and enhanced through the guidance of our staff.

As child care professionals, we understand the importance of the formative early years of childhood. The valuable experience and opportunities for first-time achievements that are presented to young children lay the foundation for higher learning.

It is our objective to create a happy, warm, and disciplined environment for our students. Therefore, we will strive to teach manners, fairness, courtesy, and respect for others, while remaining constantly alert to the well-being of our students.

Early Care and Education

Stepping Stones Academy's goal is to be North Texas' leading preschool program. Our program gives children ages 6-weeks through kindergarten, enriching opportunities to develop the whole child.

Our daily activities and program consist of a flexible schedule that has been created to provide diversity and challenge for children in all age groups. We offer a structured program for children of all ages that includes a year-round curriculum. Our activities include school readiness skills, arts and crafts, games, music, outdoor play and story time. We offer a Full Time Rate Agreement, which is for children present at Stepping Stones Academy Monday-Friday, and we offer a Part Time Rate Agreement, which is for children present any combination of 2, 3, or 4 days a week.

We focus on learning through child-directed play experiences and curriculum time. We believe a balance of play and preschool enhances growth and development in all areas: physically, socially, emotionally, creatively, and intellectually. This is achieved in a safe and loving environment with caregivers who are dedicated to enriching children's lives.

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY:

Stepping Stones Academy does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, or national or ethnic origin in admittance, education, or other administrative policies and extends to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally made available to students at the school.

Required Policies

Stepping Stones Academy is licensed and regulated by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services in order to ensure a quality environment for your children. Stepping Stones Academy complies with the applicable state licensing regulations and policies. These requirements cover staff qualifications, facility, playground, health and safety guidelines, and child/staff ratios.

The follow policies are required by Child Care Licensing per The Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers 746.501.

1. HOURS OF OPERATION

Stepping Stones Academy is open from 6:30am-6:30pm, Monday-Friday, year round. We are closed in observance of the following holidays: Good Friday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday, Christmas Eve through New Year's Day.

If holidays falls on a weekend day, the weekday closest to that day will be observed as the holiday. (i.e. if Christmas Eve falls on Sunday and Christmas falls on Monday – Stepping Stones Academy will be closed on Monday and Tuesday). These days will be decided in January of each year and will be available for your convenience. Full tuition is due for holiday weeks.

2. RELEASE OF CHILDREN

Per Texas state laws, parents have a right to access their child at anytime. However, we strongly encourage parents to drop off their children by 8:30am each day so that the child can take part in our full educational program. In the event that a parent is unable to pick up their child, they may authorize another legal adult to pick up. Children will not be released to a minor. Authorized adults must be listed on the enrollment form to pick up and the authorized adult must bring a picture ID. Children will not be released to adults without a picture ID.

In an emergency, parents must have an alternate person listed on the Application form with a full address, phone number, and driver's license number, or the child(ren) will not be released. The center reserves the right to not allow any individual onto SSA property for drop-off or pick-up if they have created a problem. Anyone not recognized by sight will be asked for a picture ID. In the event anyone out of the ordinary is to pick-up the child, please alert the office prior to that

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time. It is the parent's responsibility to notify the office and make changes on this form whenever necessary.

3. ILLNESS AND EXCLUSION POLICY

Children who are ill should not attend preschool. Stepping Stones Academy observes the standards set by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services for ill children. The most common standards for exclusion are:

1. Illness that prevents the child from participating in child care activities, ***including outdoor play***. If your child is too sick to play outdoors, then they are too sick for group care and must leave with the parent.
2. The illness results in a greater need for care than caregivers can provide without compromising the health, safety and supervision of the other children.
3. Ear canal temperature of 100 or greater.
4. Symptoms and signs of possible severe illness such as lethargy, abnormal breathing, 3 episodes of diarrhea within 1 hour, 2 or more vomiting episodes in 24-hours.

If a child becomes ill while in our care, we will contact the parent immediately. We will care for the child apart from the other children with proper supervision and give extra attention to hand washing and sanitation practices.

Parents need to pick up children within ***1 hour of notification***. In the event of *severe* illness or injury, or if a parent fails to pick up their child within a reasonable amount of time, Stepping Stones Academy may call for an ambulance at the parent's expense.

If a child is sent home sick from our program, they may not return until the child is symptom-free for 24-hours, without any medication.

4. MEDICATION

Please inform your physician that your child is in Full Time or Part Time preschool and that you prefer to give medications at home, morning and evening. Knowing this, many doctors will order longer acting medications. Limiting medications dispensed away from home prevents medication errors. Please remember, Stepping Stones Academy is designed for **well** children.

If medications need to be administered at school, the following conditions must be met:

- Prescription medication will be accepted only if it is in the original container and hasn't reached its expiration date.**
- Nonprescription medication may only be administered by following the manufacturer's recommendation on the label. Medication must be in the original

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- container and accompanied with a copy of the information given to you by the pharmacy.
- ❑ Before any prescription or nonprescription medication can be administered, including insect spray or sunscreen, we must have permission in writing by the child's parent or guardian. The office will fill out the medication forms and enter instructions into the Daily Medication Log Book. Please bring a copy of the information given to you by the pharmacy.
 - ❑ Medication needs to go home after the last date that the medication is administered.

Health forms are required to be completed at the time of enrollment showing any allergies, physical handicaps, a statement of general health, and a current immunization history. These must be updated and kept current.

Medication may be given to children with a signed medical information sheet.

5. PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING EMERGENCIES

In case of minor injury or accident, the staff will administer basic first aid. All injuries or illnesses not requiring immediate parental notification will be documented and reported to parents when the child is picked up at the end of the day.

