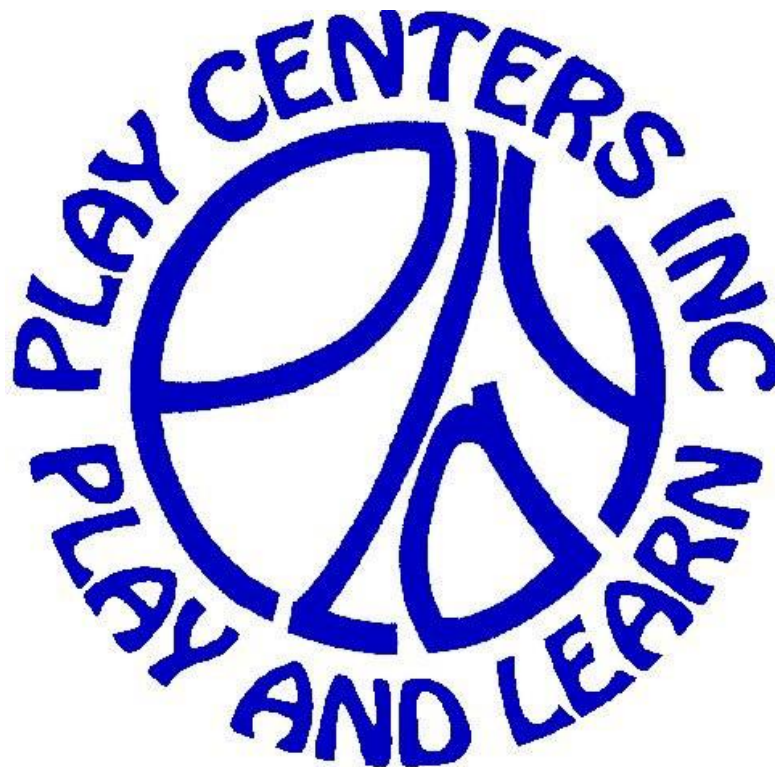


PLAY AND LEARN
PRESCHOOL
PARENT HANDBOOK



2414 E. JOPPA ROAD
PARKVILLE, MARYLAND 21234

Revised 4/24



Play Centers, Inc. / Play and Learn
"Your First Choice for Quality Child Care and Education"
in Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City,
and Baltimore County

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I. Introduction

A. Welcome Letter

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn would like to formally welcome you and your child to our program. We are pleased that you have selected us for your quality child care needs!

Our goal is to provide children with a wide variety of appealing, age-appropriate activities that foster growth and learning in all developmental areas. We look forward to providing a positive learning experience for your child.

The information provided in this handbook describes our philosophy, programs, policies, and procedures. We ask that you thoroughly read the handbook before signing the handbook receipt. Please feel free to contact your Center Director or the Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn Administrative Team with any questions or concerns.

We look forward to a bright future together!

Diane Mellott
CEO/COO

B. Phone Numbers/Website/Federal ID Number

Preschool Programs

Play and Learn at Annapolis	410-263-4029	APDirector@playcenters.org
Play and Learn at Eastpoint	410-282-2057	EPDirector@playcenters.org
Play and Learn at Hunt Valley	410-785-7077	HVDirector@playcenters.org
Play and Learn at Scribbles	410-467-6702	SCDirector@playcenters.org

School-Age Programs

Play Centers at Carney Elementary School	443-804-6991	CARDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Carroll Manor Elementary School	410-592-6948	CMDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Cromwell Valley Technical School	410-321-9011	CVDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Elmwood Elementary School	410-665-8210	EWDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Jacksonville Elementary School	410-666-3055	JAXDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Jemicy School	410-493-4057	JEMDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Our Lady of Hope/St. Luke's School	410-288-3310	OLHDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Pinewood Elementary School	410-561-0885	PWDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Stoneleigh Elementary School	410-337-2744	STODirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Warren Elementary School	410-628-7111	WARDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at West Towson Elementary School	410-494-7134	WTDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Norwood Elementary School	443-805-3378	NORDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Middleborough Elementary School	667-355-9218	MBDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Summit Park Elementary School	410-725-1815	SumDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Edgemere Elementary School	667-415-9608	EMDirector@playcenters.org
Play Centers at Fort Garrison Elementary School	410-320-4169	FGDirector@playcenters.org

Administrative Personnel

Administrative Office	410-296-4880	www.playcenters.org
Program Support Manager	EXT. 100	playcenters@playcenters.org
Human Resources Director	EXT. 103	BSimms@playcenters.org
Finance Director (CFO)	EXT. 104	Finance@playcenters.org
Program Quality Director	EXT. 107	AFleming@playcenters.org
Accounts Receivable Coordinator	EXT. 110	ARCoordinator@playcenters.org
Subsidy Specialist / School-Age Accounts Receivable Coordinator	EXT. 111	KThomas@playcenters.org
Executive Director (CEO/COO)	EXT. 113	DMellott@playcenters.org
Accounts Payable Coordinator	EXT. 114	APCoordinator@playcenters.org
Payroll Coordinator	EXT. 117	payroll@playcenters.org

Federal Tax ID Number: 52-1259566

C. History/About Us/Structure

Play Centers, Inc. has been in operation as a not-for-profit educational corporation since September 1982. Play Centers, Inc. offers infant/toddler/preschool programs known as *Play and Learn* and these programs are located in Baltimore County, Baltimore City, and Anne Arundel County.

In addition, Play Centers, Inc. offers programs for school-age children in various schools throughout Baltimore County. Originally, our school age programs were housed exclusively in public schools. Today, however, Play Centers, Inc. provides quality school-age care in both public and private Baltimore County schools.

Play Centers, Inc. has an extensive history of providing high quality childcare to Maryland's children and families for nearly 40 years and we work diligently to be your first choice for quality child care and education!

D. Programs Licensed by MSDE

Each Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn program is licensed by the Maryland State Department of Education – Office of Child Care (MSDE-OCC) and functions within the purview of the Code of Maryland Regulations governing childcare centers. A copy of the Regulations is available at your child's center and online at <https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/regulations>. Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn programs are inspected annually by MSDE-OCC Licensing Specialists and Inspection Reports are available online.

E. Guide to Regulated Child Care

The MSDE Office of Child Care *Guide to Regulated Child Care* pamphlet contains important information about licensed child care facilities in Maryland. A copy of this pamphlet is included in your enrollment folder, a copy is posted in the parent information area of your child/ren's center, and it is also available at:

https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/system/files/filedepot/2/guide_to_regulated_child_care.pdf.

F. Additions & Amendments

This handbook may be amended at the sole discretion of the Administration at any time during the year. Additionally, new policies and procedures may be added by the Administration on either a trial or permanent basis throughout the year, and the Administration has the authority to deviate from these policies if they deem it appropriate and/or to meet new federal, state, or

local regulations. An electronic version of this handbook is available on our website. In the event that additions or amendments are necessary after the publication of this handbook, they will be reflected on the website. Families will be made aware of any changes through a message, email, and/or flyer.

G. Mission Statement/Goals/Code of Ethical Conduct/Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

Mission Statement

To be the first choice for quality child care and education!

Goals

- The safety and well-being of the children in our care will be our priority.
- Our program will offer inclusive, engaging, enriching, and intentional hands-on learning through play experiences in well-developed and developmentally appropriate environments.
- Our staff will be professionally trained and experienced in child development, individualized programming, curriculum implementation, quality learning environments, child engagement, and parent/community involvement.
- Our programs will respond to a variety of individual family needs.

Code of Ethical Conduct

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn will use as a guide the *National Association for the Education of Young Children* Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment.

Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn does not and shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. These activities include, but are not limited to, hiring and firing of staff, selection of vendors, and provision of services. We are committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all of our children and families, staff, vendors, and other partners.

H. Philosophy

Play Centers, Inc. is a not-for-profit corporation providing quality care and education to children ages 6 weeks – 11 years. Using research on current best practices, communication with families, getting to know each child through the All About My Child form, collected upon enrollment, and through daily interactions, we are able to ensure that our programs are age and developmentally appropriate and reflect the interests of all current children, their primary languages, and their cultural background. We focus on the whole child, specifically the child’s physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs. We welcome children of all abilities, including children with disabilities and/or special health care needs who meet the basic eligibility requirements of our programs. All children are fully included and are given access and support needed to participate in our programs. Throughout our program design is a strong emphasis on learning through play, as well as opportunities for discovery, hands-on activities, and guided choices which serve to enrich learning. The children are offered a balance of the following categories of activities: child-initiated and teacher-directed; indoor and outdoor; quiet and active; and individual, small group, and whole group.

I. Inclusion & Non-Discrimination Policy

Play Centers Inc./Play and Learn is committed to the inclusion of children with varying abilities in our programs. We strive to address the needs of all children, including children with special health care needs, children with disabilities or developmental delays, children in poverty, as well as children who are English learners, immigrants, refugees, migrant, homeless, or in foster care. We welcome the opportunity to fully include individuals with a wide variety of abilities who meet the basic eligibility requirements of our programs.

Play Centers, Inc. programs operate in line with the position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, “...inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every child and his/her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results for inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality programs and services are access, participation, and supports.”

