

PARENT HANDBOOK



Methodist Children's Academy

A MINISTRY OF FUMC PENSACOLA

850-438-6761 (Main Office)

MCA@FUMCPensacola.com

- DOWNTOWN -

FUMC Pensacola
6 East Wright Street
Pensacola, FL 32501

- EAST HILL -

St. Mark UMC
2203 N 12th Ave
Pensacola, FL 32503

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HISTORY, PHILOSOPHY, & RELIGION

The Methodist Children's Academy (MCA) is a thriving ministry of First United Methodist Church of Pensacola. We believe that each child is a unique gift from God, and therefore worthy of love, acceptance, and support.

MCA offers a year-round preschool program to infant through pre-kindergarten with an after-school program for elementary children select locations. Our childcare programs run continuously throughout the year except for designated school holidays. (See MCA Calendar for a list of closures.)

This ministry began in 1983 as a half-day, Mother's Day Out program and playgroup with approximately 18 children. A full-day, contracted program began in 1997 and FUMC Pensacola took over full operation on May 27, 2000. MCA will begin a new partnership in ministry with St. Mark UMC in August 2024.

Our goal at MCA is to assist every child in reaching their fullest capable potential and to help build an excellent foundation for future learning. Our open-door policy encourages our student's loved ones to be active participants in their education through volunteering, and attending special events and school-wide activities.

The curriculum incorporates monthly themes and provides music, chapel, movement, art, language, and age-appropriate special events. Religion is integrated into our program through stories, songs, art, and many other forms. We start every morning with an assembly, which includes The Lord's Prayer.

ENROLLMENT/REGISTRATION

Enrollment is open to all children regardless of religion, race, sex, or creed. The number of spaces available in each class determines acceptance. The birthday cut-off date for all classes is September 1.

Registration begins in February for the upcoming school year. Those currently enrolled are guaranteed a spot for the following year. However, siblings of those currently enrolled are given preference but there is no certainty of a spot for the sibling. Current immunization record and physical must be on file by the second week of attendance for preschool children. These forms can be obtained from your pediatrician's office. The Program enforces this policy with direction from the Department of Children and Families. Shot records and physical must be kept up to date; if they have expired your child will not be able to return to school until we receive a current form.

TUITION

The fee schedule is outlined in the Schedule of Payments form. Our preschool program is a 52-week, full year program. Tuition is for the year, but can be paid in monthly increments. Payments should be made to Methodist Children's Academy via our Procure Online platform. We accept ACH Bank Transfer (preferred), or card (\$10 fee). Checks are also accepted (made out to Methodist Children's Academy) and can be placed in the tuition box. Please understand that by registering your child, you are agreeing to pay the yearly tuition.

Tuition payments are due the first (1st) of every month and are delinquent after the fifth (5th) of the month. Tuition payments made after the tenth (10th) of the month will have a \$25 late fee applied. Tuition not paid by the end of the month will forfeit your child's spot in the program. If there is any difficulty in reaching this deadline, please immediately notify the office. Be advised that two returned checks will result in a denial of acceptance of any further payment by check. All future payments will need to be made in the form of a cashier's check, money order, or cash. Payments made by mail must be received by the deadline and not just postmarked by the first.

LATE FEES

Your account is assessed our late fee as stated below if your child is not signed out by closing.

A late fee of \$1 per minute per child will be charged for the first five minutes of tardiness after designated pick up time. The rate goes to \$5 per minute per child after that. Beginning with your third late notice, your late fee will go to \$50 per child regardless of whether you are one minute or ten minutes late and then will increase to \$10 per minute after that. After your fifth late notice, you will be asked to find a program that better suits your needs. If there is a discrepancy between what you sign out as your time and the actual time, the director will have to log your time and ask you to initial it. If habitual tardiness continues, we reserve the right to dismiss your child from the program.

STAFF TRAINING

Training requirements for all our staff are listed below:

- 40-hour childcare training course
- 10 hours of annual training
- Infant/Child CPR training annually
- Employment references
- Local Criminal Background Check
- Federal Background check

DAILY SIGN-IN AND SIGN-OUT REQUIREMENT

All parents and guardians are required to sign their child in and out each day using the Procure app. Accurate daily attendance records are required for licensing compliance, funding requirements, and state inspections.

