



Little Acorns
Child Development Center

Parent Handbook

Of

Operational

Policies & Procedures

Policies and Procedures

Little Acorns Child Development Center is a state licensed early childhood center. We care for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years, not yet enrolled in Kindergarten. Our school session runs from September to May.

Hours of Operation

Our hours of operation are Monday through Thursday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Due to new CDC requirements, we can only allow childcare staff and enrolled children inside the building. Please be aware that drop-off and pick-up times may vary by a few minutes, to safely escort each student from the car to the building in the morning and from the building to their car in the afternoon. It is very important for your child to be at school on time. The teachers have activities planned for their class beginning at 9:00 am. If you need to bring your child later than the given drop-off time, due to an appointment or other reason, please make special arrangements ahead of time with either the Director or Assistant Director, so we can ensure someone will meet your child at your altered arrival time. Due to the nature of our arrival and dismissal protocols, those who are consistently late in the morning (2 or more times per month for a 2-day student or 4 or more times per month for a 4-day student), will have a penalty fee added to the next month's tuition statement. Arriving later than the designated time on occasion is completely expected with little ones, and we are happy to be merciful. Arriving later than expected on a consistent basis, communicates to us and to your child that school is not important. Please respect the hard work of your child's teachers and arrive on time each day.

Our Staff

Director: Deborah Bills

Assistant Director: Jennifer Brown

Administrative Assistants: Holly Tracy and Logan Dennis

Teaching Staff and Staff Training

We believe our teachers and support staff are the foundation to our success. Each teacher must maintain 24 clock hours of training per year. The Director and Assistant Director schedule most of these hours before the school year begins. Topics of training include, but are not limited to: Early Childhood Growth and Development, Using Music in the Classroom, Sensory Processing and Integration, Speech and Language Development, Fine and Gross Motor Teaching Strategies, Social-Emotional Growth, Behavior Intervention and Planning, Classroom Management, Self-care/Self-awareness, and Conflict-Resolution Strategies. Staff also receives training on child abuse and neglect including warning signs and prevention techniques. The Director must also 30 clock hours of training per year, 6 of which must be strictly administrative. We require all staff to be up-to-date and certified in CPR, First Aid, and Basic Child Growth and Development. All staff who interacts with children 24 months and younger goes through a SIDS/Shaken Baby training every year. This includes the Director, Assistant Director, Administrative Assistant(s), and all Extended Care workers, in addition to the infant and toddler teachers.

General Policies

Parent Involvement

We strongly encourage parent involvement in all school and classroom activities. Your involvement is much appreciated and pertinent to the success of our school. Because of the new guidelines and requirements regarding students and staff only inside the building, we will make you aware of any participation needs we have throughout the year. It is vitally important to stay in close communication with your child's teacher throughout the year, as we believe the home to school connection is what fosters the greatest education for your child.

Enrollment

Children are enrolled for the school year, beginning the January prior, when we open registration. A placement is solidified with our School Year Cover Sheet and full Registration Fee of \$250 per child. Registration is available first to those currently enrolled and plan to return the following school year. The available openings are assigned on a first come-first served basis. Current student families have one week to enroll their child before we open registration to siblings of current students. After several days of the current family registration is available, we will then open registration to the public, until a class is full (according to our standards). If a class is full, a parent may choose to place a child on the waitlist for that class. To place a child on the waitlist, we request a completed School Year Cover Sheet and \$25. If a spot opens for a child on the waitlist, we will apply the \$25 to the registration fee, charging \$225 for enrollment. An admission form, teacher information form, current immunization records and a health statement signed by your doctor are required. Children are classified at the beginning of the school year by age on or before September 1. They will remain in that class the entire year on the days the parent chooses. If a parent wants to change the days their child comes, those decisions must be finalized by the Director, and are subject to availability in that class.

