



<http://www.steppingstoneschildcare.me/>

Welcome to Stepping Stones Early Learning Center!

The information contained in this “Parents Handbook” will introduce you to the philosophy and organization of the Center. It will serve as a quick reference to the daily operating policies and procedures. Your familiarity with them will help make your child’s day a most rewarding experience.

The Center was created to meet the needs for high quality childcare for the children and their families in our community. We look forward to working with you to provide a secure foundation for your child to ensure successful growth and learning.

Not all policies and procedures can be listed here.

We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Stepping Stones Early Learning Center is an equal opportunity employer and provider.

Thank you for trusting us to care for your children!

~ Stepping Stones Early Learning Center

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This handbook is the property of Stepping Stones Early Learning Center and may not be copied or reproduced without written consent. It is intended to familiarize families with current Stepping Stones practices and standards. Stepping Stones reserves the right to revise its policies, practices and standards as deemed appropriate by the Director. The most up to date version can be found on our website or by asking for a updated copy.

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

We believe that good childcare depends upon consistent caregiving in a center-based atmosphere. Children grow and learn best in a safe environment that provides opportunities to explore, create and communicate with other children and adults. These groups function independently but cooperatively, following routines appropriate to individual needs. The program is designed to be inclusive of all children, including those with identified disabilities and special learning and developmental needs.

The Center's program is designed to include both planned and spontaneous activities in response to children's interests. Experiences with music, movement, art, language and building are incorporated into daily plans. Regularly scheduled snacks and meals, rest time, indoor and outdoor play, and routines in physical caregiving promotes the child's health, comfort and ability to care for his/herself. There is maximum flexibility for the children as a group and as individuals.

Children are encouraged to develop a positive self-image, to learn inner controls and to cooperate with peers and caregivers. Clearly defined limits help them recognize and accept their emotions and express their feelings as they grow and feel secure in the world around them.

GETTING TO KNOW OUR CENTER FAMILIES

Stepping Stones Early Learning Center builds a positive relationship with our families by being familiar with their unique characteristics, strengths and issues important to each of them. To develop partnerships with the families we create a welcoming environment and opportunities for involvement.

Our center gathers information during the enrollment process by asking parents questions and collecting the following items: enrollment form, health history, child's, and family background information. All the information is kept strictly confidential in the child's file and kept in the director's office. Stepping Stones Early Learning Center only releases your information under your authorization.

Our center has an open-door policy. Parents and family members are always welcomed. Each child is provided with the labeled cubby for program communications and personal belongings.

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

There are many ways to keep you knowledgeable about what is happening in your child's classroom.

- Website – www.steppingstoneschildcare.me
- Procure Connect – App for communication with your child's teachers
- Newsletters
- Telephone calls
- E-mails
- Daily sheets
- Notices
- Facebook Page

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Greene, ME 04236
(207) 946-KIDS (5437)
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www.steppingstoneschildcare.me

HOURS OF OPERATION

The center is open Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 6:00pm. Please pick up your child in time to exit the building by 6:00pm. For the safety of our children, parents are asked to leave the property at 6:00 and not to visit on days when the center is closed.

CALENDAR

The following calendar includes important events and closings. As other important events are scheduled for the center, updates will be posted in the center.

We will be closed for the following holidays: full tuition is due for these days. If a holiday that we are normally closed falls on a Saturday, the center will be closed on Friday, if a holiday that we are closed falls on a Sunday, the center will be closed on Monday.

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Day
- Presidents Day
- Memorial Day
- We will close at 4:00pm on the day of Preschool Graduation which is always the Thursday following Memorial Day
- The WEEK of July 4th
- Labor Day
- Columbus Day
- Veterans Day
- Thanksgiving
- The day after Thanksgiving
- The WEEK of Christmas
- New Year's Eve

Center Happenings

Stepping Stones makes every attempt to keep parents up to date on happenings here at the center and in the community. Center newsletters are sent out at least 4 times a year and classroom newsletters are sent out monthly. Parent bulletin boards are in each classroom and the Center information board is in the hall where you enter. **Please check the boards and read the newsletters.** It is also the parents' responsibility to keep up to date by being aware and checking for updates. Together, as partners, we will be able to provide your child with a fun and safe learning environment.

Family Vacation Benefit

After your family has been with Stepping Stones for one calendar year, you become eligible for a week of free childcare. This means that you may either take a week off from daycare (your child does not attend for the week) or you may opt to bring your child for the week and not pay.

Vacation benefit forms are sent home within the first few weeks of January and are due back by the last day in February (if the last day falls on a weekend, then it would be due on the Friday preceding the weekend).

Vacation picks are on a first come first serve basis and we only allow 2 free picks on any given week, so filling out the form right away and turning it back in gives you the best chance of getting your first pick. If the form is not returned before March 1st, if you terminate childcare services prior to or within 3 months of using your vacation benefit, you forfeit your free week.

Referral Benefit

Any family currently enrolled who refers a new family to our center will have the opportunity to give the new family a free week of childcare and in return receive a free week of childcare. To take advantage of this benefit the referring family needs to request the referral form to fill out and give to the incoming family. The referring family should notify the Director about the potential new family and the new family needs to bring in the referral form with the referring families name during their tour at the center. Both the referring family and the new family will have their tuition bill credited on the new family's 5th consecutive week of childcare.

KidsVision Webcams

Web Cam

We have cameras installed in every classroom. While parents do not have access to the cameras, if a problem or concern arises, we will gladly go through and look back to see what has happened.

Webcam Security

To protect against unauthorized access, the webcam system utilizes 256-bit encryption to protect usernames and passwords.

Staff

Children deserve a fun and memorable childhood, and we pride ourselves on having a loving staff and home-like atmosphere in each our centers to make that happen. Our teachers are specifically chosen for their caring attitudes, knowledge of child development, and their enthusiasm for teaching young children. Our teachers encourage, innovate, and facilitate development for a well-rounded preschool experience. Professional development including training in First Aid, CPR, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) prevention, as well as age-specific training on child development is a continuous process for our staff. In addition, we make it a priority to remain informed about current child development, education research and trends to serve your child's needs most effectively. Each teacher undergoes a criminal background and criminal history fingerprinting to ensure your child's safety.