Parents and guardians must:

- Sign their full legal signature at both drop-off and pick-up
- Not use initials, nicknames, or abbreviations
- Ensure that both morning and afternoon signatures are completed before leaving the premises

Failure to properly sign a child in and/or out may result in compliance issues during inspections and can negatively impact the preschool's operations.

A \$25 fee will be assessed for each missed or incomplete parent/guardian signature, per occurrence. Staff members are available

to assist parents and guardians who need help completing the sign-in or sign-out process. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to ensure all attendance records are completed accurately each day.

If your child will be absent from school (for example: doctor's apt., illness, vacation) please notify the childcare office as soon as possible. If you are aware ahead of time that an absence will occur you may submit this information to the office through email or in written form to be kept on file.

DISCIPLINE

Discipline is the process of encouraging children to learn self-control and to avoid danger to self or others. An important aspect of discipline is the development of an environment, which is carefully planned to prevent problems by having low adult/child ratios, child proofing in every area, providing adequate toys and materials, channeling behavior in acceptable ways and planning developmentally appropriate activities and routines. Occasionally, all children feel uncooperative and should be allowed time and a space to gain their self-control. Children experiencing difficulty will be gently removed from an over stimulating situation and be given a place to sit within eyesight of the teacher. When difficult situations arise, teachers encourage children to examine what has happened and help work out possible solutions. If this move proves to be unsuccessful the child will then be brought to the office. If a child continues to struggle within the classroom after all measures have been exhausted, he/she will be asked to leave the program.

The Methodist Children's Academy and staff prohibit the use of discipline which is severe, humiliating, frightening, or associated with food, rest, or toileting.

BITING POLICY

Biting is a common behavior among infants and one-year-old children and is often a form of communication when verbal skills are still developing. Our teachers actively supervise and use age-

appropriate strategies to prevent and reduce biting incidents in all classrooms.

- **Infants and One-Year-Old Children:**

If a child in this age group bites three (3) times in one day, the preschool may require the child to be picked up for the remainder of the day, at the discretion of the Program

Directors.

- **Older Children (Two Years Old through Fifth Grade):**

A child in this age group may be sent home after one (1) biting incident, at the discretion of the Program Directors.

The safety of all children and staff is our top priority. Decisions regarding dismissal due to biting are made to ensure a safe learning environment and to support the child's developmental needs.

SAFE SLEEP POLICY

Methodist Children's Academy follows Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Safe Sleep guidelines to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and ensure a safe sleep environment.

At MCA:

- Infants who are not yet able to roll over are placed on their backs to sleep unless a written authorization from a pediatrician is provided.
- Each infant sleeps in an individual crib that meets current safety standards.
- Cribs include a firm mattress with a fitted sheet only—no loose items of any kind.
- Infants are dressed appropriately for room temperature to prevent overheating.
- Cribs are positioned so staff can see and hear infants at all times.
- Sleeping infants are visually checked at regular intervals.
- Infants do not sleep in swings, bouncers, car seats, or other sitting devices.

- Safe sleep practices are followed during all naps and rest periods.

Parents will be notified if an infant consistently has difficulty sleeping on their back so families and staff can work together to support safe sleep habits.

HEALTH & IMMUNIZATIONS

The State of Florida requires every child who attends our program to have a physical examination completed by a licensed physician stating that the child is in good health and all immunizations are up to date. The following forms must be on file with the Methodist Children's Academy office within fourteen days of attendance:

1. Florida Physical Exam Yellow Form DH#3040
2. Florida Immunization Form DH#680- Part B

The immunization card must be updated each time your child receives an immunization. It is your responsibility to bring the blue form you received while at the doctor's office to the Methodist Children's Academy office. You must keep this form up to date. Physicals must be updated every two years. Notices will be sent home if your records are not current. Your child will not be able to attend if either form has expired, regardless of a scheduled doctor's appointment.