Toilet Training

All children entering the 4-year-old class and Transitional Kindergarten must be toilet trained. Little Acorns staff will not be able to change diapers or pull-ups in these classrooms as it takes away from the other children. We understand that accidents happen, and we strive to be sympathetic during this time of transition. If a child is in a 3-year-old class, our expectation is that they are well-introduced and comfortable with using the bathroom. It is common for a 3-year-old to still need a pull-up for naptime, but please allow them to attempt underwear for several days at school before succumbing to a pull-up. We will only use positive reinforcement for using the bathroom, and will not use shaming, embarrassment, or punishment if a potty accident happens in the school day. We have a "Little Acorns Potty Training Policy". If you would like to have a copy of that document, we are happy to email it to you or give you a hard copy.

Personal Belongings

Personal storage areas will be provided for each child. Each child needs to have a full change of clothes including underwear and socks. If your child is newly toilet trained, please bring more than one complete change of clothes. The clothes can remain at school or in the child's backpack. Children in the 2-year-old classes through Transitional Kindergarten need to have a backpack large enough to hold their lunch box and a standard sized folder.

Food

Parents will supply a snack, lunch, and water cup for their child each day they are at Little Acorns. We encourage healthy eating habits therefore we refrain from passing out treats to reward good behavior. Birthdays, holidays, and special occasions are days we look forward to at school. An occasional treat may be offered to your child on one of these days, but only with parent permission. No child will be left out, even if they suffer from a food allergy or intolerance. Special exceptions will be made if necessary, so that every child can participate.

VERY IMPORTANT: Please label everything with your child's name. We are not responsible for lost, stolen, or genuinely misplaced personal belongings that were not labeled properly.

Absences

Please notify the Director or Assistant Director, via email or Brightwheel, our messaging app, if your child is going to be absent. If your child is ill, please let us know the nature of the illness, particularly if it is contagious.

Withdrawal of Your Child's Enrollment

To withdraw your child's enrollment at Little Acorns, we require two-week advanced written notice. This allows us time to contact a parent who may be on a waiting list. There will be no refund of fees or tuition.

Suspension/Termination

Our policies and procedures are designed the best interest of children and adults for their development and welfare. Therefore, Little Acorns will terminate services for repeated violation of program policies and procedures. The procedures are as follows:

1. Notice to bring the situation to your attention
2. Written warning of suspension
3. Student may not attend for 3 days, along with a written notice of termination if problem continues
4. Termination of services for remainder of school year (family may or may not return indefinitely, but will be on a case-by-case basis)

Reasons for termination:

1. Attendance—excessive unexplained absences or late arrivals
2. Unpaid fees, after multiple reminders
3. Behavior of child—constant and/or daily disruption to classmates and teachers, dangerous or harmful actions towards classmates or teachers
4. Parent/Guardian refusal to cooperate
5. Parent/Guardian inappropriate, harmful, hateful, or disrespectful towards any Little Acorns employee or student (this includes physical, verbal, or written/typed/texted)
6. Noncompliance with policies and procedures

Parent-Teacher Conference

Either the parent/guardian or the teacher may request a conference. This may be done if there are behavior issues that need to be addressed or if there is a developmental or academic issue that needs to be discussed. The parent-teacher conference is a means of addressing concerns and setting future goals regarding such or keeping informed of the child's development and/or academic achievements. If your child is in a 4-year-old or Transitional Kindergarten class, the teacher will be setting up a formal conference with parent/guardian in January. For infants – Threes classes, conferences are held as needed.

Parental Communication

Effective communication between center and parent is our number one goal. Please make sure we have current, actively used contact numbers on file, as well as current email addresses. Each school day, parents will receive digital and/or a daily information sheet, including details of the day's activities and any reminders. Please let the Director know if you are not receiving any daily information from your child's teacher, either via messaging app or an information sheet.

Questions, Concerns, Comments

We encourage every parent/guardian to share his or her questions, concerns, or comments with us. We want you to be confident in the care we give your child. Concerns and suggestions help improve our program.

School Closings and Calendar

Little Acorns will follow the school calendar published on our website: www.hocc.org/littleacorns. No school days beyond those published will be offered. In the event of inclement weather or other circumstances that may require Little Acorns to close, please check your Brightwheel messaging app concerning plans for the day by 7:30 am. Closings due to inclement weather will generally follow the decision made by the Richardson Independent School District, but ultimately will be decided by the Director and Assistant Director, alongside the leadership of Highland Oaks Church of Christ. No refund will be given if Little Acorns is closed on a scheduled school day. Days missed due to closing will not be made up later.