INFANTS

The infant program serves children from the age of six weeks until the age of 18 months. The program is designed to promote feelings of belonging and the loving care which help infants to grow and develop to their full potential. Children eat, sleep, and play according to his or her own schedule.

Every infant is an individual with unique abilities, desires, and emotions. Our program is designed to meet the individual needs of each child and to provide them with educational experiences. In our infant classrooms, we provide a creative and stimulating program which encourages visual, language, gross motor and small motor experiences to enhance learning through their own natural curiosity.

TODDLER

Our toddler program serves children from 18 months to 36 months. The toddler classrooms are designed to provide stimulating experiences for the children where they can learn through their own inquisitiveness. The emphasis during the toddler years is on building self-confidence and fostering the natural curiosity that toddlers possess.

Throughout the day toddlers enjoy the large variety of play materials that are readily made available to them, as well as creative centers where children can dress-up, build with blocks, and experiment in the sensory table. Art, music, language, and science activities geared to little hands are also introduced.

Our teachers offer the tenderness, warmth, and patience so essential to this young age. Children feel comfortable in our toddler class settings when their parents leave. Deep respect for each child ensures that your toddler will absolutely love his or her school environment and, from that, develop a long-lasting love for learning.

PRESCHOOL

Our preschool program prepares children socially and academically, as well as, supports and encourages the development of independence, responsibility, and confidence, all of which are essential for the child's ongoing success in kindergarten.

Our educational program focuses on each child's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development by offering concrete, hands-on activities for the child to explore.

The preschool curriculum is designed to actively engage each child in developmentally age-appropriate activities exploring the content areas of literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, the arts and technology. Our skilled teachers prepare curriculum that is exciting and challenging, as well as supportive of each child's own learning style.

Our preschool room arrangement creates the optimum learning environment. It allows children easy access to educational toys, materials, and books, enabling them to initiate and expand their activities. The classroom is organized with areas for block play, manipulative toys, art creativity, dramatic play, and reading in addition to larger spaces for group activities. To enhance learning experiences in our preschool we offer class field trips at various times throughout the year.

BEFORE & AFTER SCHOOL

Our Before and After school program provides a safe, supervised environment for your child to start and end the school day.

Your child will join in arts & crafts and fun physical activities with daily homework support all while seeking new challenges, forming close friendships, and increasing responsibilities by helping in their classroom. So, while you are at work, you can rest assured your student is safe, productive, and having fun!

During spring and winter breaks, teacher workdays and summer months, we offer full-day care with exciting field trips, special guests, and hands-on activities!

Before School

Mornings start early. And so, do we. Get to work on time and avoid the school traffic by enrolling in our before-school program. We will get your child on the bus at the center and on their way to school in the morning, serve your child a nutritious breakfast and get the school day started right!

After School

After a long day of school, your child needs a safe, supervised environment with a blend of learning and fun. Throw in homework support, and you have described our after-school program! We will get your child off the bus from school at the center each afternoon and serve your child a nutritious afternoon snack.

Spring Break & Winter Break

When school is closed for teacher workshop days, school breaks or summer, we're open! During spring and winter break, we create an exciting, themed camp with exciting field trips, special guests, and unique experiences to keep your child interested and having fun!

We know you need flexibility, so our school break programs fit any schedule. Attend the full week, or just a few days. And experience daily themes, parties, and dress-up days in a safe, supervised environment!

School-Age Program Features:

- Fun, supervised environment
- Convenient hours for working families
- Homework assistance
- Assisting children getting on and off the bus from local schools

- Fresh breakfast before school and lunch on full days at the center
- Before and After school hours, full day, half day, snow day, teacher workshop, school vacations and summer break options.

Keep your child safe and engaged while making your daily routine less hectic!

SUMMER CAMP

Our school age summer program creates a not-to-miss camp experience — Our trained teachers work together to develop our Summer Camp Curriculum to highlight all of the entertainment summertime has to offer. The children can be found playing sports, cooking food, and enriching their knowledge of the local community by exploring parks, zoos, museums, aquariums, and farms.

They will stretch their creative minds through arts, crafts, music, and play, all while enjoying new adventures, exciting field trips, and special guests. Each week is a new adventure with a different theme.

Graduation

We have a graduation ceremony every year on the Thursday following Memorial Day for the Pre-K children entering Kindergarten. This is a big event that includes all the pre-k children (not just those graduating). The center will close at 4pm on this day. Information will be posted and sent home at the beginning of May.

TOILET TRAINING

Toilet training is an important milestone for toddlers and young preschoolers. However, as with any learning experience, this process should be as developmentally individual as each child. There is no right age that a child should be completely toilet trained. Therefore, Stepping Stones does not require children to be toilet trained prior to enrollment. When your child shows signs of being physically, cognitively, and emotionally ready to begin the toilet training process; we ask that you begin the training at home, preferably over a weekend or holiday. Key signs of readiness for potty training include:

- The child can pull down and up their pants and underwear/pull-ups on their own with little or no assistance
- The child can communicate to you when they need to go to the bathroom
- The child's diaper is dry after nap times and for long periods during the day
- The child can hold their bowels and bladder until they get to the potty once they realize that they need to go

We can then discuss a plan to coordinate similar efforts and methods while your child is in our care. Teamwork and daily communication will provide the consistency necessary for effective results. *Children must be completely toilet trained prior to enrollment in the Preschool classroom, those who are not will remain in the Toddler 2 classroom until toilet training is complete.

PLACEMENTS INTO OLDER CLASSES

Children are assessed for class placement into the older classes by chronological ages and in terms of their total development –social, physical and emotional. Interest level in the activities typical of each group is also taken into consideration, as is the actual availability of an open place at a particular time that matches the enrollment days of the child being moved. The classroom teacher is also consulted as to the readiness of the child. Parents will be notified and encouraged to set up a transitional conference with the new teacher.

ASSESSMENT OF CHILD PROGRESS

All age groups are assessed formally and informally to ensure that the teachers plan their curriculum goals and activities to support individualized learning.