ILLNESS

Please do not send sick children to school. If your child has run a fever (100.4), had diarrhea, or vomited in the last 24 hours, they are not well enough to come to school and should not return the next day. If your child does not feel well enough to participate in all activities (outside play, movement, etc.) please let them stay home until they can participate. If your child becomes ill while in our care, (fever, has had more than 2 diarrheas, or vomited) you will be contacted immediately. Every effort will be made to contact you first, then your emergency contact person. If your child is sent home sick, he/she may not return to school the next day. Please Note: The Health Department can supersede all of our policies if deemed necessary.

INJURIES

If your child should be injured while in our care, however slight, our staff will fill out an accident report, which we will ask you to sign before you leave. If an accident indicates a need for immediate attention, every effort will be made to locate the parent and the child will be transported to the hospital of the parent's choice or to the nearest hospital, which ever is deemed necessary. When a child is sick, a parent or guardian will be called immediately. Your child will need to be picked up within 30 minutes of notification. Methodist Children's Academy may apply fees to the accounts of children that are sick and are not picked up in a timely manner.

EMERGENCY CARE PLANS

Any child with an increased risk for a chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional condition and require additional services must have a current Emergency Care Plan on file with the childcare office. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to provide the correct and updated documents to be kept on file.

MEDICATIONS

It is the policy of the Methodist Children's Academy to not administer any non-prescription medications while children are in our care. If your child is prescribed any medication that must be administered during our school day hours we offer two available options to meet the needs of your family. A parent or guardian may come by the school office to administer the prescribed medication at any time. In order for childcare staff to administer any prescribed medication you must fill out a medication form. All medication must be prescribed to your child and in it's original container.

SAFETY/EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

The personal safety of each child is our most important consideration. Only persons authorized on the emergency cards may pick up your child. You may add or delete names on your list by sending a written notice or requesting a change to the office. We request that you call the center if someone other than the

regular person is picking up your child. Please inform all new pick-up people that they will need to show proof of identification before the child will be released to them. Children will not be released to older siblings unless they are high school age.

Fire drills are held on a monthly basis to acquaint children and staff with evacuation procedures. Our center is equipped with fire alarms and smoke detectors throughout our building. Other drills, including tornado and intruder, are done every other month.

If a state of emergency is declared by the Escambia County Emergency Management or the weather is deteriorating and warnings have been issued by the weather bureau and people have been asked to stay off the roads, then the church staff in conjunction with the program director may make a decision about closures. We will weigh all factors involved before making our decision. This is for your safety and the safety of the children. Watch your local television for any closings.

Methodist Children's Academy follows the Escambia County School System closing of schools in emergency situations. There may also be times we need to close the center due to adverse weather conditions. Every event will be made to contact you in the event of an emergency closing.

POTTY TRAINING

Toddlers

Once your child begins to show signs of wanting to use the potty we are fully committed to the potty training process. These signs can include: being able to notify a staff member when they need to use the restroom, staying dry during most of the day in between potty breaks, and even the early signs of noticing when they have soiled their diaper.

If you feel like your child is starting to show any of these signs, we are ready to begin the potty training journey with you and your family. Here are a few tips to help during the potty training journey:

* Extra clothes are a must! Accidents will happen. Extra clothes need to include plenty of underwear, outfits, socks, and even an extra pair of shoes.

* When dressing your child for the potty training journey, always keep in mind we encourage the children to become more independent by pulling up and down their own pants, underwear and/or pull ups. This may mean changing up their daily wardrobe with pull ups the have tab sides (this makes it easier to change when accidents happen) and even elastic waist bands that can be pulled up and down easily.

* Don't be discouraged when regression occurs. Consistency in potty training is one of the keys to success, and we will continue to work with your child to get them closer to being fully potty trained.

* Also keep in mind, if minor sets backs occur and accidents are more than 3 per day, we may ask that you keep your child in pull ups for a little longer for sanitary reasons. We do ask that when sending in pull ups, that you choose to use the ones with tabs. This can be discouraging for the children during the process if they are having to be completely undressed every time an accident occurs.