We also work with our families and early intervention or special education service providers to support child and family outcomes. This may include (but not be limited to): scheduling therapy sessions at the centers, possibly meeting one-on-one with the specialist, as well as, working with the child through small group or one-on-one instruction daily. If your child has an IFSP/IEP, please include a copy of it, along with a schedule of services, with your enrollment packet.

Our Center Directors and lead staff participate as team members and work with IFSP/IEP teams to make modifications and accommodations for children with special health care needs or disabilities. In addition, our Play and Learn locations also work closely with early intervention screeners, such as *Maryland Infants and Toddlers Program*, *Child Find*, *Abilities Network*, etc.

J. Developmental Differences & Mixed Age Groupings

Every child enters our program with a different set of experiences, circumstances, and interests. Consequently, each child demonstrates individual and varying talents, abilities, and needs. Our expectations of children are not uniform and consistent throughout a group or even between two children. We see each child as a unique individual and we make every effort to meet the individual needs of each child within the group setting.

The individual interests, needs, and past experiences of children within the group are carefully considered when planning the program. We determine the readiness of the children, take cues from them, and then build a program based on this information. A great amount of creative planning is essential to accommodate the variety of needs within a classroom.

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn strives to provide an environment that is most beneficial for each child, which includes spending some time in mixed age groups. This arrangement offers children the opportunity to develop relationships across all ages, for older children to serve as mentors and leaders, and for younger children to learn skills from, and to develop positive relationships with, older peers. Through focused and sensitive adult supervision and guidance, these interactions are beneficial to the individual child and to the group as a whole.

K. Quality Initiatives

In an effort to continually assess and make improvements to our programs, Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn participates in a variety of State-recommended program quality assessment and continuous quality improvement initiatives. The following formal quality assessment tools identified by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) are utilized:

- Classroom Assessment Scoring Systems
- Quality Assurance Program Improvement Plans
- MSDE's "Maryland EXCELS" Quality Rating Improvement System
- MSDE Child Care Center Accreditation Standards
- MSDE's Workforce Development Program and Individualized Staff Development Plans
- Annual Parent, Vendor, and Partner Surveys

Each of these systems for enhanced program quality and staff development identifies key areas for program and staff assessment, as well as a designated pathway toward continuous improvement. Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn staff receive ongoing development and support in the classroom for implementing each of these initiatives, under the close supervision and guidance of the Center Director.

II. Enrollment and Tuition Procedures & Policies

A. Waiting List

Upon receipt of the completed Waiting List Application and payment of a non-refundable, non-transferrable \$50.00 Waiting List Fee, your child's name will be placed on the waiting list for the appropriate center. Priority is given to siblings of those children already attending one of our centers. Priority is also given to State employees at our State-Sponsored centers, to Itineris employees at our Scribbles location, to Eastpoint Office Park employees at our Eastpoint location, and to Executive Plaza employees at our Hunt Valley location.

Although no guarantee can be made that a space will be provided for your child on the desired start date, Play Centers, Inc. will do everything we can to facilitate your requests. When your child is assured of a space, time is of the essence. Failure to adhere to the communicated deadlines will result in the loss of your enrollment opportunity; however, you will remain on the Waiting List.

Your child's enrollment will be complete when, in response to notification from the Center Director that a space is available for your child, Play Centers, Inc. has then received all required paperwork and payment has been made of the fees due at enrollment time. The \$50.00 waiting List Fee will be applied to your child's enrollment fees.

B. Enrollment/Required Paperwork

Enrollment at one of our locations can be facilitated by contacting the Center Director at the location of your choice. There are several enrollment forms that are required, including an Enrollment Agreement. In addition, MSDE-OCC requires a variety of forms be completed and on file for each child, including Health Inventory/Blood Lead Testing Certificate, Immunization Certificate, and Emergency Form. The full enrollment packet must be complete in order to facilitate your child becoming enrolled in the program.

MSDE-OCC and Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn forms are available through our Administrative Office and/or your Center Director. It is important that parents/guardians complete periodic

paperwork and contact information updates to ensure that the Center Director has accurate records at all times.

Please note that your Enrollment Agreement with Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn includes the information contained in the Enrollment Agreement *as well as* the information contained in the Parent Handbook.

C. Play Centers, Inc. Financial Policies

Play Centers, Inc. reserves the right to cancel and/or modify the Enrollment Agreement at any time. Play Centers, Inc. is not responsible for errors caused by USPS, by financial institutions, by child care reimbursement programs, and/or by electronic transmission of information.

Tuition Rates

Tuition is billed weekly for our preschool programs. Rates are evaluated on an annual basis and any change in tuition rates will be communicated in writing 30 (thirty days) prior to the effective date of the change.

Drop-In & Additional Days of Care

Play Centers, Inc. offers full-time and some part-time schedules as well as a flexible “drop-in service” at most of our locations, for an additional fee. Contact your Center Director for the rate associated with your requested schedule.

In order to utilize our “Drop-In” service, you must:

- be preregistered, with all required paperwork in place,
- be enrolled in the Automatic Payment Program, and
- confirm with your Center Director **at least 24 hours in advance** that there is a space available in the program for the day on which you need care.

Discounts

There is a 10% discount for the second child using our centers, a 20% discount for third child, and a 30% discount for the fourth child. This discount is applied to the highest tuition rate and all children must be enrolled full-time. An additional 5% discount is applied for Military families, Itineris employees, Tenants of Executive Plaza, and Tenants of Eastpoint Office Park. Play Centers, Inc. discounts do not apply to Part-Time enrollments, Drop-In Care/Additional Days of Care, or Additional Services.

Child Care Scholarship/Subsidy Programs

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn accepts child care vouchers from a variety of child care scholarship and subsidy programs. Please note that until Play Centers, Inc. is in receipt of a valid child care voucher, parents/guardians are responsible for payment of fees/services billed at rates as established by Play Centers, Inc.

OCC Child Care Scholarship Program: MSDE provides income-based scholarships through CCS Central. Learn more about Child Care Scholarships (CCS) by visiting their website at money4childcare.com (<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/child-care-providers/child-care-scholarship-program>) or by calling them at 1-877-227-0125.

Child Care Aware Subsidy program serving military families: Learn more about this at <https://www.childcareaware.org/>.

For specific questions regarding utilizing Scholarships and Subsidies for our programs, please contact the Play Centers, Inc. Subsidy Specialist at 410-307-1424.

Payments

All tuition payments are to be paid by center closing time on Wednesday of each week for the upcoming week. Payments must be made by check, money order, or a Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express credit/debit card. Payments may also be made at <http://www.myprocare.com> Play Centers, Inc. does not accept cash or non -imprinted checks. To ensure proper processing, please make checks or money orders payable to Play and Learn. Please write your child's name, center location, and week of service on your payment. Payments are to be placed in the Tuition Box location at the center. Weekly tuition payments remain the same regardless of holidays, winter break, spring break, closures for professional development, inclement weather, vacation, illness, pandemic, or acts of nature. Payments must be made no later than 9:00 a.m. on the last business day of the week to ensure continued care for your child. Failure to keep payments up-to-date will result in denial of participation in the program.

Automatic Payment Program

For convenience, Play Centers, Inc. offers an Automatic Payment Program. Upon enrollment in this payment option, Play and Learn will automatically charge the weekly tuition payment and/or additional fees to a Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express debit/credit card. Please contact your Center Director or the AR Department for further information. (NOTE: The

Enrollment Fee and Deposit which are due at enrollment time will be charged upon receipt of the signed Enrollment Agreement.

Changes in Enrollment

Changes in enrollment, including withdraws, must be received IN WRITING 2 (two) weeks prior to the date when the change will take effect in order for a new tuition rate to be offered. Requests to change your child's enrollment to Drop-In for Winter Break or Spring Break will not be honored. Please note that changing to a Drop-In enrollment does not ensure future care.

Additional Fees

Enrollment Fee: Varies by age (non-refundable). Please contact Center Director for rates.

Annual Curriculum Fee: Due with Enrollment Agreement and then billed annually at beginning of each new Curriculum Year. Initial Curriculum Fee may be prorated, depending on start date.

Balance Fee: \$25.00 (assessed on Thursday of each week)

Returned Check Fee: \$35.00

Drop-In Fee/Additional Day of Care: (Please contact Center Director for availability and rates.)

Chargeback Fee for Invalid Credit Card Dispute: \$25.00

Copies of Attendance and/or Sign-In Sheets: \$1.00 per page, per child

Past Due Accounts

If your child is suspended from the program due to non-payment, payment of the entire week and any unpaid balance is still due. If a past due account is not paid in a timely manner and it becomes necessary to refer the account to a Collection Agency, a Referral Fee equal to 33% of the past due balance will also be billed. Any reasonable interest, collection fees, court costs, and/or attorney's fees imposed by our Collection Agency will be the responsibility of the person(s) who have signed the Enrollment Agreement.

In addition, repeated late payments/returned checks/declined cards/past due accounts may be cause for expulsion from the program.

Tuition Refunds

Payment for unused days, for whatever reason, will not be refunded. No substitutions may be made for scheduled days a child is absent or for days the Center is closed. Overpayments of \$30.00 or less at the conclusion of this Agreement will not be refunded, but may be applied to future fees or enrollments.

D. Additional Financial Policies

Flexible Spending Accounts/Tax Statements/Donations

Contact the Finance Department at 410-307-1425 for more information.