Our teachers observe, record and document children's development, participation and learning throughout the year. The assessments are ongoing, systematic, and gathered from natural play activities and realistic settings that reflects children's actual performance.

Our center uses a variety of methods such as observations, checklists, rating scales, and individually administered tests. The assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement. When assessments identify concerns, appropriate follow-up, referral or other intervention is used.

All our assessments are kept in the child's records, which show the progress in cognitive, language, physical social and emotional areas of development that are consistent with our program curriculum and philosophy.

Our families are part of the assessment process with regular communication, partnership, and involvement.

Enrollment and Procedures

Stepping Stones has a license capacity of 116 children. Application for enrollment of children ranging in age from 6 weeks to 12 years old will be considered without regard to race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

Waiting List

If we are full at the time of your interest in our program, children will be placed on a waiting list for openings, Preference will be given to siblings of children currently in the program and then to those families who have gone through the interview process with the provider.

Registration Fees

NON-REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT: Equivalent to two week's payment

NON-REFUNDABLE REGISTRATION FEE: \$35 annual fee

*FAILURE TO ACCURATELY COMPLETE FORMS OR PAY FEES IN A TIMELY MANNER
MAY RESULT IN CANCELLATION OF THE ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT.*

Reserving Spots

If you need us to hold a spot for your child, depending on availability, we may be able to do that for a deposit equivalent to two weeks tuition. The spot will be held no longer than two weeks. This will be applied to your child's first week and last week of attendance, however, if you should decide not to enroll your child after all, the money will not be refunded. If you need the spot held longer than 2 weeks, depending on availability we may continue to hold a spot for your child at the regular weekly rate, however this amount will not be refunded or applied to any week of care, regardless of attendance or enrollment.

Tuition and Late payments

TUITION: For your convenience we accept the following forms of payment: check, cash, Visa, MasterCard, and Tuition Express. Tuition is due every week on the first day your child attends for the week and is considered late if not received by Wednesday. The exception to this rule is if you enroll in Tuition Express, then your payment would be pulled from your account on Thursday.

All fees are due regardless of attendance. There will be no reimbursement for unused childcare due to illness, vacation, maternity leave (a parent may choose to withdraw their child temporarily during their leave if they chose not to send them to the center, but Stepping Stones will not be able to guarantee a spot for re-enrollment of the child), or other absenteeism or closure of the center. The expense of providing a developmentally appropriate program continues daily, whether a child is in attendance or not. We do not trade a scheduled day for another day. Parents may request an added day or extended hours to a day. We have checked our schedule and will let you know if an opening is available. Parents who are receiving a childcare subsidy or childcare assistance must pay the full regular tuition rate (by check, cash, credit card or money order) until the authorizing paperwork is delivered to us by the paying agency. Please note, our tuition rates are higher than what the subsidy and assistance programs pay, this difference will be added to your parent co-pay. Upon our receipt of subsidy payment, you will be reimbursed whatever you have paid, with the exception of your co-pay. You are responsible to directly pay us your subsidy co-pay each week. Co-pays vary based on each family and are not determined by Stepping Stones Early Learning Center. If subsidy billing lapses it is your responsibility to pay the full tuition amount until the subsidy program notifies us otherwise.

RETURNED CHECK FEE: Should your check be returned for any reason a NSF fee of \$40.00 will be assessed to your account. After 3 returned checks, you will be required to pay by cash or with credit card. No exceptions.

LATE PAYMENT FEE: A late fee will be assessed for all childcare tuition that has not been received by 6:00 pm Wednesday evenings. On Thursday, any accounts that have not been paid will receive a late payment notice with the balance due. Balances must be paid in full for your child(ren) to attend daycare the following day. Payments that are more than 5 working days late (without approval from the Director) will constitute a temporary suspension of childcare until tuition is paid in full. Payments that are more than 14 working days late will constitute notice of intent to cancel enrollment.

All balances not paid in full within 30 days of termination will be forwarded to a national collection agency and any fees incurred from collection will be billed to the parent.

LATE PICKUP FEE: It is exceedingly difficult for children to understand why they are late being picked up. A fee will be assessed of \$1.00 per minute or portion thereof per child that a parent is late in picking up his/her child. This fee will be added to your bill.

Please remember that parents need to arrive prior to closing time so that parents and children exit the building at 6:00pm. We understand that from time-to-time emergencies arise, please call us ASAP to inform us of an emergency so that we may assist you in finding someone on your contact list to pick up your child. Please note that an emergency does not waive any late fee incurred unless approved by the Director.

Annual Rate Change

Tuition rates will be raised every other year.

Withdrawals

It is the center's policy that parents give the director a minimum of 2 weeks' notice of intent to withdraw. Your withdrawal may be in writing or in person to the Director or Assistant Director only.

Payment in full is required whether your children attend during their two-week notice or not. All outstanding tuition balances (including any family vacation benefit used within the prior three months) need to be paid within 30 days of withdrawal (a daily late-fee will be applied for any accounts past due more than 7 days). All balances over 30 days (where payment arrangements have not been made with the director) will be charged a 12% monthly finance charge and will be sent to collections. Parents will be responsible for any collection fees charged to the center in addition to their original balance.

Payment arrangements must be made with the director prior to the end of the 30 days. The director will be responsible for putting an agreement in writing and it must be signed by both the Director and the parent, failure to follow through on the arrangement will result in being sent to collections, finance charges will still apply to balances over 30 days.

Stepping Stones reserves the right to ask a parent to withdraw their child if it is determined that the child cannot be adequately cared for in the center or if a parent violates our center's policies.

A center exit questionnaire may be sent to you by the center Director. We appreciate your cooperation in completing this form so that we can better serve our children and families.

DROP OFF/PICK-UP POLICIES

Arrivals and departures are transitional times for children and need to be handled delicately. Your child may cling to you in the morning or cry when it is time for him/her to leave in the evening. Do not take tears as a personal rejection or the clinging as a sign of dislike for the center. This reaction is normal for a young child. We can work together to make these difficult times a little easier for you and your child.