Gang-Free Zone

Under the Texas Penal Code, childcare centers are required to inform parents that the center is in a gang-free zone. A gang-free zone is any area within 1000 feet of a child-care center, where gang-related criminal activity or engaging in organized criminal activity is a violation of the law and is therefore subject to harsher penalty under state law.

Breastfeeding

Little Acorns will provide a comfortable place with a seat that enables any mother to breastfeed her child. Due to the current guidelines, this applies to any staff member who is currently breastfeeding and already on-site. Though we will not turn away a mother from her enrolled breastfeeding child, we ask that considerations be made for a staff member to bring the child to the breastfeeding mother outside of the building, should a feeding need to occur within the school hours. If no arrangements can be made for a mother to breastfeed their enrolled child away from the building, we will kindly make an exception to the rule and offer a comfortable and safe place within the building to breastfeed her child.

Outside Staff Employment

In order to maintain Little Acorn's professionalism and confidentiality, persons employed by Little Acorns are permitted to be a caregiver or babysitter for any parent/guardian who has a child enrolled at Little Acorns, once a "Hold Harmless Babysitting Agreement" has been completed and signed by the parent/guardian, staff member, and Director, along with the dates of service.

Discipline and Guidance

Positive Guidance

Our staff focuses on the positive behaviors of the children. We also guide our staff to provide a fair and consistent environment. We feel that when consistent, age appropriate limits are in place, children will become responsible for themselves. Children are offered an acceptable, safe alternative to negative behavior. When positive redirection attempts fail, a brief, supervised separation period is used to redirect the child's attention. Children will be treated fairly and equally.

Discipline

Discipline shall always be:

1. Individualized and consistent for each child.
2. Appropriate to the child's level of understanding; and
3. Directed toward teaching the acceptable behavior and self-control.

A caregiver may only use positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourage self-esteem, self-control, and self-direction, which include the following:

1. Using praise and encouragement of good behavior instead of focusing only upon unacceptable behavior.
2. Reminding a child of behavior expectations daily by using clear, positive statements.
3. The staff member assessing their own demeanor in the situation.
4. Using brief supervised separation or time out from the group, when appropriate for the child's age and development, which is limited to no more than one minute per year of the child's age.

There must be no harsh, cruel, or unusual treatment of any child. The following types of discipline and guidance are prohibited:

1. Corporal punishment or threats of corporal punishment.
2. Punishment associated with food, naps, or toilet training.
3. Pinching, shaking, or biting a child.
4. Hitting a child with a hand or instrument.
5. Putting anything in or on a child's mouth.
6. Humiliating, ridiculing, rejecting, or yelling at a child.
7. Subjecting a child to harsh, abusive, or profane language.
8. Placing a child in isolation, away from the constant supervision of a caregiver.
9. Requiring a child to remain silent or inactive for inappropriately long periods of time for the child's age.
10. Placing a child in any restraining chair or equipment as a time-out, including a highchair, clip-on chair, exersaucer, bouncy seat, or the like.

Disrespect demonstrated towards teachers, other children or materials will not be tolerated. In such cases, a parent/guardian will be formally notified. Parents may be called to pick up a child who demonstrates disruptive, disrespectful and/or extreme behavior. Children who demonstrate such behavior may be suspended for a short period of time or indefinitely. This is not a decision that is ever easy to make nor is it one that we want to consider. However, there are times when we feel it is necessary for the physical safety and emotional well-being of the other children enrolled.

Fees

Registration Fee

Little Acorns requires a non-refundable registration fee with completed registration form for your child to reserve a place in our program.

Tuition Fees

Tuition is due at the first of each month. If tuition is not paid by the 10th of the month there is a \$10 late fee added on the 11th of the month. If tuition is still not paid by the 20th of the month, another late fee of \$25 will be added.

Vacation/Illness

So that we can maintain the highest quality of education and care for all children, your child's tuition fees must be paid in full regardless of his/her attendance. This policy applies to absences for any reason including illness, family vacations, center closings such as observed holidays, severe weather closings, or other unforeseen circumstances.