In case of medical injury or illness requiring immediate professional care (emergency), the staff will call 911, giving location and nature of emergency. As appropriate, the staff will administer CPR or first aid measures. Parents will be notified immediately. If parents are unavailable, those individuals designated as emergency phone contacts will be notified. **All children must have an emergency medical release form on file in case of such an emergency.**

If a child ingests or comes in contact with a poisonous substance the staff will contact the Poison Control Center 1.800.222.1222.

6. PARENT NOTIFICATIONS

Open Communication with parents is very important to children's success. Stepping Stones Academy has multiple ways of communicating with parents. In some situations, parents may be asked to sign documents acknowledging that communication has taken place. Listed below are ways that Stepping Stones Academy may communicate with parents:

- Our electronic monitor located on the outside of the building, beside the front door
- Written memos placed in your child's weekly folders or cubbies
- Social media site such as Facebook
- Smart phone notifications through Remind101
- Verbal communication with the child's teachers and director
- Procure Engage App

7. DISCIPLINE & GUIDANCE POLICY

Stepping Stones Academy staff members are trained to use a positive method of discipline and guidance that encourages self-esteem, self-control, and self-direction. Just a few examples used in this situation are praise and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing only upon unacceptable behavior: reminding a child of behavior expectations daily by using clear, positive statements and redirecting behaviors. There may be times during the day when a supervised separation time is needed. This is a “time-out” and is used according to the child’s age and development and limited to one minute per year of the child’s age. Stepping Stones Academy staff will never use corporal punishment or negative discipline that may hurt or humiliate a child.

Research has shown that positive guidance teaches children skills which help them get along in their physical and social environment. This aim is to develop personal standards in self-discipline, not to enforce a set of inflexible rules. Giving children understandable guidelines and redirecting their behavior helps them to develop internal control of their actions and encourages acceptable behavior.

It is neither Stepping Stones Academy’s policy, nor desire to disenroll children. This will only be used as a last resort in extraordinary circumstances where there is a serious safety concern that cannot be reduced or eliminated with reasonable modifications. Family-teacher and school partnerships are critical to reducing disenrollment. Stepping Stones Academy will work with families to identify concerns early, collaborate on solutions to address challenging behavior, and share strategies to promote children’s healthy development.

We do reserve the right to terminate care for a child(ren) at any time for discipline problems, non-payment of tuition, and/or families that do not follow the policies of Stepping Stones Academy. With regards to all the above-mentioned situations, multiple steps will be taken to work closely with families to change whatever behavior that is being dealt with at the time. In every situation that allows for it, there will be ample notification that termination of care will be effective at a future date. There may be a situation that calls for immediate termination the day of notification and Stepping Stones Academy reserves the right to terminate care the day of, as well.

8. FOOD SERVICE & PREPARATION

Parents are asked to complete an “Infant Daily Schedule Sheet” at the beginning of each month. This instructs us on how to feed your baby according to your directions.

Stepping Stones Academy provides breakfast for all children present at 8:00am. Lunch is served at 11:00am. Afternoon snack is served after the rest period around 2:30pm. Menus are posted outside of the kitchen, as well as outside each classroom at the beginning of the month. The menu is also available on our website, www.TheSteppingStonesAcademy.com. Please advise the center of any allergies. **Stepping Stones Academy is a Nut-Free School.**

9. IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

Immunization records must be current for all children enrolled in the Infant-Walkers, Preschool and Pre-K programs, and Kindergarten. A copy must be in the child's file. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure that your child's immunizations are current. Failure to keep children current on immunizations may lead to disenrollment.

From time to time Stepping Stones Academy may have children enrolled that have not received immunizations due to personal belief. A notarized affidavit must be on file for these children.

10. TUBERCULIN TESTING REQUIREMENTS

Based on local health department guidelines, proof of TB testing is not required in order to be enrolled in our program.

11. HEARING AND VISION SCREENING

Hearing and Vision Screening for possible vision and hearing problems is required by the Special Senses and Communication Disorders Act, Texas Health & Safety Code, Chapter 36, for children who are 4-years old. Parents will need to bring in screening proof from their local pediatrician.

12. ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES

Upon selecting Stepping Stones Academy to meet your child's educational needs, all enrollment paperwork is required before the child can start our program. Incomplete paperwork will not be accepted. Paperwork required for enrollment includes:

- Enrollment Application
- Consent for Medical Treatment
- Physician's Health Care Statement
- Infant Daily Schedule (if applicable)
- Hearing and Visions Screening (if applicable)
- Shot Records
- Tuition Agreement

Parents will be notified within 30 days of any policy change in writing. Signatures from parents may be required.

13. REFUND INFORMATION

We do not issue refunds. In the event you have over-paid the credit will be applied to your next week's tuition. In the event you have a balance after your child's last day, all applicable fee's including the two weeks' notice required would be subtracted from any balance prior to a final refund being issued.

14. TRANSPORTATION

Stepping Stones Academy is not licensed to transport any children.

15. WATER ACTIVITIES AND SWIMMING POOL

Stepping Stones Academy does not participate in any swimming pool activities. During the summer, there may be water sprinklers for the children to play.

16. FIELD TRIPS

Stepping Stones Academy is not licensed for field trips.

17. ANIMALS

From time to time, Stepping Stones Academy may have classroom pets that meet the requirements by Texas Child Care Licensing. A notice to parents will be posted outside any classroom door when a pet is present.

18. QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

If parents have questions or concerns about our program, we encourage you to have open communication with your child's teacher and the Center Director. Through open communication, we can ensure that all parties are well informed and working as partners in the child's education.