Preschool (threes and fours)

* Please refer to the rate sheet if you child is not potty trained. Upon entering the preschool years (beginning in our 3 year old classrooms) we expect to see most children becoming fully potty trained, or getting very close. We strongly encourage all of our families to help us reach this milestone shortly after they enter our three year old classrooms. Please keep in mind as the children move to older classrooms, we no longer have the changing table facilities in these rooms. If we begin to notice a child that is still at a point of not verbalizing the need to use the restroom and still soiling a diaper or pull up, we may request a conference with the family to address these concerns and the possibility of keeping them out of childcare temporarily until they have reached a better understanding of using the restroom. We are always very

supportive and understanding in the rare case of a medical issue causing the potty training process to become prolonged. If you have documentation from your doctor where this is noted, please notify the teachers and office staff so we can work with you to meet your child's needs. We want every child to have a positive potty training experience while they are in our care and we appreciate all the help from our families when it comes to achieving this goal!

BIRTHDAYS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Birthdays are important and the program gives each birthday child special attention. Parents may send a special treat for the whole class if they wish. Please contact your child's teacher to discuss appropriate birthday treats.

CLOTHING AND TOYS

We play outside everyday, weather permitting, so please dress your child in appropriate play clothes. Children need to dress comfortably for the weather and the day's activities. Overalls, onesies and "hard to open" belts are discouraged in children that are potty training and older. They seem to frustrate the child and discourage self-help skills. We encourage the children to explore the environment around them. In their exploration of their surroundings, the children will get dirty. We will take precautions to prevent their clothes from being soiled, such as using paint smocks, as we can, but we will not discourage the children's imaginations or creativity.

Please bring an extra change of clothes for your child including socks and shoes. Label all personal items that are brought to the center. This should include all cups, lunch boxes, back packs, and all clothing and bedding. It has been mandated by the state that all bottles, sippy cups, and pacifiers be labeled with both first and last name.

LUNCH AND NUTRITION

Please provide a well-balanced boxed lunch for your child each day with an ice pack if necessary. If you need assistance with what to send in your child's lunch box, please ask the teachers for ideas. Morning/afternoon snacks will be provided.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND VOLUNTEERS

Because we recognize the value of the involvement of those dedicated to the enrichment of the children, it is very important to us to welcome and utilize the talents of parents, grandparents, and significant others in as many areas of the program as possible.

Volunteers help the school meet the needs of the children by sharing time and talents and making the program more flexible and thus, more child-oriented through increased personal attention and assistance. Volunteers are welcome in the areas of storytelling, special events, holidays and many other ways.

Parents are an important part of our program. It is because of your input and support that The Methodist Children's Academy continues to grow. We encourage the interaction of parents and grandparents with their child in preschool. If you would like to volunteer in the program, please let us know. There is a special place for you!

DISTRACTED ADULT PREVENTION

During the 2018 legislative session, a new law was passed that required child care facilities, family day care homes and large family child care homes to provide parents, during the months of April and September each year, with information regarding the potential for distracted adults to fail to drop off a child at the family/home and instead leave them in the adult's vehicle upon arrival at the adult's destination.

Prevention Tips

- Never leave your child alone in a car and call 911 if you see any child locked in a car. (Continued on Back)

- Make a habit of checking the front and back seat of the car before you walk away.
- Be especially mindful during hectic or busy time, schedule or route changes, and periods of emotional stress or chaos
- Create reminders by putting something in the back seat that you will need at work, school or home such as a briefcase, purse, cellphone or your left shoe.
- Keep a stuffed animal in the baby's car seat and place it on the front seat as reminder when the baby is in the back seat.
- Set a calendar reminder on your electronic device to make sure you dropped your child off at child care.
- Make it a routine to always notify your child's child care provider in advance if your child is going to be late or absent; ask them to contact you if your child hasn't arrived as scheduled.

Facts About Heatstroke

- It only takes a car 10 minutes to heat up 20 degrees and become deadly.
- Even with a window cracked, the temperature inside a vehicle can cause heatstroke.
- The body temperature of a child increases 3 to 5 times faster than an adult's body.

For more information visit MyFLFamilies.com.