Late Pick Up Fee

If a child is not picked up by 10 minutes after their scheduled pick-up time, the child will be escorted to the Extended Care Room, where they will be supervised by caring, trained Little Acorns staff members. If any part of that hour is needed for last-minute care, we kindly ask that you be prepared to pay the Extended Care rate of \$10/hour. We understand that life happens, so please let us know as soon as possible if you will be late due to traffic, an appointment, etc.

Delinquent Account

If there is a balance left on your account, we will notify you. We will give you sufficient time to take care of this balance. If the balance is not paid, you will not be able to re-enroll your child in Little Acorns.

Safety Policies

Daily Sign in and Sign out

Parents are required by state licensing to sign their child in and out each day, using their own smart phone. Parents will scan the QR code, select their child(ren), answer the daily health check questions, then use their child's unique code to sign in. Last, the parent will provide their signature, using their own device, which will effectively check the child into Little Acorns that day. The signing-out procedure only requires the parent to scan the QR code to check the child out of school in the afternoon. Once the child is checked in or out, Brightwheel automatically timestamps the arrival and departure times for that child.

Arrival

There will be three main timeslots for morning arrival: 8 AM Extended Care, 8:30 AM Extended Care, and a staggered time around the 9 AM hour, when the school day starts. Please pay special attention to the time that has been designated as the arrival time for your child's class. Little Acorns will be utilizing two entrances of the Highland Oaks building for arrival and dismissal, to streamline the drop-off and pick-up times. Areas will be specifically marked for your convenience and as a reminder. Regardless of your arrival or dismissal time, it is imperative we have record and contact information for any approved caregiver. We will not put a child in the car of anyone who does not have prior authorization to do so. This includes grandparents, aunts/uncles, friends, and nannies.

Dismissal

There will be five dismissal times each day: At or around 2 PM (depending on your class' given timeslot), 2:30 PM Extended Care, 3:00 PM Extended Care, 3:30 PM Extended Care, and 4 PM Extended Care. Please pay close attention to the timeslot given to your child's class, and follow our labeled signs posted in the parking lot.

****SAFETY NOTE:** Please inform all approved pickups to always maintain a slow speed in our parking lot and pay attention. For the efficiency and safety of the arrival and dismissal process, all drivers must be aware and alert, only obtaining their phone when the vehicle is in park, and the child is ready for check-in or check-out.

Emergency Preparedness Plan

This plan is available for review in the Little Acorns office. It is designed to ensure the safety of children during an emergency by addressing staff responsibility and facility readiness with respect to emergency evacuation and relocation. The plan includes written procedures for: evacuation of children to a safe area during an emergency, how children will be accounted for, how the Little Acorns staff will communicate with parents and local authorities, and how staff will evacuate with proper documentation for each child. Little Acorns conducts whole-school fire drills each month, some of which the staff receives no warning. Quarterly, the staff reviews tornado drills and active shooter protocols. Fire extinguishers are checked each month.

Health Policies

Little Acorns Child Development Center is a Well-Child Facility.

Immunization & Other Medical Records

For the safety of all children enrolled, each child enrolled at Little Acorns must meet applicable immunization requirements specified by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. **All immunizations required for the child's age must be completed by the date of admission.** Little Acorns Child Development Center no longer accepts affidavits for vaccine exemption. Only vaccinated children will be admitted for enrollment at Little Acorns CDC. A current copy of your child's immunization record must always be on file for the duration of your child's enrollment with our center. A child's health statement signed by a physician must be provided upon enrollment.

Vision & Hearing Screening

All children enrolled in Little Acorns who are 4 years of age by September 1 are required to have vision and hearing screening. Documentation of such screening by a licensed health care professional or a certified screener must be provided at the time of enrollment.

Medication

Please read the following medication policies carefully. We must follow, according to state licensing, all policies and regulations as outlined.