19. OPEN DOOR POLICY

We welcome parents at any time, in any area of our school. Stepping Stones Academy is a privately owned and operated facility. We have the right to refuse service at anytime to anyone.

20. PARENT PARTICIPATION

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We encourage parent involvement, especially on holidays and helping with class parties. Also, if you have a concern, please schedule a time to meet with the classroom teacher and/or the director of the facility.

21. MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS

Stepping Stones Academy is licensed and regulated by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and we follow the Texas Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers. Parents may review a copy of these standards in our front office or view the standards online at www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Child_Care_Standards_and_Regulations/default.asp

22. COMPLIANCE HISTORY

Stepping Stones Academy encourages parents to view our compliance history with Child Care Licensing. Our most recent inspection is posted on our parent communication board or you may view this at

www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Search_Texas_Child_Care/ppFacilitySearchDayCare.asp
Parents may also contact our local child care licensing office at 817-321-8604. Our licensing rep is Deanna Martinez and can be reached at 817-733-2720.

23. GANG-FREE ZONE

Under the Texas Penal Code, any area within 1000 feet of a child care center is a gang-free zone, where criminal offenses related to organized criminal activity are subject to a harsher penalty. Stepping Stones Academy is a GANG-FREE ZONE.

24. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PLAN

Below is the Emergency Preparedness Plan designed for Stepping Stones Academy. Parents are encouraged to read this information carefully. In the event a parent is present in the building during an emergency, Stepping Stones Academy will ask parents to participate accordingly.

During any emergency, the best course of action is to BREATHE AND STAY CALM, know how many children you have, and have your sign-in and -out log and transition sheet in your hands.

If you have children of your own in the facility, but in another classroom, trust that their teachers will take care of them just as you are taking care of the children in your care.

In all situations in this Emergency Preparedness Plan, "Director" refers to Susan and/or Leia. In the Director's absence, the Closing person on duty (Teresa) assumes the role of Director and then designates another staff member to assume the responsibilities of the Assistant Director. In all situations in this Emergency Preparedness Plan, the Director or designated person in charge

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will notify Child Care Licensing and/or the Health Department and/or call 911 as each situation dictates. In all situations in this Emergency Preparedness Plan, the Director or designated person in charge may delegate any portion of his/her duties to other staff members, volunteers, or emergency personnel as he/she deems necessary.

TORNADO/BAD WEATHER

- Stay calm. Watch the kids, not the situation.
- Get your sign-in/out sheet and your transition sheet and stuff it in your clothing. Grab your flashlight.
- Take all your children to one of the 4 designated center rooms in the building. Have the children sit as close together as possible and have the children duck and cover. This will be familiar to the children since you practice this each time you have a severe weather drill.
- Infant classroom: Place your babies in two cribs and cover the top with a mattress from another crib. Place mattress sideways across top of the crib and huddle next to it. Role the cribs to one of the 4 designated center rooms in the building.
- Stay there until advised that the bad weather has passed.
- It can be helpful to quietly sing songs with the children to help them keep calm.
- The Director in charge will monitor local weather stations and the weather alert radio for updates.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE OUTBREAK

- All staff members will vigilantly follow policies and procedures regarding diaper changes, toileting, handwashing, food preparation and general common-sense measures such as keeping surfaces clean, changing bedding, teaching children how to cover coughs and sneezes, etc., to prevent the spread of germs that cause illness in the first place.
- In the event of an outbreak, the Director, or person in charge, will notify the Health Department and Child Care Licensing to inform them of the situation and ask for instructions and guidelines to follow for specific illness or outbreak.
- The Director, or person in charge, will inform all staff members of instructions and guidelines and require them to follow the same.
- The Director, or person in charge, will also notify all parents about the situation in writing within 48-hours as required by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and Child Care Licensing.

LOCK DOWN

(INCLUDES WEAPON, HOSTAGE INCIDENT, INTRUDER, TRESPASSING, DISTURBANCE)

- The Director, or person in charge, will announce to each classroom, "Lock Down" or other discrete code and will call 911. The director, or designated person, will always supervise the front desk during the incident, if possible.
- Upon hearing this, or sooner if you are aware that an intruder has entered the building or immediate vicinity, say calmly to the children a discrete phrase, such as "Rabbits in the Hole"; the children will know what to do because you practice this every month.
- Infant classroom: Place babies in two or three cribs with a few quiet toys. Place another empty crib or two in front of your classroom door. This might cause an intruder to change his/her mind about entering your classroom.
- Get your sign-in/out sheet and your transition sheet in your hands and stuff them into your clothing.
- Close all your classroom doors and lock them if possible.
- Turn off the lights.
- If you have reason to believe that no one else in the center is aware of the danger, and you can safely do so, you may tell your class next to you, calmly announce the secret code for "Lock Down".
- Whisper and remind the children that "we are to be very quiet."
- Do a name/face check silently.
- Keep the children and yourself safe, in place, and away from all interior and exterior windows.
- Watch the children, not the situation!
- If the intruder enters your classroom, do not argue with him.
- The Director, or person in charge, will ensure that all building entrances and exits are locked and that no unauthorized individuals leave or enter the building.
- Await further instructions from the Director, or person in charge, or emergency personnel.

ACCIDENT

- Breathe and stay calm.
- Make sure all children are supervised. If you are alone, tell them to sit down near you.
- Comfort the child by speaking in a low, quiet voice.
- Apply first aid as needed.
- Call the office if you need further assistance and/or the Director, or person in charge to call 911.
- If the child is bleeding profusely, apply pressure to stop the bleeding. (In an extreme case, take off the child's shirt and use that.)

