



# Parent Handbook

Please keep this handbook

For future reference!



# 1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center

407 Edwardsville Road

Troy, IL 62294

618-667-6241 Ext. 13

Lisa@troymc.org

<https://www.facebook.com/1ststeplearningcenter>

Dear Parents,

Welcome to 1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center. We are owned and operated by Troy United Methodist Church. Please know we feel that we have your most important possession when your child is with us. We maintain an open door policy, so please feel free to stop by at any time.

This handbook is provided to inform you of our policies and procedures. We hope that it will answer any of your questions. If you have any concerns that are not covered in this handbook, please feel free to contact the Coordinator at 667-6241 x13. As special events arise, we will be sending home notes to inform you of what is going to be happening at 1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center.

We are looking forward to a wonderful year. Thank you for choosing 1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center.

Sincerely,

Lisa Rayle

Preschool Coordinator

1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center

# Mission Statement

1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning center is a ministry of the Troy United Methodist Church. Our mission is to serve families of preschoolers by partnering with them in the preparation of their child(ren) for their future school experiences. This is accomplished by offering a safe, nurturing, Christ-centered environment that provides play-based experiences. We believe that these experiences will enhance the development of the whole child. We accomplish this by addressing the following areas – Social, Physical, Intellectual, Creative, Emotional and Spiritual.

## Our Philosophy

We believe that all children grow and develop at their own pace and while it is important to ensure children are ready for kindergarten and for life experiences, we also feel they should not be hurried through childhood. Our goal is to provide a safe learning environment where kids can simply be kids.

We feel play is an essential aspect of young children's lives... it is essential to their well-being and development. Our preschool program provides time for free play as children need these experiences. New concepts, new skills and new understanding come to children through play. In play, children learn to formulate and organize ideas and to become more flexible in problem solving. Children's attention begins to lengthen when they play. Their imagination can take them anywhere they want to go. During play children learn to communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs to others. We feel by arranging our childcare areas to offer challenging, interesting play and learning choices at a range of developmental levels, children will learn through their play.

We balance play with many structured activities such as table time, circle time, open ended art activities, music, snacks, clean up etc. We choose curriculum activities based on the needs of the children enrolled and where we feel they need to be for kindergarten. We feel it is important to help each child succeed at his or her own level and adjust projects to meet and challenge their current level of development. Teachable moments provide learning opportunities on any given day. Activities such as setting the table can be used as teaching opportunities. Children can learn counting, patterning, and one to one correspondence setting the table. Looking up a bug they may have seen on the playground teaches them not only the information about the bug (science), but that book, magazines, and computers are resources. We strongly feel that developing their love for learning and exploration is every bit as important as their care and safety!

We believe social skills and self-help skills are essential for each child to develop and we reinforce this through modeling responsibility, acceptance, caring, sharing and respect for all children and adults. We believe that truly listening and engaging in conversations with children provides numerous opportunities for the development of emotional, language and social skills as well as enhancement of self-esteem. We are sensitive to each child's social, emotional, intellectual and physical needs. We strive to meet their individual needs as well as the needs of the whole group. We believe given these experiences and opportunities, children will develop a positive self-esteem and a love of learning that will follow them throughout their lives.

# Parent Communication

We utilize Facebook, texting, ClassDojo and Brightwheel apps to help keep up good communication. This, of course, is not intended to replace verbal communication but to enhance it and make it easier when you need to send the school a quick note. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time.

We use our apps to post pictures of what the children are doing in our program often. (Permission for your child's photo to be posted is your choice and you will need to fill out a photo permission slip.) We understand each family has personal preferences regarding Facebook and other apps and respect your decision about having your child's pictures posted. Many parents love being able to see their children throughout the day, but other people are more private. It is totally your choice. Regardless please check out our page often to keep up with what your child is doing at school.

We also have a monthly newsletter from your teacher as well as from the office that will contain upcoming fun events as well as general information.