Parent Referrals

Parents who refer other families to our program may choose a thank you gift once the new family has been with us for 90 days. The Preschool Referral Form must be completed by both families and turned in with the new child's enrollment packet. See your Center Director for details. Both families must have accounts that are "in good standing" for the referral gift to be issued.

Late Pick-Up Policies

If a child is picked up late, a charge will be imposed at the rate of **\$1.00 per minute, per child**. This fee is due when the child is picked up. It may be paid with Current Autopay, or by a check/money order made payable to Play and Learn. Please note that in the event of a scheduled or unscheduled early closure, the late pick-up charge will be imposed beginning at that adjusted closure time. Repeated late pick-ups may be cause for expulsion from the program.

III. Operating Procedures and Policies

A. Hours of Operation

Play and Learn preschool hours of operation vary from center to center. Contact the center of your choosing for its specific opening and closing times.

B. Holidays and Scheduled Closings

Play and Learn preschool Holidays and Scheduled Closings include, but may not be limited to:

New Year's Day (or day observed)	New School Year Prep Day
Professional Development Day	Thanksgiving Day
Memorial Day	Native American Heritage Day
Independence Day (or day observed)	Christmas Eve (or day observed)

Labor Day

Christmas Day (or day observed)

Parents will receive at least one week's notice of any additional scheduled closings. Annual Calendars specific to each location will be available to each enrolled family. Those calendars contain a listing of additional center-specific information, including dates of any other non-emergency closings for the year.

C. Inclement Weather/Emergency Closing Policy

Play and Learn will make every effort to open the center and to remain open during inclement weather; however, there may be times when weather conditions or emergencies, such as a water main break or power outage, will necessitate a change in our normal operating hours.

For specifics, please refer to the *Emergency Closing Policy* for the Play and Learn location which your child attends. This information is provided in the enrollment packet and is also available online at www.playcenters.org.

Play Centers sends email notifications, cell phone text message alerts, and/or Brightwheel messages to families who have signed up for those communications. More information on these options is available from the Center Director.

In addition, you may call your child's center for program opening/closing status.

Parents/Guardians should establish alternative child care arrangements in advance in the event that center closings occur.

D. COVID/Pandemic/Quarantine Closing Policy

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn centers must follow any current mandates from local, state, and federal government agencies, such as MSDE-OCC, the Department of Health, and the CDC, regarding COVID-19 and any other possible future health-related pandemics that require partial or full quarantining/closing of centers. We must also follow all mandates regarding operations, such as: cleaning procedures; changes to child/staff ratios and/or room capacities; and closing of the buildings to all but staff and children.

These mandates change frequently in an active pandemic situation. Families will be kept informed of any changes through email, Brightwheel, text alerts, and/or phone calls.

Every situation is different when a room and/or center must close due to a pandemic. The CEO/COO (Executive Director) and CFO (Finance Director) will determine whether tuition will be

modified based on the length of the closure. Families will be informed of any decision that is made.

Parents/Guardians should establish alternative child care arrangements in advance in the event that center closings occur.

E. Dropping Off & Picking Up Children

Upon arrival at the center, parents **must sign their child in to the program AND deliver him/her to the staff person in charge.** Similarly, staff must be told when a child is leaving for the day and parents **must sign their child out of the program.** Please be sure to include the time that your child arrived at and left the center.

For safety reasons, we request that parents not permit their children to move around the building and/or playgrounds areas unsupervised. *Parents are responsible for the direct supervision of their child before he/she has been signed in and once he/she has been signed out.*

Be reminded that it is a misdemeanor to leave a child under the age of 8 unattended, including leaving the child in the car, while dropping off or picking up another child in the center. In addition, staff may call 911 (and emergency contacts) to report children or pets locked in cars and/or in the event that a parent/guardian arrives at the center intoxicated or impaired.

A child will only be released to a person authorized to pick up the child. Written notification must be given to the staff person in charge if someone other than the parent/guardian is picking up the child on any given day. A valid ID must be presented upon request.

In custody issues between parents/guardians, **legal documentation** must be on file at the center stating the specifics of any visitation or pick-up restrictions. Otherwise, staff will have no alternative but to grant access to both legal parents/guardians.

F. Absence Procedure

For the safety of your child, it is important that you contact the center if your child will be absent on a day for which he/she is regularly scheduled to attend. Communication can be through email, telephone, or through Brightwheel. In our shared efforts to ensure child safety and well-being, we very much appreciate you following this important request.

G. Media and Internet Release

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn may develop, conduct, participate in, or be the subject of presentations and events which highlight your children participating in various educational activities that take place during their enrollment at Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn.

The media used of your child and his/her projects and activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Photographs
- Slideshows
- Videos

The events and presentations may include, but are not limited to:

- Classroom Activities/ Projects
- Community festivals, exhibits, fairs, etc.
- Public relations campaigns/ Radio Advertising / Newspaper Publications/ Company Website/Social Media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, etc.

Preschool children may also be included in photographs and videos on their personal Brightwheel feed, as well as in other classmates' feeds if it is a group picture/video. More information about the Brightwheel app is in a later section of this handbook.

A Media and Internet Release form is included in your Enrollment packet. It is also available on our website or you may request a copy from the Center Director.

*It is your responsibility, as the parent, to provide written notification to the Center Director if your child **will not be** permitted to participate in photos/videos/evaluations.*

Additionally, we ask that all parents be mindful that our families hold a range of views on posting pictures and videos of children to social media. Before publicly posting any pictures or videos of a school event, please consult with the parents of any children appearing in those images.

H. Screen Time Policy

In the best interest of our children's health and well-being, computers and other media devices are used only when directly related to a lesson plan, classroom objectives, or other facilitated learning experiences. The types of screens available to children during program hours vary from site to site, but may include screens for viewing curriculum-related enrichment activities, virtual field trips, etc.

The staff will utilize all screen experiences as a way to enhance the learning experiences for each child and each staff person will be fully and actively involved in that process.

Screen time is not permitted for children under the age of 2. For children ages 2 to 5, access to screens will be limited and would not occur on a daily basis. On days when screens are utilized with Two's and Preschool children, that access would be limited to a maximum of 30 minutes.

In the event that a child does not wish to participate in a screen-related activity, he/she will be given the opportunity to pursue an alternative activity that is related to the same learning objective.

Screen Time Tips for Children and Families are available on our website and in the Parent Resources area of the Center.

I. Babysitting Policy

We do not recommend that our staff members babysit for center families; however, we recognize that parents may want individual staff members to provide in-home babysitting for their children on occasion. Please realize that Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn assumes no responsibility for our employees when they are off duty, nor for our students when they are not signed in to our centers during regular business hours. All contracts for babysitting are solely between the parents/guardians and the individual providing the service. In addition, no babysitting is allowed on center premises at any time.

J. In-House Field Trips/Center Visitors/ Portraits/ Educational Walks

In-House Field trips and presentations by special Center Visitors may occur throughout the year. Preschool Portrait photographers may also visit 2-3 times per year. Details and permission slips will be provided in advance.

Additionally, as an extension of the curriculum, Play and Learn participants may take neighborhood educational walks. *It is the parent/guardian's responsibility to provide written notification to the Center Director if his/her child **will not be** permitted to participate in these neighborhood walks.*

IV. Health and Safety Policies

A. Open Door Policy and Center Security

Play and Learn programs have an Open Door Policy. This means that parents will have access to all areas of the childcare center during operating hours in order to contact their children, to

observe activities, to confer with the center staff, etc., (unless such access is limited by an outside agency, as occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Play and Learn programs have secured access in all locations and access is facilitated by the use of swipe cards, door codes, and other methods of managed entrance into the program.

B. Emergency Preparedness

Fire Drills are conducted monthly at various times of the day. The Fire Drill Record may be found in the Parent Information Area.

Center Directors complete Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Training and are professionally guided in the development of an Emergency Preparedness Plan for Child Care Centers. The Emergency Preparedness Plan is utilized to train staff in emergency preparedness protocols, both as a part of each staff person's New Employee Orientation and during regularly scheduled protocol reviews held throughout the year.

Safe locations for sheltering-in place within the building have been identified and Shelter-in-Place Drills are conducted annually. Emergency Evacuation Drills are also conducted annually. Written Evacuation Location Agreements have been prearranged so that there is a viable and approved location for our program to move to in the event that the building must be fully evacuated due to an extreme emergency. Please be assured that, for safety reasons, Emergency Evacuation Drills are only conducted to the property line and we would only leave the property to go to the evacuation location in the event of a true emergency, under emergency personnel direction. The Emergency Preparedness Drill Record and the Emergency Preparedness Plan may be found in the Parent Information Area.

The primary responsibility of Play Centers' staff is to maintain each child's safety and well-being during an emergency. In the event of either an Emergency Evacuation or Shelter-in-place, every effort will be made to contact parents as quickly as possible. To facilitate the children's comfort and well-being during an emergency, staff are prepared with easily transportable emergency food, water, medications and other supplies, children's books and other activities, etc. that may be needed or helpful in the event of an evacuation or shelter-in-place event.

C. Boo-Boo Notes & Medical Emergencies

The staff are trained to implement policies and procedures to assure a healthy and safe environment.