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- If injury is to the head or face, report it to the office immediately - even if it is minor.
- Complete an Accident/Incident Report, have everyone staff member involved, sign it immediately, and have the parent sign it when the child is picked up.
- Turn the Accident/Incident Report in to the Director, or person in charge, before you leave on the same day.
- Keep the Accident/Incident Report confidential while in your presence.
- In the event of serious illness or injury involving an adult, contact the office and a director, or the designated person in charge, will call 911 and/or the person's emergency contact.

ILLNESS

- Ask the child, "What doesn't feel good?"
- Contact the front office and have the child's temperature taken. If the fever is over 100 degrees, the Director, or person in charge, will contact the parent.
- If there is no fever, make the child comfortable and keep an eye on him.
- If the child complains of pain, ask him to point with one finger where it hurts the most and then investigate that spot for injury or discoloration and call the office.
- Light vomiting or mild diarrhea: If there is no pain, call the office after the third episode.

EXPLOSION, CHEMICAL SPILL OR GAS LEAK

That occurs INSIDE the facility.

- See procedures for FIRE and OFF-SITE EVACUATION AND RELOCATION

That occurs OUTSIDE the facility.

- Close doors and lock them if possible.
- Turn off air conditioner/heater.
- Turn off lights, computers, TV, radio, CD player, aquarium pump or anything else that may cause a spark.
- Keep children seated on the floor and calm. Sing quiet songs or read stories.
- Be prepared to evacuate if told to do so by the Director, or person in charge, or emergency personnel.
- If you detect a strong odor, show the children how to lift up and breathe through their shirts.
- If told to evacuate, consider crawling to avoid strong fumes that are floating higher in the air. Ask for clarification if time.

BOMB THREAT OR OTHER THREAT

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- Write down everything the person says.
- Ask where the bomb is.
- Ask when the bomb (or other threat) will "go off" or "happen".
- Write that down, too.
- Notify the Director, or person in charge, to call 911 immediately.

OFF-SITE EVACUATION AND RELOCATION

- Your primary responsibility is to keep the children safe.
- Keep your sign-in/out sheet and transition sheet in your hands or stuff them into your clothing.
- If time allows, gather children's diaper bags, bottles, baby formula/food, and coats.
- Children will be evacuated in the safest way possible, from oldest to youngest so that older children can assist with keeping children seated at the evacuation site. Depending on the situation, the city may also send transportation vehicles.
- The Director is responsible for keeping a charged cell phone with him/her and overseeing and directing the evacuation process. She/he is the last person to leave the building.
- The Assistant Director is responsible for taking the emergency binder (of permission slips and parent contact information), the first aid kit, emergency medication (i.e., insulin, EPI pens, asthma medications), and a charged cell phone and accompany the first group of children and staff to the evacuation site so that he/she can oversee the evacuation site.
- The Director and Assistant Directors are aware of each-others cell phone number.
- Evacuation and relocation site for Stepping Stones Academy is Christ's Haven for Children. The address is: 4200 Keller Haslet Road, Fort Worth, TX 76244. 817-431-1544
- There will also be messages sent out via Remind 101 and Facebook. We encourage each family to make sure they have signed up for Remind 101 and have "liked" Stepping Stones Academy on Facebook.
- After all children and staff have been relocated to the evacuation site and are safe and have had all needs taken care of, the Director and Assistant Director will designate staff to contact parents and notify them of the situation.
- Staff members will continue to supervise and take care of the children, including entertaining them with songs, stories, games, etc. at the evacuation site. Watch the kids, not the situation.
- The Assistant Director will continue to supervise and take care of the needs of the staff.
- The Director will be the contact person for emergency personnel and parents.
- The center's usual verification process for allowing adults to pick up children from the center will be used at the evacuation site. (i.e., only persons listed on the child's

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enrollment form as authorized to pick up will be allowed to do so after showing photo ID.)

FIRE

- When aware of fire or when alarm sounds, quietly say, "Fire drill boys and girls; line up at the door, please." This should be familiar to them since you say it every month when you practice monthly fire drills. *Your primary responsibility is to get the children safely out of the building. Do not attempt to put out the fire unless it is between you and a child or preventing exit.*
- Get your sign-in/out sheet and your transition sheet and keep it with you.
- Make a quick head count.
- Make sure you have everyone.
- Infants: Place all the children in two cribs.
- Proceed to the proper fire exit and exterior meeting place as designated on the floor plan in the classroom. This is the same spot you take the children each month during your fire drill.
- Do a name/face check once you are outside and check it against your sign-in/out sheet and transition sheet. If anyone is missing, tell the Director, or person in charge, or a fire fighter immediately, but never leave the children unsupervised.
- The children must be safe (out of way of emergency vehicles and the fire) and supervised at all times. Watch out for anthills, broken glass and other hazards.
- Watch the kids, not the situation.
- The fire department, Director, or person in charge will tell you when you and the children can re-enter the building or begin off-site evacuation procedures.

COOK AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- When aware of fire or when alarm sounds, the Director sounds the alarm, if necessary, thus alerting everyone and notifying the fire department.
- She/he then proceeds to each classroom to ensure that everyone is out of the building.
- When aware of fire, or when alarm sounds, the Assistant Director takes possession of the emergency binder and says aloud, "I have the binder!" and then proceeds to assist the infant classrooms to safely exit the building.
- When aware of fire, or when alarm sounds, if the cook is in the building (and not when already counted in child/staff ratio), she will assist the young toddler classroom.

25. BREASTFEEDING

Stepping Stones Academy will provide a comfortable place with a seat for mothers to breastfeed their child if they choose to do so. Parents may also provide breast milk for their child to be served while in our care.