## Arrival and Pickup Routine

If we are still in Covid protocols, drop off and pick up will be at the door. Please follow the signs to the drop off lane. When dropping off, we will get your child unbuckled and out of the car. When picking up, we ask that you get out and buckle them in. If we are not in Covid protocols, please follow the steps below.

All children must be accompanied by a parent or other authorized adult. (Authorized adults must be listed on your child's Enrollment Form.) All children are encouraged to take care of their own belongings.

### ARRIVAL

- Have your child put their things on their hook/cubby, take care of jacket, etc.
- Share any valuable information with staff (schedule changes, how the child is feeling, etc.)
- Check in on the app

If your child is going to be arriving late or will be absent for the day, please call or text us by 8AM so we can plan our day and won't be waiting for your child to arrive. If you are going to be detained at pick up by more than 5 minutes, please notify us so we can reassure your child and plan for staff to stay with your child.

If someone new is going to be picking up your child, please let us know in advance with a written notice or by contacting the coordinator. **We cannot release your child to anyone without your written consent.**

Please call the office if you know you are going to be late picking up your child. A late fee will be charged for a late pick up that we did not receive prior notice for. The fees will be as follows: 10-15 minutes late—10.00, 16-20 minutes late---15.00, more than 20 minutes will result in a 25.00 penalty. These fees will be paid directly to your child's teacher.

## Orientation to our Program/Separation Anxiety

Starting in a new setting is an exciting experience for a young child, however it can also be a difficult one initially. Even children who are very excited about “starting school” may suddenly realize that you are not going to be there. The apprehension that accompanies that realization is a normal reaction. We would like to offer several suggestions to help your child with the adjustment process.

- Relax! Children will sense your apprehension; therefore, it is important that you feel comfortable with the routine. If you have questions or concerns, please ask us.
- Come and visit with your child before the first day of attendance.
- Learn the names of your child’s future play mates and the teachers who will be caring for them.
- Go to our Facebook page and our apps, look at the pictures with your child. It will help your child become more familiar with the classroom before attending.
- In their first days, use those pictures as a conversation starter with your child. What do you think you would like to do there? What did you play with today? Did you like the \_\_\_\_? etc.
- Actively listen to your child as (s)he talks about their day. This will give insight to help the next day. If you know they like the blocks, that might be a great direction to get them thinking about the next morning.
- Establish a “goodbye routine” and even practice it at home when leaving your child with a grandparent or spouse who typically doesn’t drop off. Try for example a special phrase like see you later alligator, one hug and two kisses. Try not to get trapped in the “one more hug, kiss etc.” Kids are amazing at this game! Unfortunately, it usually just makes a tough goodbye, tough for an even longer period of time.
- Figure out what works best for your child. For most children a quick departure is best. It doesn’t prolong what they are dreading (you are leaving). Usually by the time parents have pulled out of the driveway, a crying child has stopped and is involved in playing.
- If you are wondering how they are doing, please call or text to see how they are doing. We don’t want you spending the day worrying about them and totally understand how difficult this transition is on parents as well as children.

## Health & Medication

Your child’s health is important to all of us. Please inform us of any special health precautions, medications or other concerns you may have about your child. In accordance with state law Immunization records must be on file at the center within one month of enrollment for all children who are not yet in public school. If choose not to immunize your child, we must have a written record of this for our file. Please update records after each immunization.

Authorization for medical treatment must be completed and signed by a parent and be kept on file for each child enrolled in our program. Our emergency medical facility is typically Anderson Hospital unless another facility is dictated by your insurance carrier, you, or the severity of the emergency. In case of emergency, we will make every effort to contact the parent first. Children requiring emergency treatment may be transported by a teacher or EMS for minor injuries requiring immediate treatment.

Staff are trained in CPR and First Aid.

Illness: Parental cooperation is necessary to promote a healthy environment for all the children attending our program. Please do not send your child to the center if they show signs of illness in the morning. Your child may attend if they have regular cold symptoms, mild coughing or runny nose if they are able to participate in ALL childcare activities including outside play.