A Boo-Boo Note will be completed in the event that a child is injured during his/her hours of care. A Parent/Guardian must review the report and sign the form. The family then keeps the yellow copy and the white copy is kept in the child's file.

Parents/Guardians will be called immediately about any injury to the head (regardless of how minor it appears), a cut that appears deep or bleeds for an extended period of time, excessive swelling that occurs following an injury, or after a bee sting.

In the event that the parent/guardian is not available during a medical emergency, a staff member will accompany the child in the ambulance to the hospital. A copy of the child's emergency forms will be taken with them. **It is important that information on all emergency forms be kept up to date.**

If a parent/guardian takes a child to the doctor/dentist/clinic/emergency room as a result of an accident or incident at the center, parents/guardians must inform the Center Director as soon as possible.

D. COVID & Respiratory Viruses Health & Safety Procedures

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn follows all current MSDE-OCC/Health Department/CDC/State and Local Government regulations and procedures regarding COVID and other respiratory viruses, such as RSV, influenza, and pneumonia. These regulations and procedures change as needed and include a wide variety of topics, including group size restrictions, mask regulations, temperature recording, symptom and quarantine rules, cleaning rules, restrictions on admittance into the building, etc.

In addition to following any regulations, guidance, and procedures issued to us by the MSDE/OCC/Health Department/CDC, etc., we believe that it is extremely important to err on the side of caution regarding health issues, due to the fact that young children comprise one of the largest Risk Factor Groups, according to the CDC. Infants, Toddlers, and other young children have not been fully immunized and do not yet have mature respiratory systems. In addition, children under 2 are not permitted to mask at all, and children ages 2 – 5 can only mask for half or less of the day, since masks are not permitted to be worn for physical play, snacks, lunch, and naps. Typically, the Guidance for returning to work/school/child care applies to people ages school age and up, since these groups have become more successful in the consistent and proper wearing of masks. For younger children, longer exclusions will apply.

E. Illness and Communicable Diseases Policies

Sick Children

- Children should be well enough to participate in regularly scheduled activities, including going outside. Our centers are not equipped or staffed to isolate sick children for long periods of time. Therefore, we cannot honor requests for your child to remain inside during outside time. If your child is not well enough to go outside, then it may be best that he/she stays home.
- Some of the signs and symptoms of illness, for which a child will be excluded from care, include, but are not limited to:
 - Fever (100.4 F or higher) (**must be fever-free without medication for 30 hours before returning to care**)
 - Illness-related vomiting and/or diarrhea (**must be 30 hours incidence-free before returning to care**)
 - Rash; Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye); Ringworm; Hand, Foot, & Mouth Disease; 5th Disease; Impetigo; Chicken Pox; illnesses that require antibiotics, such as strep throat (**While these illnesses may require a doctor's note to return to care, at all times MSDE-OCC Licensed Child Care Programs in Maryland must follow the current Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's *Communicable Diseases Summary for exclusion and physician's note protocols*, regardless of communications or recommendations by a child's physician or other health care provider.**) *In addition, children must be free of open sores and all eye discharge before they may return to care.*
 - Severe Cough and/or wheezing
 - Stomachache, headache, earache, or sore throat
 - Abnormal Behavior, such as excessive fatigue or irritability, or refusal to eat or drink
- The Center Director - as well as the In-Charge Person, when the Director is not in the Centers, will make the final determination regarding health and well-being, and will have full authority to exclude a child from care as needed. They also have full authority to request a doctor's note be presented clearing a child to return to care.
- Any child sent home as described above must be excluded from care for a minimum of 30 hours, regardless of diagnosis, medicine given, or doctor's note, in order to reduce and hopefully prevent the potential spread of illness, as well as to give the child the opportunity to rest and heal.
- In the case that your child should become ill during the program hours, we will call you to pick up your child. You or your emergency back-up person must be able to pick up the child within **one hour** of being notified. We are not licensed to provide care for sick children.

- After an absence due to illness for three days or more, Play Centers will readmit your child after the Center Director has been given a written statement by the parent or physician that the child may return.

Communicable Disease Reporting

Child care centers are obligated to report the name and address of any child or staff member who appears to be infected with any designated reportable communicable disease or has been exposed to any designated reportable communicable disease, as well as should there be an outbreak of any communicable disease.

For some illnesses that occur in the center, information will be shared with families that indicates the name of the illness (such as chicken pox), but not the name of the child(ren) who have it.

A child care center may not knowingly admit a child to childcare during the period of communicability of a communicable disease unless the child is undergoing treatment and the child's readmission is approved, in writing, by a licensed practitioner.

Please note that if a child is diagnosed with a communicable disease – such as those listed in the current Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's *Communicable Diseases Summary* and other CDC or Health Department communications to Licensed Maryland Child Care Programs – we must follow Maryland State Department of Education – Office of Child Care Regulations regarding all exclusion and return to care requirements, regardless of communications or recommendations by a child's physician or other health care provider.

Head Lice

If you believe that your child may have been exposed to head lice, please consult with your health care provider for recommendations.

In addition, please immediately report exposure details to the Center Director so that families may be alerted to check their children for signs of head lice and so we may take appropriate cleaning measures.

In order to return to care, the child must be treated for at least 24 hours, and all live lice must be removed from hair prior to return. Upon return, if live lice are detected, the child must be picked up and any live lice removed prior to returning to care.

F. Medication Policies

Medication Authorization Forms

- Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn staff will only dispense prescription (Rx) or over-the-counter (OTC) medications with written consent from both the parent/guardian and the licensed health practitioner.
- A Medication Authorization form is required for each medication (OTC and Rx). This form includes the child's name, medication name, dosage, side effects, parent's and physician's signatures, etc. Details on administration are also recorded on this form.
- A new Medication Authorization form is required at the beginning of each 12-month period, for each specific medication, and each time there is a change to dosage or time administered.
- Medication Authorization forms must be specific as to dispensing information. Directions to give doses as needed (PNR) are insufficient. Detailed information must be provided as to the specific conditions under which a medication should be administered by staff.

Medication Guidelines

- The parent/guardian must bring all medications to the Center Director. All expired medications will be returned to the parent. Non-expired, authorized medications are required to be on-site at all times that the child is in our care.
- Prescription (Rx) medications must be in the original container, labeled by the pharmacy or physician with the child's name, dosage, expiration date, etc.
- Over-the-counter (OTC) medications must be in the original container with the label intact, clearly labeled with instructions for dosage and expiration date.
- All medications will be stored in a medication box in the center.
- Play Centers, Inc. staff are not permitted to give the first dose of any medication.
- It is preferred that maintenance doses of medication be given at times other than during program hours, if at all possible.
- If medically indicated, a child 6 years or older will be authorized to self-carry an emergency medication. Specific procedures are in place for facilitating this *emergency* health situation *and must be fully preapproved before self-carry may begin*. Please see the Center Director for more information.
- Accidents or medical problems resulting from false information will not be the responsibility of Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn.

Sunscreen/Bug Spray/Diaper Cream/Lotion/Lip Balm

Topical ointments, creams, lip balm, sunscreen, and insect repellent, when used as a *preventative* measure, are not considered to be medications, and may be applied by staff with parent-only permission. Physician authorization is not required unless the ointment, etc. becomes a *treatment*.

Asthma Action Plan

If your child has asthma, then you will be required to complete an Asthma Action Plan. The plan should be completed by your child's physician and signed by both the physician and parent/guardian. If the plan indicates that your child requires an inhaler and/or other medication, then the medication will need to be on-site at the school with a Medication Administration Form (see above).

Allergy Alert Plan

If your child has an allergy requiring an emergency medication that would need to be administered onsite (Benadryl, Epi-pen, etc.), then you will be required to complete an Allergy Alert Plan. The plan should be completed by your child's physician and signed by both the physician and the parent/guardian. The medication will need to be on-site at the Center with a Medication Administration form (see above.)

Please note that none of our programs are entirely peanut/tree nut free. **Although we will work with families regarding food sensitivities, please note that we cannot guarantee that any of our classrooms will be fully food allergen-free zones.**

Center Special Attention List

All children and staff with allergies (other than mild seasonal), asthma, and/or other pertinent medical conditions are listed on the Center Special Attention List that is kept in the emergency binders and inside cabinet doors in classrooms and in the kitchen, so as not to be visible to the public and other families.

G. Immunizations & Lead Tests

Prior to enrollment, families must submit documentation of age-appropriate immunizations as defined by MSDE or provide supporting evidence for cases in which a child is under-immunized

because of a medical condition (documented by a licensed health care professional) or the family's beliefs.

Lead tests are now required for all children at 12 months old and again at 24 months old, regardless of zip code.

It is the parent's responsibility to make sure that their child's health forms remain current. Whenever children are scheduled to get shots or have a lead test, parents should get a new copy of the health form from the Center Director for the doctor to complete, or bring in a copy of the immunization records and/or lead test results after such a doctor's visit.

H. Child Abuse & Neglect

All staff members are required by state law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services.

I. Food & Nutrition Policies

Meals & Snacks for Ages Two and Older

We will provide a morning snack with 1% milk or water, 1% milk with lunch, and an afternoon snack with 1% milk or water each day to children ages two and older. Families must bring a lunch each day for their child.