Bring your child directly into his/her classroom. Please make sure that your child's teacher is aware of his/her arrival. Children should NEVER be left unaccompanied in the parking lot, dropped off at the front entrance, left in the halls or on the playground.

Inform the staff either verbally or in writing of any special instructions or information that might be needed for that day. Let your child's caregiver know that you have arrived, help your child get settled and then prepare to leave. Parents are welcome to stay briefly to help their child adjust to the group and to smooth the separation. If the child is anxious about saying goodbye, your child may cry briefly, but ultimately will trust you more.

Since children will not know when they will be leaving, they may be involved in an individual or group activity. Allow your child to "shift gears" by giving him/her a warning period, i.e., "we will be leaving in two minutes" or "after you finish that picture we will leave". Please remember to collect any artwork, soiled clothing, and outerwear in your child's cubby area on your way out.

Procare

Here at Stepping Stones, we know how important your child is to you and that often throughout your working day you are wondering how their day is going. We use the Procare app to give you updates throughout the day in "real time" that lets you know exactly what your kiddo is up to. Please keep in mind though that our priority is taking care of the children, if teachers don't respond right away or update that exact minute it is because they are busy tending to the children in their care. That will always be our number 1 priority.

What do parents gain from Procare?

- 1) Build Closer Relationships between Staff and Parents.
 - a. By making it easier for parents to receive updates and respond to staff messages, they are more likely to feel confident that their child is receiving the best care at our center.
 - b. The photos and videos that are sent will often be the highlight of a parent's day.
 - c. Procare Works Hard to Reduce Complaint & Confusion. For parents who don't want to receive multiple messages, there's an option to pick and choose which notifications they want to see.
 - d. Parents can message their child's teacher during the day to let them know something they may have forgotten to tell us at drop off.
 - e. Parents can make immediate requests if they notice their child did or ate something the parents do not want them to.
- 2) What Can the Parent do in the App?
 - a. Message their child's teacher or school admins.
 - b. Instantly sign their child in/out for daily check in (If on property)
 - c. View any activities that were recorded by staff.
 - d. Edit their child's allergies & medications.
 - e. Edit their child's authorized pickup list.
 - f. Add profile pictures for themselves, their children, and their authorized pickups.
 - g. View their current account balance.

SECURITY/ACCESS

Our building has a state-of-the-art security system. The front door has a keypad that will, when a code is entered, release the magnetic lock on the inner door. When you enroll your child, you will pick the number combination to enter the keypad for independent entry. There is a front doorbell should you forget the procedure. Please do not give out the entry code to others who are authorized to pick up your child. You will be required to enter the building through the main entrance as all other doors will be locked from the outside. Photo I.D. is required and kept on file for who is authorized to pick up your child.

PICKUP/RELEASE FORM

If someone else is going to be picking up your child, the center must be contacted in advance. A release form with the names of those authorized to pick up your child and signed by the parent will be kept in your child's file. The state requires that this information be completed on your child's enrollment form. If you do not wish anyone other than yourself to be authorized to pick up your child, this must be stated on the enrollment form.

Let us know who will be picking up your child, when he or she will be picked up, if your child knows the person, and provide us with a physical description. We require that any person who will be picking up your child for the first time have a photo ID (although they may be asked for ID on subsequent pick-ups if a teacher has not met them before) on hand so that we may verify who the person is. Please ask any guest to respect this policy; it is for your child's safety. If no photo ID is given, then your child will not be released, and you will be responsible for picking up your child.

ABSENCE OR LATE ARRIVAL

If your school or working hours are irregular, keeping arrival and departure times as consistent as possible will help to promote a stable routine for your child. We ask that you drop off your child no later than 9:00am as this is the start of our curriculum-based program. Parents are asked to inform the center if a child must arrive late due to an appointment or an emergency. Arriving late is disruptive to the child's routine as well as to the other children in the program. Any child arriving after 9:00 am without prior approval will be turned away. If your child will be absent for any reason, we ask that you call the center to notify us by 9:00 am as well.

Parking Lot Safety

For health, safety, and legal reasons the center must insist that cars not be left running in the parking lot and that children be properly restrained in appropriate safety seats when on center property. There is also a NO SMOKING policy on Stepping Stones property.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

At Stepping Stones Child Care the term guidance is used for several reasons. It is a positive term and implies working with the children to develop internal control of their behavior. Our goal is to encourage children to become creative, independent, responsible, and socially mature human beings. This involves learning to make responsible choices and accepting the consequences of such choices. Guidance takes several forms within our center:

- *Environment*--A place designed for children. Each room is age-appropriate in furniture size, large and small manipulates, and supplies required for hands-on experiences.
- *Logical Rules*--Such as keeping our hands to ourselves and taking care of the learning environment. These are discussed with the children as well as why such rules are needed.
- *Curriculum*--Is developmentally appropriate, based on the children's interest and level of readiness.
- *Positive Behavior*--We reinforce the behaviors we wish to see repeated.
- *Redirection*--Often interesting a child in another activity can eliminate potential difficulty. We might ask a child to help us or send a child to a different area to play.
- *Positive Reminder*--Telling the children what we want them to do rather than using "no" or "don't."
- *Renewal Time*--Occasionally, as a last resort, a child needs to be removed from the situation for a brief break. This allows the child time to calm down and consider an alternate behavior.

Difficult Behavior

Respectful treatment of other children, staff and all property, toys, and furniture are expected. We will make every effort to work with the parent or guardian to ensure a cooperative approach for children having difficulties with behavior. We are here to serve and protect all children! A parent may be called at work or home at any time the child exhibits uncontrollable behavior that cannot be modified by the center's staff. The parent may be asked to take the child home immediately. The following steps may be taken regarding children who display chronic disruptive behavior, upsetting the emotional or physical well-being of another child or an adult. Willful destruction of property will be charged to the parent at the cost to replace the item.

Initial Consultation

The director may request that the parent or guardian meet for a conference. The problem will be defined on paper. Intervention strategies will be discussed. The best solution toward solving the problem will be agreed upon by the center director, teacher, and parent or guardian.