Parents need to have an alternative plan for illness of their child(ren) arranged in advance. When we call to inform you that your child is sick and needs to be picked up, we expect you or someone to pick up your child within 20 minutes.

Children should not return to the program until a full 24 hours after a fever has ceased (without the use of a fever reducer) and diarrhea or vomiting has stopped. In addition, children must be on medication for any communicable disease for 24 hours before returning to the center.

Medication: Staff will dispense either prescription or non-prescription medication under the following conditions:

- Medication is in the original container which is labeled with the child's name.
- An authorization to administer medication has been signed.

Please give all medications including cough drops to a staff member for storage and administration. You may choose to complete a form to authorize administration of non-prescription medication for minor occurrences (headaches, fevers, coughs, sore throats, etc.)

Safety for your Child:

- No child will be released to any person not listed on the child's enrollment form without prior approval for the child's parents.
- When someone other than normal pick up people comes to pick up a child, prior permission from parent is required. An ID will be required for unfamiliar adults.
- Playground and classroom equipment is cleaned and inspected regularly.
- Children and staff use proper hand washing procedures before and after each meal, toileting, diapering, etc.
- Child records are kept up to date and are located where all staff member can quickly access in case of emergency.
- Staff are mandated reporters of suspicion of child abuse or neglect.

# Social & Self-Help Goals

We feel social and self-help skills are as important as academics. Each program has different expectations for children, so we wanted to outline some of the goals and skills children in our program will be working on. We DO NOT expect your child to come in our program knowing how to meet these expectations. It is a growing and learning process. The goals we have for the children in our care are all in place for a reason. They may be for health and safety reasons or developing self-help skills they will need for kindergarten and beyond, or social skills they need to navigate through life.

## General Manners and Expectations:

- Children will learn to say please and thank you regularly.
- Children will learn to say excuse me when appropriate.
- Children will learn to share and take turns as developmentally appropriate. (Preschoolers will not be able to do this at all times – this is a goal to work towards.)
- We do not allow children to exclude anyone who wants to play with them. (they can have alone time, but we try to eliminate the “I only want to play with \_\_\_\_\_”)
- Children are expected to help clean up the classroom at clean up times. We also encourage children to get in the habit of putting things away when they are done playing with it.
- Children are expected to use a gentle touch, we discourage rough play and pretend guns.
- Children are expected to be respectful of their teachers and other children.
- Children are expected to take care of their own things. They put their things away in their cubbies. They put papers in their folders. Clean up their own messes.

# Potty Training

We believe that potty training is different for each child and each child will exhibit signs of readiness at different ages. Because of this, we do not require your child to be trained before starting preschool except in the 4's classroom. We will be glad to assist in potty training with the understanding that it will only work if we work together. When your child is showing signs of readiness, you must work with your child at home and we'll work with them here. Children should have some consistent success at home before we start with them at school/childcare. This typically means several days with only one accident and interest in staying dry.

A child will be allowed to use the bathroom any time he/she asks. In the two-year-old programs the parents must supply all diapers and wipes; please keep teacher informed of potty-training details. Children in the 3 year old class must be in the process of potty training and wearing a pull up. Children in the 4 year old class must be completely potty trained.

# Preschool Program

Our preschool schedule is flexible to meet you and your child's needs. We have a variety of programs from 2, 3 or 4 mornings a week. We teach weekly and monthly themes. These are designed to meet curriculum needs and/or building on the children's interests. Activities are designed to have children learn and discover new things each day and more importantly develop a love of learning.

**Social Skills-** (manners, kindness, playing cooperatively, taking turns, compassion, respect, handling emotions).

**Self-help skills-** (washing hands, dressing self, handling bathroom needs, cleaning up toys, taking care of their possessions)

**Gross Motors Skills-** (climbing, running, hopping, jumping, balancing, catching and throwing balls)

**Fine Motor skills-** (puzzles, Lego's, blocks, manipulative toys, lacing beads, drawing, coloring, writing, cutting, play dough.)