26. CHILD ABUSE REPORTING LAW REQUIREMENTS

Stepping Stones Academy staff are **REQUIRED** by Texas State law and licensing requirements to report immediately to the police or Child Protective Services (CPS) any instance when there is reason to **suspect** the occurrence of physical, sexual, or emotional child abuse, child neglect, or exploitation. Our staff receives annual training on recognizing and preventing abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse. Stepping Stones Academy has made a commitment to help increase awareness and prevention techniques to employees and parents through trainings, memos and monthly newsletters. Stepping Stones Academy will also coordinate with community organizations on strategies to prevent abuse and neglect.

The staff may not notify parents when the police or CPS is called about possible child abuse, neglect, or exploitation, except on the recommendation of CPS or the police when they are called.

Some examples of abuse and neglect are: leaving a child in a vehicle unattended, not securing a child in a seat belt or booster seat, unexplained marks or bruises on opposite sides of the body, and child hygiene issues.

If parents feel they need assistance with possible child abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse, we encourage you to get help. Please call the National Parent Hotline at 1-855-427-2736 or visit www.helpandhope.org/find-help.html

The statewide Abuse & Neglect phone number is 1-800-252-5400, if you would like to report any suspected abuse or neglect.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES

27. VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASE'S FOR EMPLOYEES

Stepping Stone Academy does not require any employee to receive any additional adult immunizations.

28. TUITION AND FEES

All tuition payments are due by close of business on Tuesday of each week. If you would like to send a bill pay from your bank, please notify the office. You may pay each week, or pay several weeks at a time. Checks returned NSF will be charged \$50.

If tuition is not paid by the close of business, Tuesday of each week, there will be a \$50 per week, per child, Late Fee assessed to the account.

29. EXTRA FEES

A non-refundable Registration Fee is due at the time of enrollment. During summer months and holiday times, an activity fee may be charged. Activity fees are for additional activities outside our normal planned curriculum. Parents will be notified 30 days in advance of activity fee options.

Our program is open Monday through Friday from 6:30am to 6:30pm. Stepping Stones Academy is only licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services to care for children during these specified times. If you are late picking up your child, a \$5 late penalty will be charged for the first 5 minutes you are late and an additional \$5/minute, thereafter. This **MUST** be paid in **CASH** to the closing person in charge. These Late Pick up Fees must be paid in order to continue enrollment at Stepping Stones Academy.

30. CONFIDENTIALITY

While your child is enrolled in our program, parents may come across confidential information about our program, our staff, and sometimes other children. All information received from Stepping Stones Academy must remain confidential at all times. Breaching confidentiality may lead to disenrollment.

31. PARENT CODE OF CONDUCT

Please understand, young children are present in our building. Some adult language is not appropriate for young children. Stepping Stones Academy **prohibits** swearing or cursing on our property. Threatening staff, children, or other parents will not be tolerated per Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Stepping Stones Academy has the right to terminate care immediately in the event of disruptive behavior from a parent or guardian.

Stepping Stones Academy must follow particular rules on discipline and guidance as outlined in the Texas Minimum Standards for Child Care Centers. All adults, including parents, must follow these rules while on our property.

32. PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES

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Children must be signed in and out by the custodial parent or adult person approved by the parent(s). Parents who fail to sign children in or out may be charged a \$5 penalty for each occurrence. Please understand that due to liability issues, staff of Stepping Stones Academy is not permitted to take children home from our center.

Children must be brought to school in appropriate day/play wear. Staff may not change your child's clothing unless it has been soiled. Please do not ask your child's teacher to change clothing before they are picked up.

In order not to confuse school toys with a child's personal property, we ask that children not bring playthings from home. Stepping Stones Academy staff cannot be responsible for lost or broken personal toys. Two exceptions to this are a stuffed animal for use during naptime by full-day preschool children and for Show & Tell purposes. You will be notified by your child's teacher if and when the class will have Show & Tell.

There are several ways you can help us maintain the best possible teaching atmosphere for your child:

- Communicate any concerns regarding our program or your child immediately to staff.
- Pick up and read the notices and information left for you in your child's folder and/or posted outside your child's classroom, at the reception desk, or in e-mail.
- Pick up your child's papers/projects daily. Their work is very important to them and provides another means of communication between parent and child and helps the parent share in the child's day.
- Please be aware of the scheduled meal times of breakfast and lunch, 8:00 am and 11:00am, and make sure your child arrives in time to be included in those meals, if necessary. It is very difficult to try and feed a child later than the scheduled meal time, and causes a disruption in the classroom schedule, which affects all of the children in the classroom.
- Please do not allow your child to bring gum or candy to the classroom. We **STRONGLY** encourage you to allow your child to eat what we are serving that day, unless, of course, food allergies are a concern. In that case, we ask that you bring a note from your Physician. Any food brought from home will only be served at the same time that the other children are eating and **MUST** be taken home at the end of the day.
- Periodically check on your child's supply of extra clothing. Please take home soiled clothing promptly.

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services does not allow smoking on the premises, either indoors or outdoors. This includes Vaporizers and Electronic Cigarettes, as well as Chewing Tobacco.

33. WITHDRAWAL FROM PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

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Fourteen (14) days written notice must be given for withdrawing a child from Stepping Stones Academy.