Second Consultation

If the initial plan for helping the child fails, the parent will again be asked to meet with the director and teaching staff involved. Another attempt will be made to identify the problem, and establish a new, or revised, approach for solving the problem. Parents may be asked to consult outside professionals or bring in behavioral specialists to help identify the problems or provide new strategies, in order for Stepping Stones to continue care. Our goal is to work as a team to better serve each child.

Disenrolled

If previous attempts have been followed and no progress has been made toward solving the problem, the child may be disenrolled from the center at the discretion of the center director. The director may also at their discretion and when necessary disenroll a child or family without any consultation if they feel that the child's continued enrollment could put other children or the center at harm or if they feel that there are no conditions that would change the end outcome of disenrolling the child. If threats are made against a child, staff member or the center termination will be effective immediately.

CHILD ABUSE POLICY

All staff of the Stepping Stones Early Learning Center are mandated reporters and are required to report any suspected abuse, neglect, or maltreatment on the part of an employee, parent, or volunteer.

Any abuse or maltreatment of a child, either as an incident of discipline or otherwise, is prohibited. Any means of corporal punishment will not be tolerated. Additionally, withholding or using food, rest or sleep as a punishment is prohibited. If any type of abuse or neglect is suspected, it will be reported to the State Central Registry at the mandated number.

SPECIAL NEEDS POLICY

“Early childhood inclusion embodies values, policies, and practices.”

Stepping Stones Early Learning Center's

Parent Handbook

that support the right of every infant and young child and his or 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 of 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 early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports."

Definition of Early Childhood Inclusion excerpted from: "A Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), April 2009"

Our goal is to meet the needs of every child at Stepping Stones Early Learning Center INC by acknowledging that all children have their own special needs at one time or another. We are often the first educators to identify these needs, and we see facilitation of early intervention services as a critically important aspect to our work with young children. We closely watch the development of all the children in our care and, should we have a question, we will take the following steps. Throughout this process, we ensure that the confidentiality of every child is protected:

- We will document development and note when behaviors seem outside the developmental range over time for children of this age (through anecdotal notes, and samples of work) and meet with the director.
- We will contact the family and communicate our concern in writing and verbally. We will request their permission to arrange for a screening. If the family agrees, we will help to coordinate a screening through the appropriate school system or agency for that family.
- If the family refuses to pursue a screening or consult with their child's school system, and the need presented by the child requires additional programmatic resources, families may be asked to assume the costs of those additional supports for their child's inclusion in the program. The Director will be responsible for the hiring and supervision of the additional staff.
 - If the screening indicates an area of concern in a child's development, teachers, director and parents will meet with the special needs coordinator for that school system or agency and develop a plan for the child in writing. Typically, these plans will involve modifications to our classroom environment or practice, and guidance will be provided to teachers to support their work.
 - In some cases, a school system may recommend that a child be enrolled in a different program, where there may be more resources available to provide early intervention.
 - In some cases, certain adaptations to our program may be impossible (an additional teacher at the cost of the family, for example) and we may recommend a different placement for the child. Please know that wherever possible, we will draw upon all resources to meet the child's needs.
 - Stepping Stones Early Learning Center INC may determine that we are not able to serve the child. Staff and administrators will let the family know as early in the year as possible if this is a possible outcome, so that the family can pursue other placement options. The family will be notified verbally and in writing.

- The program has three considerations when asking a child to leave: a) has implementation of strategies over time resulted in improvement, or have the concerns persisted or escalated? b) Is the program able to meet the needs of the individual child and the needs of the group as a whole? c) Is there a safety issue regarding the child or other children in the classroom? Each case is considered on a case-by-case basis, and the program will apply every recommended strategy to support the child's progress before considering termination.

Our policy for inclusion of children with special needs is as follows:

- Stepping Stones Early Learning Center INC will integrate children with disabilities and other special needs (such as chronic illness) and children without disabilities in all activities possible.
- Children with special needs and their families shall have access to and be encouraged to receive a multidisciplinary assessment by qualified individuals, using reliable and valid age and culturally appropriate instruments and methodologies, before the child starts in the facility. The multidisciplinary assessment shall be voluntary and focus on the family's priorities, concerns, and resources that are relevant to providing services to the child and that optimize the child's development.
 - The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) and any other plans for special services shall be developed for children identified as eligible in collaboration with the family, representatives from the disciplines and organizations involved with the child and family, the child's health care provider, the staff of the facility (depending on the family's wishes), and the agency's resources and state laws and regulations.
 - If a child has an IEP or IFSP, the Director will be responsible for coordinating care within the facility and with any caregivers and coordinators in other service settings, in accordance with the written plan.
 - A child with special health care needs shall have a special care plan on file that includes emergency contact information, health provider, triggers, signs and symptoms of the condition and treatment instructions.
 - In all cases, we place the best interests of our children and families at the center of all plans, and work with the family and with community partners to ensure that the best plan is developed.

Legal Custody

In cases where an enrolled child is the subject of a court order (ex... Custody Order, Restraining Order, or Protection from Abuse Order) Stepping Stones must be provided with a Certified Copy of the most recent order and all amendments thereto. The orders of the court will be strictly followed unless the custodial parent(s) requests a more liberal variation of the order in writing. In the case where both parents are afforded shared/joint custody by order of the court, both parents must sign the request for more liberal interpretation of the order. In the absence of a court order on file with Stepping Stones administration, both parents shall be afforded equal access to their child as stipulated by law. Stepping Stones cannot, without a court order, limit the access of a one parent by request of the other parent, regardless of the reason. If a situation presents itself, where one parent does not want the other parent to have access to their child, Stepping Stones suggests that the parent keep the child with them until a court order is issued. If conflicting court orders are presented, the most recently dated court order will be followed. Once presented with a Protection from Abuse Order or a Restraining Order, Stepping Stones is obligated to follow the order for the entire period it is in effect. Employees of Stepping Stones cannot, at the request of anyone, except the issuing judge, allow a Protection from Abuse Order and/or a Restraining Order to be violated. Stepping Stones will report any violations of these orders to the court.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

In the event of inclement weather, Stepping Stones Early Learning Center will make every attempt to open as usual. However, to preserve the safety of our staff and children we will close if conditions warrant such action. It is at the discretion of the Center's Administration to make the decision to close earlier or open later due to natural disasters (i.e., Snow, ice ...) Please note that Stepping Stones will automatically close if the forecast calls for 10" of snow or more.