Lunches should be brought in a gallon-sized baggie labeled with the child's name. Please place the bag (along with a labeled water bottle or sippy cup) in the refrigerator in your child's classroom. At the end of the day, please check the refrigerator and take all of your child's items home. Play Centers cannot store items in the refrigerator overnight.

Morning snack is not served until 8:30/9:00 AM, depending on the classroom and center. If your child arrives before 8:00 AM, you may also wish to send in breakfast with your child if they were not able to eat at home. A table will be available for children to eat their breakfast.

Nutrition Policy

Nutritional snacks are an important aspect of the daily program and are provided by the center to children two years of age and older. Each Director is able to consider food allergies when selecting the monthly snack items; however, it may not be possible to accommodate all dietary restrictions. In those cases, parents will be responsible for providing snacks for their child each day. Additionally, while we cannot guarantee that we are 100% peanut/tree nut/gluten/egg

free in any of our centers, child allergies may require that we request that families alter the foods that they send in for their child, depending on the nature of a particular allergy for a particular child. In that event, it may require that a classroom, a group of classrooms, or the entire center be kept as free of the allergen as possible. In that event, we would ask families to provide foods for their child that would not trigger an allergic reaction in another child in care.

Snacks that may be served include whole grains, fresh fruit and vegetables at least four times each week, low-fat cheese, 1% milk, and a variety of other healthy foods. Foods containing excessive fat, salt, sugar or other added sweeteners, and caffeine are avoided in provided foods and beverages. Water is available to children at all times.

It is the parent's responsibility to provide a nutritionally-sound lunch each day. Parents are provided, via the Parent Resource Area and Parent Newsletters, information that promotes healthy eating, including healthy choices that are appealing to children, appropriate serving sizes for young children, the advantages of eating whole foods and grains, and more.

While the center will provide and/or supplement lunches for children who do not have a nutritionally-sound option (and/or snacks for older babies and toddlers, with written parent permission), repeatedly not providing needed food for your child will result in a consultation with our Administrative Support Team. Additionally, infants need to be provided with a sufficient amount of their regular formula/breast milk each day. Infants who do not have enough bottles may not be allowed to be dropped off and/or will need to be picked up early.

In order for us to remain in compliance with Health Department Guidelines for food safety, please send ready-to-eat lunch items that can be served cold or at room temperature for your child to enjoy at lunchtime. We are unable to warm lunches. No microwaves, stoves, or ovens may be used to heat food. Only bottles for infants can be warmed.

Choking Hazards

Play and Learn staff may not offer children younger than five years of age the following foods: hot dogs (whole or sliced into rounds); whole grapes; nuts; popcorn; raw carrots (whole or sliced into rounds); whole cherry or grape tomatoes; melon balls; large chunks of meat; large or chunked hard pretzels.

Hot dogs and raw carrots may be served if they are cut lengthwise into sticks. Grapes, melon balls, and cherry/grape tomatoes may be served if cut in half.

Sliced cheese or rectangular cheese sticks are a better choice than round string cheese, which can cause choking.

Infant and Toddler Meals & Snacks

Infants are fed on-demand, based on each child's individual schedule. Toddlers are transitioning from on-demand feeding to the group style AM snack/lunch/PM snack schedule that they will follow in the Two's and Preschool.

Parents of infants and toddlers (ages 6 weeks up through 23 months) must provide all meals, snacks, and drinks for their child. It is also requested that a supply of extra formula/breastmilk and non-perishable food be left in the classroom.

All infant and toddler food and drinks must be labeled with both the child's name and with the date.

Bottles and cups (formula/breast milk/water) must have lids and be fully prepared. Staff cannot mix powdered formula or transfer breast milk from bags to bottles. Glass bottles and baby food jars are not allowed. Additionally, while we may warm bottles, we are unable to warm food.

Perishable foods should be brought in a gallon-sized baggie *labeled with the child's name*. Place the bag of perishables (along with the labeled bottles and/or sippy cups) in the refrigerator in your child's classroom, if classroom access is permitted. Otherwise, hand all perishables to the staff person in your child's classroom so the items may be immediately refrigerated. At the end of the day, please ensure that you are taking all of your child's items home. Regulations require that all parent-provided food that is not eaten or taken home each day must be discarded; therefore, Play Centers cannot store items in the refrigerator overnight.

Due to unknown allergy-related reactions, please send only those foods that your infant/toddler has eaten at least once previously. Please be sure that all new foods are introduced at home, rather than at the center.

Nursing infants must be comfortable being fed by program staff from a bottle.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding onsite is strongly encouraged and supported. Nursing mothers are provided a comfortable space for breastfeeding, access to an electrical outlet, and privacy as needed. Please discuss your breastfeeding needs with your child's teacher so that your breastfeeding experience is positive and personalized as much as possible.

Ongoing training will be conducted with teachers so that they may facilitate successful breastfeeding in the center.

Birthday Celebrations

Parents are encouraged to celebrate their child's birthday in the center. Please see your child's teacher in advance to make arrangements for their special day and to ensure that there are no scheduling conflicts.

We ask that you consider non-food items, such as a small art or craft project or other creative activity, for these occasions, in case any of the children in your child's classroom have food allergies. **If you must bring food, it must be store bought and it must have all ingredients listed. Candles and latex balloons are not permitted.**

Please be sensitive to the feelings of all children and families if you plan a party for outside of the center. Unless all children in the class are invited to the party, send your invitations through email and not via the children's cubbies.

J. Clothes and Shoes

At Play and Learn, your child will be learning through play. Please dress your child in clothing that he/she can easily manage, is comfortable, and is appropriate for active and potentially messy indoor and outdoor activities and play. We ask that no flip-flops or sandals be worn by children in the program as they can become a safety hazard. Please send your child to school with socks and sneakers, instead.

At least one change of seasonally appropriate clothing, including socks and underwear, should be kept at the center at all times. **Please label all clothing with your child's name.**

If your child is not yet fully potty trained, you are responsible for supplying diapers/pull-ups, wipes, and diaper cream. In addition, it is recommended that several changes of clothing are provided, including an additional pair of shoes, as accidents may occur during the potty-training process. Your child will be more relaxed in response to accidents if we have access to several sets of their own clothing as needed.

K. Outdoor Play & Physical Fitness

Outdoor play and opportunities for physical activity are an integral part of the development of all children, including infants and toddlers, and is built into the daily schedule. Toddlers and up go outside twice a day, weather permitting. Infants take walks in strollers. Additionally, activities are offered throughout the day that focus on each child's physical fitness, health, and well-being.

It is important that your child is dressed appropriately for outdoor activities. For your child's safety, closed-toe and closed-heel shoes are required year-round for outdoor play. Please send seasonally appropriate outdoor attire, including a jacket/coat, hat, and mittens. Please be assured that Play and Learn follows appropriate protocol for assessing daily temperatures and air quality when determining outdoor play schedules.

During the summer months, each classroom has water play once per week (weather permitting). Schedules, permission slips, and a list of what your child will need will be given to you each year right before summer.

If your child cannot go outside, then it may be best that he/she does not attend the program. Please discuss your concerns with the Center Director.

Please be aware that our playground hours coincide with our center hours. We ask that you do not use the playground outside of these hours.

L. Positive Behavior Management

Age appropriateness, as well as developmental stages, are major factors that are considered in quality, positive behavior management strategies. Play and Learn makes every effort to ensure that these two key issues are addressed prior to the implementation of any discipline techniques for a given age group.

Staff set firm, fair, and consistent limits which affirm the child's self-control, thus self-esteem, and establish cooperation. With all age groups, individual differences are recognized and creative discipline techniques are utilized, thus resulting in a positive learning experience for the child.

For infants, positive outcomes occur when an environment that is safe, nurturing, stable, and appropriately stimulating is provided.

For toddlers and younger two-year-old children, these needs must be met, and additionally, clear rules, ample space, opportunity to make choices, and access to gross motor opportunities and outdoor play will facilitate positive outcomes.

It is important to note that some behaviors, such as biting, may be developmentally normal and are managed appropriately. Children bite for a variety of reasons including frustration, as well as during gum discomfort when teething. The child who bit is removed from the situation and told that, "Biting hurts our friends. We can only bite food." If teething is suspected, a frozen

teething ring may be given. The bitten child will be comforted, the area washed, and ice applied if necessary. Parents of both children are notified, and an accident report (Boo-Boo Note) is written; however, the name of the child who bit is kept confidential.

For older twos and preschool children, the goal of positive behavior management is to teach the children to be responsible for their own actions. Positive behavior management policies and procedures are based upon the child's cognitive understanding of right and wrong. Simple and clear rules and expectations are developed with input from the children.

Inappropriate, negative, and unacceptable behavior is dealt with immediately and on an individual basis. Play Centers believes in focusing on the positive. Staff guide children on what is acceptable and appropriate behavior through a wide variety of positive supports and strategies, including, but not limited to:

- Providing a variety of appropriate choices
- The anticipation and elimination of potential problems
- Ignoring minor attention seeking behaviors
- Skills in problem solving
- Encouragement and praise
- Modeling appropriate choices
- Redirection
- Opportunities for reflection
- Behavior modification programs (rewards and reinforcements)

It is an accepted fact that children need guidance. They need directions, limits, and rules to follow. Play and Learn meets this need by incorporating discipline techniques which are geared to the development of self-respect, skills in problem solving, and healthy interpersonal relationships.

For older children, conflict resolution is approached in the following ways:

- Staff act as mediators and negotiators, letting the children know the staff is there to protect each child as they work out solutions to their conflicts
- Staff help the children to brainstorm various solutions to their conflicts
- Staff act as role models as they help settle differences with the children
- Conflicts are resolved through supportive, non-punitive, and non-violent means

Parent involvement is strongly encouraged because follow-up at home is necessary to help children continue to respond in appropriate ways. The staff will do everything possible to deal with difficult situations onsite, however, parents will be notified immediately if a child is in danger of hurting himself/herself, others, or the environment.

Occasionally, when a child fails to respond to verbal techniques, a one-on-one discussion of the problem and alternative solutions are explored. Alternative solutions may include redirection, spending time alone to reflect and regroup, and/or talking with the parents.

Play and Learn makes every effort to facilitate each child's success in the program. Occasionally, however, our program may not meet the specific needs of a particular child. When this becomes the case, there is a general course of action that is typically followed. The action may include, but not be limited to, utilization of a behavior log, parent conference, behavior contract, suspension, and dismissal.

M. Nap Time/Rest Time

Infants sleep on demand and "schedules" are based on information indicated on the monthly form, input from the child's parents, and how the staff interpret how the infant seems to feel each day. Newborns tend to catnap, while infants 4-12 months tend to take two naps per day. Infants should have two Pack and Play or crib-sized sheets available at all times.

Maryland licensing requirements require that infants be placed on their backs to sleep and that blankets, pillows, bumper pads, toys, and stuffed animals (including those attached to pacifiers) are not used. In addition, we are not permitted to swaddle infants. A written note on letterhead from the child's physician is required for any exceptions to this policy. Lightweight, properly fitting "sleep sacks" are permitted to be used as long as they will not slip up around the infant's face.

Toddlers (18-24 months), while still sleeping somewhat on demand, are working to transition from two naps down to one nap. Toddlers also transition from cribs to cots.

Toddlers and Two's will need a standard crib-sized sheet and light blanket. Preschool cots are a bit larger and may use a standard crib-sized sheet or a twin-size sheet. Please check with the Center Director to see which size works best with the cots utilized in your child's classroom. Please take all bedding home at the end of the week to be laundered.

Licensing requires that Two's and Preschoolers be provided a regularly scheduled nap or rest time appropriate to the age, needs, and activity level of the individual child. While we cannot force any child to sleep, we do provide a cot and a quiet atmosphere. After a 45-minute period, any child that is awake may read or play quietly on his/her cot. Adequate sleep is a requirement for good health, especially for growing children. Therefore, with the exception of the summer before all-day kindergarten, or a specific day that a child needs to be picked up early, it is not

our policy to keep children awake or to awaken them early from naps. Children who are well rested wake up on their own.

N. Pets & Animals

In order to protect children and staff who may have allergies and/or asthma, pets are not permitted in the building or on the playground of any Play and Learn program. This includes pets who are leashed or in a crate. Service animals are also discouraged for this reason and must be authorized in advance by the Director so that vulnerable children and/or staff can be moved to safety.

Teachers may choose to have allergy-friendly animals, such as fish, hermit crabs, or butterfly kits. Please be assured that all licensing guidelines will be followed at all times to ensure the safety and well-being of all children.

Some of our Center Visitors, such as the ZOOMobile, do bring animals and permission slips would be sent home in advance of any animals visiting the center for a special activity.

O. Student Volunteers & Professional Observers

During the school year, early childhood education students from area colleges and universities may be assigned to one of our Play and Learn locations as part of their learning experiences. We also accommodate professional observers, including medical and physical therapy students and pediatric fellows. Additionally, developmental screening experts and/or early intervention specialists may be called in by parents to observe and assess their child.

These student volunteers and professional observers will be screened and handled according to MSDE-OCC childcare regulations and will not be left alone with children.

Parents will be notified in advance should arrangements be made for student volunteers or professional observers to be visiting their child's program.

V. Infant-Preschool Education at Play and Learn

A. The Power of Play

Enrolling a young child exclusively in activities with a heavy academic emphasis may result in that child being temporarily capable of what seem like remarkable accomplishments.

However, it is unlikely the long-term outcome would include solid educational foundations, impressive imagination and creativity, a strong love for learning, good social skills and a healthy self-esteem – all of which are required to ensure the child’s ultimate happiness and success.

Also, as time goes by, a child will have ever-increasing chances and a steadily growing capacity to improve her prospects through formal instruction in specific academic concepts. But early childhood constitutes a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to benefit fully from the power of play.

(an excerpt from “The Power of Play – A Discussion About Early Childhood Education”, by Michael K. Meyerhoff, Executive Director, The Epicenter, Inc.)

B. Staff Qualifications and Clearances/Ratios/Staff Development

Staff Qualifications and Clearances

All child care providers in the State of Maryland are required to have a recent medical exam and have a state and federal fingerprint/criminal background check. Additionally, all staff must complete the MSDE-OCC Child Care and COVID-19 Training, the MSDE-OCC Basic Health & Safety course, and also remain current in First Aid & CPR.

All staff receive a Center Orientation and Aides must complete an Aide Orientation course. Teachers have additional courses that they take in order to meet or exceed the MSDE-OCC requirements for their position. Center Directors take both education and administration classes and hold either a Bachelor’s Degree or an AA degree with Early Childhood credits.

Play Centers, Inc. employs an extensive team of dedicated and fully trained child care professionals whose credentials, criminal background histories, and references have been fully cleared prior to entering the programs.

Staff : Child Ratios

Current MSDE-OCC Regulations call for the following staff-to-child ratios:

- Infants and Toddlers 1:3
- Two’s 1:6
- Preschool 1:10
- School-Age 1:15

Each room has at least one staff member who is qualified as a Teacher for that particular age group.

Staff Development

MSDE-OCC Regulations require Aides to take 6 hours of continued training per year and Teachers and Directors to take 12 hours of continued training per year. Because of our commitment to quality, our staff also take part in the MSDE Credentialing program which requires 12-24 credits per year at increasing levels. Professional content areas include Professionalism; Child Development; Curriculum; Special Needs; Health, Safety, & Nutrition; and Community.

In addition, staff meetings are held monthly, or more frequently as needed, to ensure that new information and critical updates are passed on to each staff member in a timely way.

Staff receive an annual evaluation based on job performance and continuing education plan completion.

C. Your Child's First Day/What to Bring/Items From Home

Your Child's First Day

Since this may be your child's first experience in a group childcare setting, it is very important that you prepare your child for this new experience. How your child handles the separation and the adjustment will strongly influence his/her behavior and attitudes in future development.

Following are some suggestions for helping your child's transition to go as smoothly as possible:

- Prior to your child's entrance into the program, visit the program often to acquaint your child with the center, the staff, and the classroom setting.
- If possible, drop off extra clothes, nap supplies, diapering/potty-training supplies, paperwork, etc. before your child's first day, so that there is less to worry about that first morning.
- Prior to your child's first day, discuss what to expect at the center.
- During the transition period, tell your children when you are leaving and when you will be back. This process will help your child to develop trust. Do not sneak out, nor draw out your good-byes. These extremes make the transition harder for children. If you are worried, ask the teacher to send you Brightwheel pictures after a few minutes. Most children calm down and begin playing after about five minutes.
- Initially there may be a change in behavior either at the center, at home, or both. This is a natural reaction to a new environment. Try to understand that it takes time for children to become fully comfortable.

What to Bring

All children need at least one change of clothing and naptime bedding. Infants and toddlers need all food and drinks for the day, while Two's and older just need lunch and a sippy cup/water bottle. All children who are not yet potty-trained need diapers/pull-ups, wipes, and diaper cream, and additional sets of clothing, including an extra pair of shoes, as accidents may happen more frequently during the potty-training process.

A more complete checklist of what your child will need to have at school each day, based on their age, is included in your enrollment packet.

Items from Home

In the very beginning, you may wish to send a special stuffed animal or lovey from home to make your child's transition to the center as smooth as possible. All toys/personal items should be labeled with your child's name. However, after that initial time, your child's toys are best left at home.

At no time does Play and Learn assume any responsibility for loss or damage incurred to personal items.

D. Curriculum/Lesson Plan Statement

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn believes that a comprehensive curriculum for infants through preschool has a foundation in which children learn through play and that there is a clear relationship between play and future academic success.

After careful evaluation, Play Centers, Inc. /Play and Learn selected *The Creative Curriculum*, a Maryland State Department of Education approved curriculum for Infants-Preschool aged children. Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn preschool centers chooses to only use only the Infant – Two's portion of this curriculum for the preschool centers, based on the curriculum's alignment with our educational philosophy.

The Creative Curriculum allows our teachers to engage the children in playing with toys, imitating and pretending, enjoying language and literacy, connecting with music and movement, creating art, discovering science, and outdoor play. *The Creative Curriculum* is a hands-on curriculum using fine and gross motor skills to encourage an imaginative world for younger children.

The Investigator's Club was chosen by Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn because of its high approval from the Maryland State Department of Education and its densely enriched

Literary-based activities. This curriculum is built on utilizing language to enhance skills in reading, writing, phonics, science, social studies, technology, and much more. Additional resources are also used to prepare preschoolers for kindergarten.

Children's learning opportunities are designed to be developmentally appropriate, multi-sensory, enriching, and stimulating, and are responsive to the needs and interests of each child. In order to provide the best program for each individual child, the teacher(s) in the preschool classrooms will assess and provide a comprehensive weekly plan for each child according to their observed responses during large and small group activities. The tools put in place to facilitate the individual needs of each child are Skill Based Assessment and Differentiated Instruction through Small Groupings, which will provide each staff member with the necessary information to implement a curriculum designed for each child's style of learning. We also work with our families and early intervention, English Language Learners, ad/or special education service providers to support child and family needs. This may include scheduling therapy sessions at the centers, possibly meeting one on one with the specialist, and working with the child through small group or individual instruction daily.

Lesson plans are developed to include culturally competent, age-appropriate, domain-based activities that are reflective of the children's interests and skills, as well as a sensitivity to each child's primary language, culture, and background.

Domains of learning for children ages birth-3 years include:

- Personal and Social Development
- Language Development
- Cognitive Development

Domains of learning for children ages 3-5 include:

- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development and Health
- Language, Literacy, and Reading
- Social Studies
- Scientific Thinking
- Mathematical Thinking
- The Arts

Domain-based activities provide opportunities for whole group, small group, and individual learning experiences that include adequate time for transitions, literacy, and reading opportunities. Lesson plans address the developmental levels, skills, and needs of each child, are guided by ongoing assessments, observations, and information gained from families about their children, and also include information from an IFSP/IEP, if provided.

All curricula have assessments that allow teachers opportunities to create an individualized plan of action for each child. While we use many resources to develop a high quality, comprehensive environment, our curriculums are built on a foundation and understanding that children’s play is their “work.” Play is essential and critical to each child’s healthy and successful development.

E. Materials

The environment and materials are selected and utilized in the classrooms and/or on the playground in an intentional manner in order to elicit curiosity, risk-taking, discovery, and success, the building blocks of scaffolding of learning opportunities and positive growth and development.

The children’s materials:

- Are developmentally appropriate
- Are accessible and safe
- Promote multiple modes of exploration and learning
- Reflect the children’s interests, cultures, languages, and learning goals
- Support children of all abilities
- Are rotated regularly to facilitate children’s interest, to ensure that items remain in good repair, and to ensure that items remain appropriate to the needs of the group

F. Daily Activities/Daily Routines/Sample Schedules

Daily Activities

The daily schedule consists of opportunities for the children to explore the various activity and learning Interest Areas inside and outside of the classroom where the children can be actively engaged in meaningful learning.

These Interest Areas include Art; Blocks; Cooking; Discovery; Dramatic Play; Library; Music & Movement; Sand, Water, & Sensory Play; Technology, Toys and Games, and Outdoors.

Ongoing opportunities are offered throughout the day for enhancing social-emotional skills through play, active outdoor exploration and gross motor development, working with peers in large and small groups, differentiated instruction based on informal and formal assessments, literacy, snacks, health and safety skill building, and more.

Daily Routines

Consistency is important to the young child's appropriate growth and development. A daily routine helps children know what to expect next, and predictability develops confidence and security. At the same time, flexibility and ongoing assessments of the needs of each child in their classroom allows staff to continue to meet the individual needs and interests of every child in the program.

Sample Schedules

While individual classroom schedules may vary, these sample schedules provide a snapshot of what a typical day may look like.

Sample Daily Schedule - Toddlers

7:00 - 9:15	Arrival/Center Time
9:15 - 9:30	Diaper Changing
9:30 - 9:35	Hand Washing
9:35 - 9:55	Snack
9:55 - 10:00	Clean up from Snack
10:00 - 10:15	Circle Time (Hello Song/Weather/Book)
10:15 - 10:30	Music & Movement
10:30 - 10:35	Coats on/Sunscreen Applied
10:35 - 11:00	Outside Time
11:00 - 11:15	Diapering
11:15 - 11:30	Art
11:30 - 11:35	Clean up from Art
11:35 - 12:00	Center Time
12:00 - 12:05	Clean up from Center Time
12:05 - 12:10	Hand Washing
12:10 - 12:50	Lunch
12:50 - 1:00	Prepare for Rest Time
1:00 - 3:00	Rest Time
3:00 - 3:15	Diapering
3:15 - 3:20	Hand Washing
3:20 - 3:40	Snack
3:40 - 3:45	Clean up from Snack

3:45 - 4:10	Center Time
4:10 - 4:15	Clean up from Center Time
4:15 - 4:20	Coats On/Sunscreen Applied
4:20 - 4:50	Outside Time
4:50 - 5:05	Diapering
5:05 - 5:10	Hand Washing
5:10 - 5:30	Snack
5:30 - 5:35	Clean up from Snack
5:35 - 6:30	Center Time/Departure

Sample Daily Schedule – Two's

7:00 - 8:00	Arrival/ Quiet Centers
8:00 - 8:30	Table Toys/Fine Motor Skills
8:30 - 9:00	Math and Science
9:00 - 9:05	Clean up
9:00 - 9:15	Story Time
9:15 - 9:30	Hand Washing/Prepare for Snack
9:30 - 9:40	Snack
9:40 - 9:45	Clean up from Snack
9:45 - 10:00	Toileting/Diaper Changing
10:00 - 10:30	Circle Time
10:30 - 11:00	Art
11:00 - 11:05	Clean up from Art
11:05 - 11:10	Toileting/ Diaper Changing
11:10 - 11:15	Prepare for Outside Time
11:15 - 11:45	Outside Time
11:45 - 12:00	Prepare for Lunch
12:00 - 12:30	Lunch
12:30 - 1:00	Prepare for Nap/ Toileting
1:00 - 3:00	Naptime
3:00 - 3:10	Toileting/ Diaper Changing

3:10 - 3:15	Handwashing
3:15 - 3:30	Snack
3:30 - 3:50	Teacher Directed Art Activity
3:50 - 3:55	Clean up time from Art Activity
4:00 - 4:30	Outside Time
4:30 - 4:35	Handwashing
4:30 - 5:00	Table Toys/ Fine Motor Activities
5:00 - 5:30	Toileting
5:30 - 6:00	Quiet Centers
6:00 - 6:05	Clean up from Quiet Centers
6:00 - 6:30	Reading Time
6:30	Departure

Sample Daily Schedule – Three's

7:00 - 8:45	Arrival/Center Time
8:45 - 9:00	Clean up
9:00 - 9:15	Bathroom
9:15 - 9:30	Snack
9:30 - 10:00	Music and Movement
10:00 - 10:15	Circle Time
10:15 -10:30	Literacy
10:30 -11:00	Center Time/Small Group/Small Group Art
11:00 -11:10	Clean Up
11:10 -11:20	Prepare for Outside/ Bathroom
11:20 –11:50	Outside Time / Physical Development
11:50 -12:00	Prepare for Lunch
12:00 -12:30	Lunch
12:30 -12:40	Bathroom

12:40 - 1:00	Prepare for Rest Time
1:00 - 3:00	Rest Time
3:00 - 3:10	Clean Up from Rest Time
3:10 - 3:30	Bathroom
3:30 - 3:45	Snack
3:45 - 4:00	Whole Group
4:00 - 4:15	Prepare for Outside
4:15 - 4:45	Outside Time/ Physical Development
4:45 - 5:00	Bathroom
5:00 - 5:15	Book Time
5:15 - 5:30	Music
5:30 - 5:35	Clean up from Music
5:30 - 6:30	Quiet Centers/ Departure

Sample Daily Schedule – Four’s and Young Five’s

7:00 - 8:45	Arrival/Center Time
8:45 - 9:00	Clean up
9:00 - 9:30	Alphabet/Literacy/Phonics
9:30 - 9:45	Bathroom
9:45 - 10:00	Snack
10:00 - 10:15	Music & Movement
10:15 - 10:30	Circle Time
10:30 - 10:40	Content Area – Large Group
10:40 - 11:10	Center Time/Content Area Small Groups
11:10 - 11:15	Clean up

11:15 – 11:30	Prepare for Outside Time/Bathroom
11:30 -12:00	Outside Time/Physical Development
12:00 -12:10	Prepare for Lunch
12:10 -12:50	Lunch
12:50 - 12:55	Bathroom
12:55 - 1:00	Prepare for Rest Time
1:00 - 3:00	Rest Time
3:00 - 3:05	Clean up from Rest Time
3:05 - 3:10	Bathroom
3:10 - 3:30	Snack
3:30 – 3:35	Clean up from Snack
3:35 - 4:00	Fine Arts Activity
4:00 - 4:15	Social-Emotional
4:15 - 4:20	Prepare for Outside
4:20 - 4:50	Outside Time/Physical Development
4:50 - 5:00	Bathroom
5:00 - 5:15	Book Time
5:15 - 5:30	Music
5:30 - 5:35	Clean up from Music
5:35 - 6:30	Quiet Centers/Departure

G. Observation Policy: Assessments

Children are observed through anecdotal records and through their weekly Sensory/Nature observation journal entry and their Creative Curriculum/Investigator’s Club observation journal entries. The Investigator’s Club also has assessments at the end of each Unit.

In addition, we use the ASQ-3 Questionnaires for all ages, The Creative Curriculum Individual Child Profile for Infants, Toddlers, and Twos, and Developmental Progress Checklists for Twos, Threes, and Fours.

Observations of all types are used to help plan curriculum to best match the needs of each child. Developmental checklists cannot diagnose any learning disabilities or developmental delays, but on occasion, the results of developmental screenings may suggest the need for a parent's consultation with a child's physician and/or other specialist(s).

H. Parent Conferences

Parent/Teacher Conferences are held at least two times a year. Parents are informed of the dates of these Conferences in both the annual calendar (which they receive each September) and in the monthly calendar and newsletter for the actual conference month (typically October & April). About two weeks before each conference, sign-up sheets are posted on each classroom door with a variety of times. There is a note at the bottom of each sign-up sheet telling parents that if the stated times will not work for them, that they have the option of setting up a phone conference or setting up an alternate date and time with their child's teacher.

There may also be times during the year where a parent or teacher would like an additional conference to discuss questions and/or concerns that they may have. This conference may be between the teacher(s) and parent(s)/guardian(s), the director and parent(s)/guardian(s), or all of the above. In some cases the child may be present for part of the conference. If the child receives special services, the service provider(s) may be included, as well. If there is a language barrier, a translator may also be present. For any of the above scenarios, the person/party desiring the conference would speak to the classroom teacher and/or Center Director to set up a time for a conference that will work for all those attending.

I. Transition Plans

Children need predictable and consistent routines in order to feel safe and secure in their environments. Once children feel safe and secure that they will be cared for and that all of their needs will be met, then they will be ready to learn and grow. Transitions are changes in children's routines. While transitions may be necessary, they can be stressful for children. We strive to help make transitions as smooth as possible for children.

There are many kinds of transitions that young children are likely to encounter in childcare:

- The first, and often biggest, transition is when a child first starts in the program. See the earlier section “Your Child’s First Day” on making this a smooth transition. The welcome packet also includes the forms All About Me and/or All About My Child to help us get to know your child/ren more quickly.
- Children have small transitions multiple times each day. For example, coming inside from outside, going from snack to circle time, etc. Each classroom has a schedule that they follow. This predictable routine helps children know what is coming next.
- As children get older, they will inevitably move to the ‘next’ room. Your child’s teacher and/or the director will talk with you and ask you to fill out a Transitioning Classrooms form to help determine if your child is ready to begin transitioning to the next room. The transitioning process takes two weeks. Your child will visit their new classroom for a bit longer each day.
- The final transition – going off to elementary school, is also a big one, although generally children are quite excited about it. In the months before the big day, preschool teachers read lots of books about kindergarten and talk with children about their feelings.
- Just as IEP’s are followed throughout the day, if a family has provided the center with an IEP for their child that has goals and/or accommodations related to any kinds of transitions, we will follow the IEP for these transitions, as well.

VI. Family Engagement

A. Communication Policy

A child’s success in Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn is greatly enhanced when teachers and parents are partners in that process. A critical and ongoing component of child success and parent satisfaction is effective, two-way communication. Open and confidential communication regarding each child’s progress, concerns, and program planning occurs at Play Centers in a variety of ways, including the following:

- Registration in the program and the resulting introduction to the program staff builds an important first connection. Opportunities for daily communication with each parent occur at program drop-off and pick-up times and give the staff the opportunity to share

information with parents in person. Staff are trained in the professional process of sharing and exchanging knowledge with families.

- At the start of the enrollment period, staff gather preliminary child and family information. The staff then get to know each child and family better as time progresses. Critical information is shared between parents and program staff as circumstances warrant. Staff communicate with families regarding each child's progress, questions and concerns, and program planning. Building a comfortable environment for shared communication is key.
- Play Centers maintains a website at www.playcenters.org which provides information regarding programs, policies, and procedures, as well as links to childcare-related professional organizations and state and county agencies. You can also visit us on Facebook.
- Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn's Administrative Team and Center Directors are all available via telephone and email. A chart with contact information is located at the beginning of this manual.
- Center Directors and teachers can also be contacted through Brightwheel (see section below).
- Annual Calendars are provided right before Labor Day each year, as our school year runs from September-August. The Calendars are also available on our website. These Annual Calendar list Center Special Events, Parent Conference Weeks, Holidays, and Other Scheduled Closings.
- A Center-specific calendar and newsletter are available on the first of each month. The Monthly Newsletter and Monthly Calendar contain information regarding weekly curriculum themes and upcoming events at the center. You will receive an email alerting you when the new Monthly Newsletter and Calendar are available on our website. You may also request a paper copy.
- Monthly snack menus for children ages two and older are posted in the center and are also available by request.
- Newsletters, calendars, and menus are also posted in the lobby and on classroom bulletin boards. Classroom bulletin boards also show the current lesson plan and staffing pattern for the room, as well as any class-specific messages or postings. Please take some time to browse these areas to stay informed.
- Please remember to check your child's cubby and/or communication folder daily for artwork, permission slips, and/or other important information.
- Parent Surveys are made available semi-annually. Feedback from families is strongly encouraged and appreciated. Survey results are evaluated by Play Centers' Administrative Team and Program Directors, and then any necessary changes to the program are implemented.

B. Brightwheel

Parents will receive an invitation to Brightwheel through email and/or text, and are asked to accept this invitation and download the app in order to receive important notifications and/or reminders from the Center Director and classroom teachers. This is a free app that will provide families a window into their child's day, so that they can have a daily report in "real time". The app logs eating, drinking, sleeping, and diapering/bathrooming. Teachers also take pictures of the children playing and taking part in activities. Direct messaging between parents and staff can also be utilized.

C. Respectful Relationships

It is the commitment of this company and its management to ensure that each of our Centers is free from negative, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors, and that the environment is aimed at providing high quality care in an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness, safety, and equality. All employees and families have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

All complaints of negative and inappropriate behaviors within the Center or Play and Learn/Play Centers, Inc. will be taken seriously and followed through to resolution, and employees or family members who communicate a complaint will not be treated disrespectfully or victimized for reporting others for their inappropriate behavior.

D. Confidentiality Policy

Confidentiality applies to all documents and information collected and maintained at the center and/or main office for your child. Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn will not disclose information concerning an individual child or the child's parents or guardians to a person other than a staff member or a government official acting in the course of their duties, unless the parent(s)/guardian(s) named on the contract grant written permission for disclosure, except as required by law.

E. Grievance Policy

Play Centers, Inc./Play and Learn makes every attempt to offer the highest quality of care to families. If you have any questions or concerns about an event, situation, or staff member, you are encouraged to first speak with the lead teacher in your child's room. If this contact is not satisfactory, please reach out to your Center Director. If there is still no satisfactory resolution, you are encouraged to contact the Play Centers, Inc. Administrative Office at 410-296-4880, ext. 100. The Office Manager will connect you with the Administrative Team member that can

best help with your specific concerns. Finally, you may also contact the Maryland State Department of Education – Office of Child Care Licensing Office for the Maryland Region in which your child’s center is located. Their contact information is located in the Guide to Regulated Child Care document that you received at enrollment.

F. Parent Resources

A Parent Resource area is located near the entrance to each center. Special information related to the program, community resources (e.g., local library; local doctors/dentists/clinic; local parks; etc.), early intervention resources, child development, parenting information, and more are located in this area.

G. Family Engagement Opportunities

Although the restrictions presented by the COVID-19 pandemic still impact our ability to fully offer the types of Family Engagement that we were accustomed to prior to the pandemic, we feel it is still important to share with you our Family Engagement Philosophy, in the hopes that we can continue to return to full family engagement in the future.

Family participation in our program is always welcome. Family involvement is beneficial to the child as it fosters both a sense of belonging and a sense of community. Family involvement is beneficial to the program by creating a partnership that is fundamental to high-quality early childhood education.

Family Engagement opportunities may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Play Centers sponsors periodic events such as recognition of special family days, holiday and end-of-the-year programs, Preschool Family Investigation Nights, and other opportunities for families to enjoy group program activities.
- Grown-ups are encouraged to spend time in the center with their child, playing a game, reading a story, or working on various activities in the various learning centers.
- Parents and family members are invited to share information about their culture and special celebrations.
- We invite parents and family members to share information with the children about their careers, special hobbies/talents, or a variety of other interesting, age-appropriate topics.
- Parents and guardians are welcome to attend in-house field trip/Center Visitor presentations, individual classroom events, and more.

Parents and guardians are made aware of these opportunities through the Annual Calendar, Monthly Newsletter & Calendar, emailed and posted Flyers, communication with the Center Directors and teachers, and more.

VII. Quotes on the Importance of Play

“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.” – Mr. Rogers

“Almost all creativity involves purposeful play.” –
Abraham Maslow

“Children learn as they play. Most importantly, in play children learn how to learn.” – O. Fred Donaldson

“I tried to teach my child from books, He gave me only puzzled looks. I tried to teach my child from words. They passed him by, oft unheard. Despairingly, I turned aside. “How shall I teach this child?”, I cried. Into my hands he placed the key. “Come”, he said, “and play with me.” – Author Unknown