**Math Skills** (counting, patterns, simple addition and subtraction, one to one correspondence. We use a wide variety of manipulative activities and incorporate math during our daily activities and circle time.)

**Literature-based Activities** (circle time, stories, charts, finger plays, songs, beginning reading and writing skills and dictating their own stories).

**Letter and Number Explorations** (activities including letter books, fun tactile activities and games)

**Handwriting** (handwriting program teaches proper letter formation from the start, yet in fun, easy ways designed for preschoolers to develop good fine motor skills)

**Science** (hands on explorations about our environment, animals, and nature)

**Social studies** (learning about our community)

**Art Media Discovery** (a variety of painting techniques, markers, glue, scissors, collage materials, beads, stencils, rubbing plates, play dough.)

## Toys and Personal Items

**PRESCHOOLERS: No Toys Please!!!!** Please do not allow your child to bring any toys to school. Toys brought to school cause added tension as toys could be easily lost or broken and special toys are difficult to share. All young children practice taking turns and sharing; however, it is much harder for your child to share his or her favorite toy. Therefore, we request that no toys be brought, unless you have been notified that it is a special day such as teddy bear day.



# What to wear

Casual clothing is strongly recommended. Your child should be dressed for play; children do get dirty when they are actively involved in play. We feel letting them learn through explorations is much more important than keeping their clothes spotless. Please send your child in clothing that is easy to manage. Your child wants to learn to care for him/herself and to be independent. Please do not send your child with belts, suspenders or overalls unless they can fasten and unfasten them by themselves.

Please provide a backpack for your child to bring back and forth to school each day. This should include a complete change of clothes (more if potty training). Dirty clothes will be sent home each day, please be sure to replace any missing items.

Please put shorts under all dresses. We go outside daily so comfortable footwear is of utmost importance.

## **All children should have the following items:**

A complete change of clothing, including shorts, long pants, t-shirt, long sleeved shirts, socks, underwear and sweatshirt or light jacket.

## **Remember your child's comfort for outdoor play:**

**Winter Season:** Please dress your child properly for the weather at all times. We typically go outside when the weather is above 32 degrees unless it is bad weather due to freezing rain, snow or windy. **Please label ALL** winter clothing, particularly mittens, snow pants and boots as so many items look similar. When purchasing outdoor wear for your child please take into consideration that mittens, snow pants and boots must be waterproof otherwise they are wet right through to their inside clothes in minutes and children become cold quickly.

**Spring/Fall Season:** Please bring shorts, pants, t-shirts, sweatshirts and jacket. Often a chilly day turns very warm or a warm day turns cold.

# School Schedule

Each child will have his or her own scheduled arrival and pickup times. This is an approximate schedule of our day during the school year. Our schedule of activities is subject to change, due to the weather, kids, needs for the day etc. Every day, each class will be involved in the following activities: snack, story time, music, kindergarten readiness skills, calendar time, gross motor time, arts and crafts as well as free play to explore on their own.

- All classes gather once a week for chapel. During this time children will learn about Jesus through stories, crafts, puppet shows, music and many other exciting things!
- The 3's and 4's classes will use the 2<sup>nd</sup> Step program each day in class to develop their social and emotional skills. This will help them gain confidence, set goals, make better decisions, collaborate with others in work and play and navigate the world more effectively.

# Child Guidance Policy

Our child guidance policy is designed to help children become independent and caring by learning self-control, decision-making skills and responsibility for their own actions. We believe that children should be treated with the same respect that we, as adults, wish to be treated. Our goals are to help children develop positive self-esteem, respect for themselves and the rights of others and socially acceptable ways of expressing their needs and feelings. This is accomplished through positive guidance and loving discipline when necessary. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Step program (you can find more information here: <https://www.secondstep.org/early-learning-curriculum>) has been very effective in helping our students gain self-confidence and awareness of other peoples feelings. Since we started using this program several years ago we have found that our discipline issues have dropped off significantly.