34. CUSTODY SITUATIONS

Stepping Stones Academy prefers NOT to get involved with custody disputes. Stepping Stones Academy will follow a court order exactly as written. If your family has a court order on file, please provide us with the most recent copy. *PLEASE NOTE: PER STATE LAW, IN THE ABSENCE OF A COURT ORDER, BOTH PARENTS HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS.* With this being said, it is imperative that all enrollment forms are completed with both parents information. A copy of a child's birth certificate may be requested at the Director's discretion. In the event that a custody dispute takes place on our property, the local police will be called and asked to handle the dispute. Our staff will not be placed in the middle of such disputes. If a custody issue creates a risk for our facility or staff, Stepping Stones Academy has the right to terminate care.

35. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICIES

Stepping Stones Academy will open most days during inclement weather. Please check local TV stations, Facebook, the school's voicemail, and look for a text from Remind101 for announcements of closings.

In case of serious emergencies such as earthquakes, fire, storms, or loss of power/water, parents will be notified, if possible, and children will be cared for until parents or emergency contacts arrive.

36. CURRICULUM

Stepping Stones Academy uses the ABeka curriculum for Walkers through Kindergarten classrooms. This curriculum is faith based and believes that children learn best through actively engaging with people and things in their classrooms. Children are involved in hands-on experiences, real-life adventures, and assisted discovery as they explore concepts through play. Stepping Stones Academy is a place where essential readiness skills are nurtured through play, investigation, and of course, fun! These programs provide developmentally and age-appropriate activities and materials for exciting and wonder filled environments.

CURRICULUM:

Children learn by doing. They learn through play, experimentation, exploration, and testing. Learning should be a joyful, natural experience. We have chosen a curriculum based on the developmental needs of each child. The rooms will help the child's growth through opportunities for exploration. 90% of brain growth occurs from zero to 5 years old. Each class's lesson plans, and your child's class flexible schedule are posted on the parent's board in your child's room. We incorporate current trends in Early Childhood and School Age Education and then structure this curriculum to meet the needs of most of the children in the group. Our curriculum, although it will vary depending on age, is guided by the following underlying principles:

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- Children learn through dynamic investigation.
- Children instigate their own learning.
- Learning comes from open-ended experiences.
- Adults are facilitators of children's learning.

INFANT CURRICULUM:

We will keep your child on his/her daily schedule as much as possible. During the day, we will do activities with your child to help them develop their social, emotional, cognitive, language and physical skills. These activities may include playing with toys, art, pretending, enjoying stories and books, discovering sand and water, music, and exploring outdoors.

PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM:

The preschool curriculum will cover the following areas:

Movement and Coordination

- Physical attention and relaxation
- Gross motor skills
- Eye-hand, and eye-foot coordination
- Group games
- Creative movement

Autonomy and Social Skills

- Sense of self and personal responsibility
- Working in group setting

Work Habits

- Memory Skills/
- Following directions
- Task persistence and completion

Language

- Oral language
- Nursery rhymes, poems, finger plays/songs
- Emerging literacy skills

Mathematics

- Patters and classifications
- Geometry
- Measurement
- Numbers and numbers sense
- Basic Addition and subtraction
- Money

Orientation in time and space

- Vocabulary
- Measure of time
- Passage of time (past, present, future)
- Actual and represented space.

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- Simple maps
- Basic geographical concepts

Science

- Human, animal, and plant characteristics
- Physical elements (water, air, and light)
- Tools

Music

- Attend to different sounds.
- Imitate and produce sounds.
- Listen and sing.
- Listen and move.

Visual arts

- Attend to visual detail.
- Creating art
- Looking at and talking about art

DAILY SCHEDULE:

Although your child's schedule varies somewhat day to day, a typical flow of a day's activities is below.

Activity Time: Activities specific to the weekly theme are presented along with basic activities such as puzzles, table manipulatives, dramatic play, blocks, etc.

Group Time: Group times are child-centered participative sessions. The planned group activities include reading, music, movement, finger plays, and discussion, dramatization, games, and experience stories.

Outdoor time: The playground is an extension of the classroom. Children can participate in an activity of their own choosing. Inclement weather, special events, or celebrations will occasionally affect the scheduling of outdoor time.

Snacks and Meal Time: Staff sits with children while they are eating, encouraging and participating in quiet conversation.

Rest Time: Children are given the opportunity to nap or rest each day.

Specific activities vary based on age; all are posted weekly in each room.

37. DAILY SCHEDULE

Stepping Stones Academy classrooms follow a daily schedule designed specifically to meet the children's developmental, social, and emotional, and personal needs. All schedules are

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contingent on the needs of the children and may vary from day to day. Please be aware that each classroom has their individual schedule posted outside their door.

38. CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS

Classroom assignments are based on each individual child's chronological age, developmental age, emotional age, and physical age. Stepping Stones Academy typically will transition children to new classrooms once a year, however from time to time we may request a transition sooner based on the individual child's needs.

39. ABSENCES

Early learning program policy regarding child absences such as, how a parent reports an absence, if there are fees or tuition associated with absences, or the number of absences allowed before voluntary withdrawal.

It can say "If your child will be absent, please call the center before "time" to notify management."

40. PARENT CONFERENCES

You can either state that parent conferences are given upon request or state how many times a year parent conferences are given.

41. PROCEDURES FOR UPDATING INFORMATION

You can come by the office at any time communication app if you use one or through email. "Parents are free to update any information at any time without staff assistance through email."

42. SCREEN TIME POLICY

Screen Time: We follow Child Care Regulations Minimum Standard when it comes to our screen time policy:

- Ages 0-2 years, no screen time.
- 2+ years, no more than 1 hour weekly.

43. BITING

Biting is a common issue in early child development. The best way to deal with biting is consistency between providers and parents. Biting could occur for multiple reasons. Proper communication will help determine why a child is biting. Stepping Stones Academy will work with parents when biting becomes a problem. We will make every effort to solve the issue as soon as possible, however, disenrollment is always a possibility when the problem cannot be resolved in a timely matter.

44. CHILD TO STAFF RATIOS

Stepping Stones Academy exceeds state ratios in most classrooms. From time to time, we may follow state ratios, but will never be non-compliant unless under emergency situations.

45. NAP TIME

Supervised rest periods are provided for all children under five years of age who remain at Stepping Stones Academy for six or more hours a day, and for all other children who show a need for a rest time. Your child will be provided a mat to rest on for naptime. Please provide a clean blanket for naptime and take them home Fridays for washing. You may also bring in a special blanket, pillow, or stuffed animal if desired, but they must be able to fit in your child's cubby.

46. INFANT SAFE SLEEP POLICY

OPERATIONAL POLICY ON INFANT SAFE SLEEP

PURPOSE:

Parents will review this policy upon enrolling their infant at Stepping Stones Academy and a copy of the policy is provided in the parent handbook. Parents can review information on safe sleep and reducing the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome/Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS/SUIDS) at: <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/sleep/Pages/A-Parents-Guide-to-Safe-Sleep.aspx>.

SAFE SLEEP POLICY

All staff, substitute staff, and volunteers at Stepping Stones Academy will follow these safe sleep recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) for infants to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome/Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS/SUIDS):

- Always put infants to sleep on their backs unless you provide an Infant Sleep Exception form 2710 signed by the infant's health care professional [§746.2427 and §747.2327].
- Place infants on a firm mattress, with a tight-fitting sheet, in a crib that meets the CPSC federal requirements for full size cribs and for non-full-size cribs [§746.2409 and §747.2309].
- For infants who are younger than 12 months of age, cribs should be bare except for a tight-fitting sheet and a mattress cover or protector. Items that should not be placed in a crib include soft or loose bedding, such as blankets, quilts, or comforters; pillows; stuffed toys/animals; soft objects; bumper pads; liners; or sleep positioning devices [§746.2415 and §747.2315]. Also, infants must not have their heads, faces, or cribs covered at any time by items such as blankets, linens, or clothing [§746.2429 and §747.2329].
- Do not use sleep positioning devices, such as wedges or infant positioners. The AAP has found no evidence that these devices are safe. Their use may increase the risk of suffocation [§746.2415 and §747.2315].

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- Ensure that sleeping areas are ventilated and at a temperature that is comfortable for a lightly clothed adult [§746.3407(10) and §747.3203(10)].
- If an infant needs extra warmth, use sleep clothing (insert type of sleep clothing that will be used, such as sleepers or footed pajamas) as an alternative to blankets [§746.2415 and §747.2315].
- Place only one infant in a crib to sleep [§746.2405 and §747.2305].
- Infants may use a pacifier during sleep. But the pacifier must *not be attached* to a stuffed animal or the infant's clothing by a string, cord, or other attaching mechanism that might be a suffocation or strangulation risk [§746.2415 and §747.2315].
- If the infant falls asleep in a restrictive device other than a crib (such as a bouncy chair or swing or arrives to care asleep in a car seat), move the infant to a crib immediately, unless you provide an Infant Sleep Exception form 2710 signed by the infant's health care professional [§746.2426 and §747.2326].
- Our child care program is smoke-free. Smoking is not allowed in Texas child care operations (this includes e-cigarettes and any type of vaporizers) [§746.3703(d) and §747.3503(d)].
- Actively observe sleeping infants by sight and sound [§746.2403 and §747.2303].
- If an infant can roll back and forth from front to back, place the infant on the infant's back for sleep and allow the infant to assume a preferred sleep position [§746.2427 and §747.2327].
- Awake infants will have supervised "tummy time" several times daily. This will help them strengthen their muscles and develop normally [§746.2427 and §747.2327].
- Do not swaddle an infant for sleep or rest unless you provide an Infant Sleep Exception form 2710 signed by the infant's health care professional [§746.2428 and §747.2328].

Form

47. CLOTHING

Preschool children must have a complete change of clothing, **clearly marked with the child's name**, left at Stepping Stones Academy. Preschool children need to be dressed for the weather. Caps, mittens, and warm clothing must be worn during the cooler seasons for the daily outdoor playtime. Accidents can happen, even for the older preschoolers, when they wait too long before going to the bathroom, or if they get wet on the playground.

48. PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Parents must supply all bottles, pre-filled with formula or breast milk. Stepping Stones Academy provides toddler training cups. Please label everything with your child's first and last name.

We use washable crayons, markers, and paint during art time, but the children's clothing may get stained from just being kids! Please dress your children in play clothes since PLAY is what we do!!

Please leave all valuable items at home since Stepping Stones Academy cannot be responsible for broken or lost items.

49. OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor play is a regular part of the daily routine. Children should be prepared to play outside some part of every day. Please do not request that your child stay indoors. Per the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, children too sick to go outside should not be at school. If a parent requests their child stay indoors, they will be asked to take their child home until they are well enough to go outdoors for play. Children may not wear flip flops, crocs, sandals, etc. due to the danger these shoes may cause on the playground. They must have closed-toed shoes on.

Stepping Stones Academy strongly believes and supports the need for physical activity each day. When children participate in physical activity every day, multiple health benefits accrue. Regular physical activity builds healthy bones and muscles, improves muscular strength and endurance, reduces the risk for developing chronic disease risk factors, improves self-esteem, and reduces stress and anxiety. Beyond these known health effects, physical activity may also have beneficial influences on academic performance. In addition, cognitive skills and motor skills appear to develop through a dynamic interaction. Research has shown that physical movement can affect the brain's physiology.