If the condition occurs during operating hours, the center will contact the parents through phone as well as through our app so that the children can be picked up as soon as possible. If conditions occur during non-operating hours parents will be notified of the decision, prior to 5:30am, in the following ways:

- Posted on our website: <https://www.steppingstoneschildcare.me/>
- Shown on the following television channels: NBC 6, WMTW 8 and CBS 13,
- Posted online on the before-mentioned station websites as well as on Stepping Stones Facebook page.
- Text alert for delays or closings for our center
- Messaging on the App

To receive texts, you will need to sign up online on our website. Stepping Stones is not responsible for any fees that may occur from receiving text alerts and will not send them to you without a release form. There will be no refund or compensation for closings that are beyond the control of the Center Staff (for example, inclement weather, or any state of emergency, or any type of loss of power or water).

PARENT VISIT/INVOLVEMENT

Enrolled Parents may visit the center at any time. However, if there are problems arising from parent visits that interfere with the deliverance of quality childcare, then the parent(s) will not be permitted in the classroom. Families are welcome to participate in the class activities and school events.

WAYS FOR THE FAMILIES TO BE INVOLVED:

- Making things or bringing in things for the program or special activities
- Sharing their culture
- Sharing a talent or a job
- Participating in the class activities or field trips
- Contributing to the curriculum

Parent Conduct

Parents are expected to always conduct themselves in a courteous and respectful manner. The relationships between parents, teachers and children impact the well-being of all our children and should serve as a role model for healthy, adult interactions. While issues with teachers should not be discussed in front of the children, parents should feel that they can communicate their concerns and complaints directly to the caregiver of their child, provided it is done in a civilized manner. Parents may also talk directly to the Director. Displays of anger, hostility, or offensive language are not appropriate.

Neither the Assistant Director nor teachers have the authority to change the center policy; issues of policy should be brought before the Director.

Certain actions are so serious that they will lead to immediate disciplinary action. Such conditions include but are not limited to:

- Comments of a sexual nature

- Racial, ethnic, or religious slurs
- Violence or inappropriate language
- Smoking or drinking on center property
- Disrespect of staff, children, or other parents

Disciplinary Action

If a parent is in violation of center policy, this violation will be brought to the attention of the parent. First time violations or minor incidences may be discussed verbally with the parents by the Director or the Assistant Director. The Director or the Assistant Director, however, shall make it clear to the parent that this is a formal verbal warning, and a written record will be kept in the file. Violations that are more serious or repeated minor violations will result in a written warning from the Director to the parent. As a last resort, the Director may ask a family to leave the center. A parent who disagrees with any disciplinary action may submit a written complaint as directed below.

NEGOTIATING DIFFERENCES

The primary purpose of this Policy is to provide for prompt and equitable resolution of students/parent's complaints and grievances. The resolution of a complaint through informal communication as close as possible to the point of origin is encouraged. A student/parent with a complaint shall first take it to the immediate teacher depending on the point of origin. In the event the complaint cannot be resolved through informal communication a Formal Grievance may be filed by the student/parent.

The following steps shall be followed when filing a Formal Grievance:

LEVEL ONE: The student/parent filing the grievance shall complete the Stepping Stones Grievance Report (found in parent forms). The report shall be submitted to the Assistant Director. The Assistant Director shall investigate in a timely manner. The Assistant Director's decision shall be reduced to writing and presented to the student/parent. In no event shall an appeal to Level Two be allowed without the involvement of the Assistant Director. The Assistant Director shall document his/her involvement with the problem.

LEVEL TWO: In the event the problem is not resolved at Level One, the student/parent may file an appeal in writing with the Director by completing the Stepping Stones Grievance Report (found in parent forms). Such an appeal shall be presented within ten (10) days of the Level One decision. The Director shall request a conference with the aggrieved or render a written decision within ten (10) days from the receipt of the grievance.

STAFF HIRED BY PARENTS

We strongly discourage our employees from making independent childcare arrangements with families at the school.

However, if you enter into an agreement with a Stepping Stones Early Learning Center employee to babysit for your family outside of the employee's normal work hours and/or outside of the school hours, it must be done away from the school and with the full knowledge and understanding that the sitter enters into such an agreement as a private citizen and not as a Stepping Stones Early Learning Center employee.

We cannot be responsible for our employees away from school, outside their working hours, and will not be liable for their acts or omissions when not on our property, including the transportation of children. You may be required to sign acknowledgement and waiver to this effect.

If you hire a staff member to work for you and that employee resigns their position with us to accept your employment offer, you will be required to pay Stepping Stones Early Learning Center a \$500 finder's fee.

MEALS & SNACKS

Stepping Stones Early Learning Centers children are provided a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and PM snack. Stepping Stones follows the nutritional guidelines established by the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Menus will be posted on the bulletin board near the main entrance. You may request a copy to take home if you would like.

Children will be encouraged to sample all the foods that are offered but will never be forced to eat. Please inform your child's teacher if your child cannot eat a certain food or has different dietary needs (e.g., vegetarian, vegan, lactose intolerant) so a substitution can be made. For certain dietary restrictions, you may be asked to provide food from home for your child.

Please make sure your child is at the daycare before meals and snacks. If they come after a meal or snack is served, please make sure they eat before they come. The provider will not serve food after the scheduled meal/snack times. Infants under 12 months are fed on an on-demand basis, however, children who eat off of the menu can only eat the menu food at scheduled meal times.

MEAL TIMES

Breakfast: 6:00am - 8:00am
Lunch: 11:30am - 12:15pm
PM Snack: 3:30pm - 4:00pm

*BABY FOOD

Infants 6-11 months: The provider will supply solids upon parent/guardian request when baby is developmentally ready. Baby led weaning is the preferred method of feeding, but pureed foods are also acceptable. Please let the provider know your preference and what foods your child may or may not have. You may provide a list and add as needed if preferred. Formula or breast milk will still be served until the child's 12-month Birthday. When a child turns 12 months, only table food will be offered.