Our staff uses other guidelines and techniques to help children develop self-discipline and reduce problems before they start:

- A learning environment that promotes consistent routines and well-defined expectations.
- Use of praise through kind words and actions (hugs, smiles) to reinforce desirable behaviors.
- Redirection to another activity when a child displays undesirable behaviors.
- If a child caused physical or emotional harm to others, the child will be removed from the situation for a brief time to calm down and will be guided through ways to help calm their body.
- Time is provided to talk with the teacher about how the child is feeling and alternative, appropriate behaviors at a time when the child has calmed down.

We believe the primary responsibility for raising young children rests with the parents; however, the staff strives to assist parents in the training and guidance of their children. We will provide parents with feedback about their children (both positive and negative, if necessary). If you desire help in dealing with a specific behavior or issue, please discuss it with us. Parent support is expected for any guidance techniques used by staff to resolve unwanted behaviors.

## Snow Days/School Cancellation

School cancellations will be announced on KMOV, KSDK and FOX channels. We will also send out a notification with our Brightwheel app and on our Facebook page. If we have an accumulation of 3 or more snow days, we will prorate tuition or add additional days to our calendar. The first two snow days will not be prorated or made up. Parents will be notified of the make-up schedule.

# Snack

Snacks will be provided by 1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center. If your child has any allergies, please list these in your registration packet and bring them to the attention of their teacher as well. If your child requires special snacks, you must provide a list of appropriate snacks to the office. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Preschool Coordinator.

# Birthday Treats

If you want to send a special treat for your child's birthday, please send pre-packaged treats **only**. This is required by the state due to possible food contamination.

# Tuition and Fees

**Tuition:** Tuition is based on enrollment (a reserved slot) not attendance and payment will be expected whether the child is in attendance or not.

**Registration Fee:** A one-time \$100.00 non-refundable registration fee per child is required upon enrollment of child. This fee covers preparations for your child's school year including, snacks and art supplies as well as holding their spot until the time they are scheduled to begin. There are no supply lists needed for the beginning of the year, just a full-sized backpack with a change of clothing.

Payment is expected by the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month. You may send in a check or cash or pay through the Brightwheel app. If you are paying by cash, please place it in an envelope with your child's name on it.

The annual tuition for 3's and 4's programs is \$1620.00 payable monthly in \$180 installments (August and May are \$90.00) and \$1710.00 for the 2's program payable monthly in \$190 installments (August and May are \$95.00). You will be charged a \$20.00 late fee for all payments made after the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month. There will be a returned check fee of \$30.00 for any checks that are returned insufficient funds from the bank.

Please make checks payable to 1<sup>st</sup> Step Learning Center. Please put your child's name in the memo line if you are paying with a check. If you pay with cash, put the money in an envelope with your child's name on it. Online payments are accepted by going to our Brightwheel page for the payment link. Receipts are available upon request.

**Sibling Discounts:** In order to financially help families, we offer a sibling discount of **10%** off your youngest child's tuition rate.

**Scholarship:** We have a limited number of scholarships available for families to apply if they feel they may be eligible. Please stop by the office for an application.

## Basic Preschool information

Parent/Teacher conferences will be scheduled after the first of the year. However, if you feel you would like to have a conference before then, they can be scheduled earlier.

Class parties –We will have class parties throughout the school year and we will offer a sign-up sheet for parents to volunteer or donate items for the party. Due to space in the classrooms we may feel the need to limit the number of volunteers for a party. Please do not bring children that do not attend 1<sup>st</sup> Step to class parties.

Volunteering –We will have several opportunities for parents to volunteer throughout the year. We are always looking for Parents to volunteer for our events such as Zoo day and Rodeo day/Circus day!

If you are interested in visiting your child's class or volunteering please contact the Preschool Director or your child's teacher.

Please feel free to contact Lisa Rayle at 667-6241 x 13 or 402-3995 (cell) or [lisa@troymc.org](mailto:lisa@troymc.org) with any questions.