Infants will be given opportunities for physical activity, including supervised tummy time. Toddler age children will participate a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous active play each day.

Preschool and Pre-Kindergarten children will participate a minimum of 90 minutes of moderate to vigorous active play each day.

School age children who are in attendance for a full day will participate a minimum of 90 minutes of moderate to vigorous active play each day.

Opportunities for active play may overlap with outdoor play when weather permits.

Stepping Stones Academy will promote all children's active play every day. Children will have ample opportunity to do moderate to vigorous activities, such as running, climbing, dancing, skipping, and jumping, to the extent of their abilities.

All children will participate each day in:

- o Two occasions of active play outdoors when weather permits.
- o Two or more structured or teacher-led activities or games that promote movement over the course of the day.
- o Continuous opportunities to develop and practice age-appropriate gross motor and movement skills.

Physical activity may take place in the classroom or on the playground, when weather permits.

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When participating in physical activity, children's clothing should protect them from sun exposure and permit easy movement (not too loose and not too tight) that enables full participation in active play. Footwear should provide support for running and climbing. Hats may be worn to protect children from sun exposure.

Examples of appropriate clothing/footwear include:

- Gym shoes or sturdy shoe equivalent
- Clothing for the weather, such as a lightweight, breathable jacket without any hood and neck strings.

Examples of inappropriate clothing/footwear include:

- Footwear that can come off while running or that provide insufficient support for climbing.
- Clothing that can catch on playground equipment, such as those with drawstrings or loops.

When weather conditions prohibit outdoor play, physical activities will occur in the classroom during the scheduled outside time. Classroom teachers have activities planned in advance for "rainy days".

50. BIRTHDAYS

Most children enjoy celebrating special events with their preschool friends (birthdays, new babies, and holidays). Parents may send a "store bought only" treat to share with the class. Please make sure that there are **NO** peanut ingredients, oils, tree nuts of any kind listed on the package. Please make arrangements with the teacher several days in advance.

51. CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

When a child demonstrates inappropriate or disruptive behavior, it becomes necessary for staff to intervene. The following actions will be taken in addressing challenging behaviors at my childcare home to ensure the safety of everyone.

The child will be told that their behavior is inappropriate. The teacher will first talk to the child about the behavior and try to guide the child into using more appropriate ways to communicate.

The child will be redirected and, if necessary, given a short time away to calm down away from the rest of the children

Parents will be notified about the behavior so we can work together to develop a plan of intervention that includes conferencing with the parents.

Attempts will always be made by the teacher to handle challenging behavior with natural consequences, relationship building, and consistent rules and routine first. There will also be frequent communication between families and teachers. If it is deemed necessary by the staff or requested by families, a family conference will be scheduled to collaborate with the teacher on the exhibited challenging behaviors.

52. SCHOOL SAFETY POLICIES

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Parents need to personally escort their child(ren) inside the building to sign in and out when their children enter and leave the facility. Each classroom has a window for viewing activity from the hallway. Parents are welcome to visit the center any time during the day to observe their child without prior approval. However, if you would like to stay and spend time with your child during activities, please see the office so we can do a proper criminal history check, as required by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Our facility is equipped with a smoke detector system, and fire drills are practiced monthly.

You will be notified of any incidents other than minor scrapes or bumps with a phone call. We will also give you a written report at pick up time. First aid will be applied to minor incidents. In the event medical attention is required, we will notify you immediately. Parents are responsible for all medical fees.

Anytime you and/or your designated drop off-pick up person is on Stepping Stones Academy's property, your child's health and safety is your responsibility. In short, as long as YOU are present on property, you are responsible for YOUR child's health and safety.

Stepping Stones Academy is a privately-owned, Christian preschool and not a government funded program. Therefore, we require that every person desiring to use the restrooms on our property use the designated restroom associated with the gender identified on their individual birth certificate.

53. CAMERAS

Stepping Stones Academy has closed circuit cameras in all classrooms. A monitor is located in our front office for parents to view. The privacy of the children is very important to us. For this reason, the cameras are not available over the internet.

54. PHOTOGRAPHS

Stepping Stones Academy believes in the benefit of using real life pictures in our educational program. Photos taken of the children will be done with a school owned camera and will only be used in our program. If parents choose to take pictures of events held at our program, they may only photograph their child, unless written permission is given by the other parent.

In the Application, you will find a Social Media section which gives you the option to opt out of having your child photographed for any reason. Please note during certain parent events, such as Pre-K graduation and Carnivals, photographs may be taken. If you wish for your child to not be photographed, you may want to remove them from these events.

55. OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT



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Employees of Stepping Stones Academy are prohibited from outside employment with parents of the organization. This includes, but is not limited to, babysitting and/or nanny- type jobs.

56. CYBER IDENTITY/SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB SITES

Cyber identity and social networking is very exciting these days. However, please understand that employees of Stepping Stones Academy are prohibited from participating in social networking with parents and children. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc..

57. CELL PHONES

Proper parent communication is imperative when working with young children. It is difficult to communicate when cell phones are in use. Effective December 1, 2010, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services passed new regulations prohibiting the personal use of cell phones in classrooms. Please help us stay in compliance with this new standard.

If parents must use their cell phone, please do that outside of the building. We need your undivided attention when picking up your child so that staff may communicate effectively with you, the events of your child's day.

Staff members are trained NOT to release a child to a parent until they have been able to communicate events of the child's day without the distraction of a parent on a cell phone.

We, at Stepping Stones Academy, know that you trust us with your most valuable treasure, your child, and we strive to serve our families the absolute best in preschool education and childcare. We believe that excellent early childhood development is the foundation for a bright future for our children at Stepping Stones Academy.