Infants 0-5 months: Formula or breastmilk is permitted only.

*BOTTLES

Stepping Stones will supply Wellesley Farms infant formula with iron, premium until 12 months of age. If the parent/guardian chooses not to use this formula, the parent/guardian must bring in their preferred formula brand or breast milk clearly labeled with your child's name and the date, and a form must be signed stating that the parent/guardian is bringing their own formula or breastmilk. The contents of a bottle, both breast milk and formula, must be eaten within 1 hour from the beginning of feeding and will be discarded after the hour is up. If a bottle is left un-refrigerated for 1 hour or more, it will be discarded. Mothers who are breastfeeding can store milk in the classroom refrigerator/freezer, all breastmilk must be

child's name and date it was pumped. Frozen breast milk can be stored in the freezer for up to three months. Opened jar food can be left in the refrigerator for 24 hours. All formula and breast milk (except for frozen or powder) not used in the days' time, must be taken home. It cannot be left at the center overnight.

*Bottles will not be permitted after 13 months of age unless there is a medical reason for your child to have one.

FOOD ALLERGIES

Based on the needs of the children at each center, a classroom may be peanut/egg free. Please see classroom teachers for further information. In the case a classroom is peanut/egg free, no food containing, or processed in a facility with peanuts/eggs, is allowed in that classroom.

FOOD ALLERGY ACTION PLAN

If your child has a food allergy, please complete a Food Allergy Action Plan form, available in the office. This form will be posted in your child's room, as well as in food preparation areas. If medication for an allergic reaction is provided, please have your physician sign the Food Allergy Action Plan as well.

HEALTH POLICIES

"The risk of transmission of the agents that cause infectious diseases is increased when children are gathered into groups for any reason. This risk is particularly significant in day care because of the many close physical interactions between children and adults. The majority of day-care programs attempt to exclude ill children. However, illness among young children is frequent and many parents want to bring mildly ill children to day-care programs. This results in a struggle between staff and parents and a desire for absolute criteria to use to determine when a child's illness requires exclusion. Day-care personnel criticize parents for demanding care for sick children. In turn, parents criticize day-care programs, believing that their children acquire their illnesses from day-care contacts. The resulting tensions strain parent/staff relationships, negatively affecting the quality of the day-care experience. Unfortunately, absolute criteria for exclusion of ill children do not exist. Day-care programs base their exclusion policies on two issues:

- 1. risk of transmission of infectious diseases and*
- 2. the demand of sick children for increased adult attention, which may exceed the resources of the day-care program."*

(Quoted from Pediatrics in Review)

For your child to attend the Early Childhood Education Center, he/she must be well enough to eat the meals and snacks provided by the center. They must also be able to go outdoors. If your child exhibits symptoms of illness (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat,

frequent cough, heavily running nose, frequent sneezing, unknown rash, Conjunctivitis (pink

eye) etc. during the 24-hour period prior to scheduled attendance at the center, your child should be kept home until the symptoms mentioned have disappeared or a note is obtained from your physician stating that your child does not have a contagious condition. Children must wait 24 hours after the last fever, vomiting and diarrhea episode. Please note with Conjunctivitis your child cannot attend the center until he/she has been on medication for 48 hours.

IF YOUR CHILD BECOMES ILL AT THE CENTER

Children who are mildly ill and do not exhibit any of the following conditions may attend. Children must be able to participate in activities (which includes outside time, as well gross movement activities.) If children develop any symptoms while at Stepping Stones, the child will be separated from the other children and parents will be contacted. Arrangements should be made to pick up children within an hour. If you cannot be reached within 15 minutes or you will not be able to arrive within the hour, an authorized person from the registration forms will be called to pick up your child. Please make sure your registration forms are updated. Please make every effort to follow these state Health Department requirements.

State Guidelines for Illness

For the welfare of all the children in the center, the Early Childhood Development Center is required by the state to exclude a child from care if the following symptoms exist:

The child has an oral temperature of 100.5 degrees F or greater.

Diarrhea, which is defined as an increase in number of stools compared to the child's normal amount, with increased and/or decreased stool water.

- Vomiting in the previous 24 hours
- Mouth sores associated with the inability to control his/her saliva.
- Rash with fever or behavior change
- Infected eyes with discharge, until 48 hours after treatment started by a physician.
- Infestation (scabies, head lice, pinworm), until after first treatment with a medicated product.
- Impetigo, until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment has begun.
- Strep Throat, until 24 hours after medication started.
- Ringworm infection, until 24 hours after medication started.
- Chicken Pox, until one week after the onset of rash, or until all lesions have dried and crusted.

- Children needing individual one-on-one care.
- Any child having surgery must remain out for a minimum of 48 hours (more if the doctor has stated differently)

Lead teachers and/or director may turn away children brought to Stepping Stones who exhibit any of the required exclusion illnesses, so please have a reliable back up childcare plan for the possibility your child may become sick. Please do not mask your child's symptoms with Tylenol or similar medication. To control the spread of illnesses, contagious children must stay home. We want your child here at childcare, but in order to protect all the children, we must take illness very seriously.

REPORTABLE ILLNESSES

Some childhood illnesses are required, by law, to be reported to our local health agency. In the case of a contagious illness in your child's class, we will post a notice on the door of the classroom.

MEDICATION AND MEDICATION FORMS

If your child does have an illness that requires medication, the following policy will be in place. No over-the-counter medicine will be dispensed except for diaper rash ointments, teething gel, and sunscreen. Many antibiotics and other medications can be administered 1 or 2 times per day. When visiting the doctor for your child's illness, please request medication that can be administered in the morning before childcare and the evening after leaving child care. In the event your child is placed on prescription medication that needs to be administered during the day the following will be applied:

1. All medication must be given to a staff member upon arrival at the center and will be stored out of reach of children. No medications should be left in cubbies.
2. Prescription medication must be in the original containers, with the child's full name, have the original pharmacy label and date clearly marked on the prescription. Must have a child safety cap.
3. Medications must be accompanied by a medication permission form. No medication will be administered if there is not a current form signed with date and submitted.