1. For child safety, all medication must remain in the front office with management personnel. No medication is allowed in the classrooms.
2. All medications (prescription and over the counter) must be in their original container and clearly labeled with your child's name.
3. Medications must not be expired. Any expired medication will not be administered. Any unclaimed expired medication will be disposed of.
4. Prescription medication will be administered as directed with written authorization and instructions that correspond with the physician's directions on the label. We cannot administer prescription medication to anybody other than the child for which it was prescribed. This includes sharing a prescription medication with a sibling(s).
5. Over-the-counter medication will be administered as directed with written authorization and instructions that correspond to the manufacturer's directions on the label.
6. Over-the-counter fever reducers and pain-relieving medications shall not be administered for the purposes of 'disguising' a fever and/or an attempt to keep a child comfortable while in care. If a child requires medication to remain comfortable, they are considered too ill to attend and shall not be admitted into care for the day.
7. Over-the-counter medication and prescription medication shall be administered only for the period for which the medication indicates.
8. We will not deviate from either the physician's or manufacturer's directions. We will not administer medication for which parent/guardian has altered the directions and/or dosage, unless directions are accompanied by a supporting physician's note indicating such alteration.
9. Any medication given within the school day will be documented and the parent will be notified through the Brightwheel App on the child's daily log.

10. If a child requires medicine on an “as needed” basis, such as inhalers, EpiPen, allergy medication. Anti-itch cream, or other topical analgesic, the medicine will be kept in the Little Acorns office and administered only with explicit instructions from the parent/guardian and/or physician. If a child requires an EpiPen for a life-threatening allergy or a rescue inhaler, those may be kept either in the office or in the child’s classroom, depending on the severity and need for medicine proximity.
11. Any child requiring an Epi Pen available, must have a completed allergy form filled out by their physician. The teachers, administrators, and support staff will all be trained thoroughly on the action plan.

Illness

We will not admit a child for care if one or more of the following exists.

1. The illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in activities including outdoor play.
2. The illness results in a greater need for care than the caregivers can provide without compromising the health, safety, supervision (and general consideration) of the other children.
3. The child has one of the following, unless medical evaluation by a health-care professional indicates that you can include the child in the school’s activities:
 - a. A temperature of 100 degrees or greater.
 - b. Symptoms and signs of possible severe illness such as lethargy, abnormal breathing, 3 subsequent loose stools, one or more vomiting episodes in a 24-hour period, rash with or without fever, mouth sores, behavior changes, or other signs that the child may be severely ill; or
4. A health-care professional has diagnosed the child with communicable disease, and the child does not have medical documentation to indicate that the child is no longer contagious.

If your child becomes ill while at school, we will contact you. Your child will be kept apart from other children until you arrive. The parent/guardian or other designated person must pick up a sick child that needs to go home within one (1) hour of notification.

If your child is sent home with a fever, diarrhea or vomiting he/she must be free from symptoms **without medication** for 24 hours or possess a physician’s release statement before returning to school. So that we can track and better control the spread of infection, please notify Little Acorns if your child becomes ill.

Medical Emergencies

Should an emergency arise, we will call 911 and attempt to contact the parent/guardian in the order written on your child’s enrollment form. If we are unable to contact anyone listed on the enrollment form, we will act on behalf of the parent.

If an injury or accident occurs at school that prompts a visit to the child’s doctor, the parent must let the Director or Assistant Director know, as we are required by licensing standards to report any such injury.

Insect Repellant/Sunscreen

Staff will apply insect repellant or sunscreen at the request of the parent. Parent must supply said insect repellant or sunscreen.

Texas DFPS Standard for Child Care Centers

The Minimum Standards and Rules for Licensed Child Care Centers and Little Acorns' licensing report is available for review anytime during hours of operation.

Texas Law requires that any person who believes a child is being abused, neglected, or exploited to report the circumstances to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Abuse Hotline. A person making a report is immune from civil or criminal liability, and the name of the person making the report is kept confidential. Any person who suspects abuse and does not report it can be held liable for a Class-A misdemeanor. Reports of suspected child abuse may be directed to the licensing office at 214-951-7902, the child abuse hotline at 800-252-400, or the PRS website at www.dfps.state.tx.us.

Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Director. You may call 214-342-6000 during normal business hours or email our office at littleacorns@hocc.org.