IN CASE OF INJURY

Basic first aid will be performed. In the event of a serious injury, a parent will be notified. If the parents are not available, the emergency numbers on the child's emergency card will be called. If the person(s) cannot be reached, the child will be taken to CMMC's Emergency Room, unless the parents have designated a different emergency plan.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Emergency Drills

We are required by state licensing to do fire drills monthly as well as other disaster drills once every 6 months. Fire drills are held on random days and times. We practice evacuating the classrooms, meeting on the playground, accounting for all staff and children, etc. We discuss the importance of the drills with the children and talk about any fears they may have.

Evacuation Procedures

If the children would be safer remaining indoors, we would shelter them inside Stepping Stones Early Learning Center. If our building were not considered to be a safe place for the children, we would relocate to a designated space (Miss Mandi's house), If Miss Mandi's house is not safe for us to relocate to, we will relocate to the Greene Fire Station. After arriving at Miss Mandi's house or the Greene Fire Station we will attempt to contact parents or emergency contacts for all children to notify you of where your child is located. Children will be grouped according to age and staff members will stay with the children until the Director releases them from their responsibilities.

Pandemics

Our Preparedness and Response Plan (available upon request) will be followed during any pandemic period. The Center for Disease Control, Department of Health and/or State Child Care Licensing Rules will be followed. Response will include, but is not limited to, monitoring symptoms in staff and students, practicing social distancing, following proper hygiene protocol, implementing any/new safety equipment, isolating staff and/or students infected, decreasing class sizes, and transparent communication with families and regulating agencies.

Bodies and Boundaries

There is a natural curiosity among children with regards to their bodies. When situations arise where we must speak to children about body parts, we use the anatomically correct terms. We also teach children that every person has boundaries and that our bodies are private and should be respected. Parents will be notified if situations occur in the classroom that directly affects their child(ren).

Photographs of the children participating in our programs may be taken from time to time and may appear in newspapers, magazines, brochures, or other publicity materials. Your permission for photographs including your child to be used without compensation is part of this agreement.

BIRTHDAY/HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Parents may bring cake, cupcakes or other special treats to school to celebrate a child's birthday.

FIELD TRIPS

Stepping Stones frequently supplements the in-class curriculum with off premise field trips. Parents are required to give written permission for their child to attend each field trip. Notification of a field trip will be sent home in advance of the trip, with all pertinent trip information including, destination, date, time, reason for trip, cost, and mode of transportation. Accompanying the notification paper, teachers will include a permission slip to be filled out, signed, and returned to the teacher prior to the date of the trip. The field trip permission slip must be filled out completely and accurately, and all trip costs must be paid in advance for your child to attend. If your child is not scheduled to attend on the day of a field trip and you wish for your child to participate in the trip, please discuss this with your child's teacher at least 1 week prior to the date of the trip. Your child will be permitted to attend if required ratios can be maintained with his/her addition to the class. An additional day fee of, as well as the cost of the trip and signed permission slip will be due prior to the date of the trip.

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

It is unlawful for any Early Childhood Education Center staff member to discriminate in the enrollment of children and families at Stepping Stones Early Learning Center INC on the basis of race, color, religious creed, handicap, ancestry, national origin, age, sex, veteran status, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, pregnancy or citizenship status.

CLOTHING

Children play hard and need to be comfortable. We ask that children be dressed in clothes suitable for the many art, playground and climbing activities of their day. Cold weather does not necessarily keep us indoors, so please be sure that children have the necessary mittens, sweaters, hats, etc., appropriate for the day's weather changes. All clothing should be labeled with the family's name, to facilitate dressing and reduce loss.

Two full sets of extra clothes should be kept at the center, even for the oldest children. When

accidents of play, feeding or toileting happen, we know you would want your child to be comfortable. Extra sets will need to be regularly replaced as soon as possible if your child uses them. Shoes need to be appropriate for indoor/outdoor play. Hot, wet snow boots, for health reasons, need to be replaced with indoor shoes. Sneakers or rubber-soled shoes are required for safe play; an extra pair may be left in the child's cubby and teachers will gladly help with the changes.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Fridays are "share day" in our classrooms. On that day children are invited to bring in 1 item from home to share with their classroom. Every other day we ask that toys be left in the car or at home, so as not to be lost, broken, or envied by others. Action figure/superhero toys and projectile toys are not permitted in the center. Action figure toys encourage strong physical play which often leads to aggressive play; this can get out of control when children confuse make-believe with reality. Please be aware that Stepping Stones Early Learning Center is not responsible for broken or lost items brought from home.

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOUR CHILD WILL NEED

Individual cubbies will be available for each child so that items can be left at the center. Items sent in and paid for by parents are not shared between students, siblings aside. Please label all belongings.

INFANTS

- Disposable diapers and diaper wipes
- Bibs
- Baby Cereal (If not using what the center provides)
- Baby Food (If not using what the center Provides)
- Extra can of ready-to-feed Formula or Breast Milk (If not using what the center provides)
- Change of clothes
- Pacifiers, if used

TODDLERS

- Disposable diapers and wipes
- AM Snack
- 2 Changes of clothes including shoes/play clothes for outside

PRESCHOOLERS

- 2 changes of clothes including shoes/play clothes for outside
- Sleeping bag and pillow
- AM Snack

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is part of the early childhood curriculum. During the winter, your child needs a coat, hat, and gloves. During the summer, your child will need to come with sunscreen already applied and the teachers will reapply as the day progresses. We will go outside every day except in the following cases:

- Orange or Red Air days (Yellow days we will limit outside time to 15 minutes)
- Temperatures above 99°
- Temperatures under 30° (Temperatures between 30-32° we will limit outside time to 15 minutes in the am and 15 minutes in the pm)
- During active precipitation

Stepping Stones Early Learning Center Welcomes You!

ALL FEES AND POLICIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE