

# The Mustard Seed Preschool

## Parent Handbook 2024/2025



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# Welcome to The Mustard Seed Preschool!

A ministry of St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Brick, NJ

We are excited to welcome you and your child to our program at The Mustard Seed Preschool, a ministry of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. Our dedicated staff is committed to providing a high-quality preschool experience in a nurturing, faith-based setting. We value diversity and welcome all children, ensuring equal access regardless of background or religious affiliation. Please review this handbook, which outlines both state and school policies, and feel free to contact us anytime with questions or concerns. We look forward to a fantastic school year ahead.

## *The Parable of The Mustard Seed*

Again he said, "What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."



**New Jersey's Department of Children and Families  
Office of Licensing**

**INFORMATION TO PARENTS**

Under provisions of the Manual of Requirements for Childcare Centers (N.J.A.C. 3A:52), every licensed childcare center in New Jersey must provide to parents of enrolled children written information on parent visitation rights, State licensing requirements, child abuse/neglect reporting requirements and other childcare matters. The center must comply with this requirement by reproducing and distributing to parents and staff this written statement, prepared by the Office of Licensing, Childcare & Youth Residential Licensing, in the Department of Children and Families. In keeping with this requirement, the center must secure every parent and staff member's signature attesting to his/her receipt of the information.

Our center is required by the State Childcare Center Licensing law to be licensed by the Office of Licensing (OOL), Childcare & Youth Residential Licensing, in the Department of Children and Families (DCF). A copy of our current license must be posted in a prominent location at our center. Look for it when you're in the center.

To be licensed, our center must comply with the Manual of Requirements for Childcare Centers (the official licensing regulations). The regulations cover such areas as: physical environment/life-safety; staff qualifications, supervision, and staff/child ratios; program activities and equipment; health, food and nutrition; rest and sleep requirements; parent/community participation; administrative and record keeping requirements; and others.

Our center must have on the premises a copy of the Manual of Requirements for Childcare Centers and make it available to interested parents for review. If you would like to review our copy, just ask any staff member. Parents may view a copy of the Manual of Requirements on the DCF website at <http://www.nj.gov/dcf/providers/licensing/laws/CCCmanual.pdf> or obtain a copy by sending a check or money order for \$5 made payable to the "Treasurer, State of New Jersey", and mailing it to: NJDCF, Office of Licensing, Publication Fees, PO Box 657, Trenton, NJ 08646-0657.

We encourage parents to discuss with us any questions or concerns about the policies and program of the center or the meaning, application, or alleged violations of the Manual of Requirements for Childcare Centers. We will be happy to arrange a convenient opportunity for you to review and discuss these matters with us. If you suspect our center may be in violation of licensing requirements, you are entitled to report them to the Office of Licensing toll free at 1 (877) 667-9845. Of course, we would appreciate your bringing these concerns to our attention, too.

Our center must have a policy concerning the release of children to parents or people authorized by parents to be responsible for the child. Please discuss with us your plans for your child's departure from the center.

Our center must have a policy about administering medicine and health care procedures and the management of communicable diseases. Please talk to us about these policies so we can work together to keep our children healthy.

Our center must have a policy concerning the expulsion of children from enrollment at the center. Please review this policy so we can work together to keep your child in our center.

Parents are entitled to review the center's copy of the OOL's Inspection/Violation Reports on the center, which are available soon after every State licensing inspection of our center. If there is a licensing complaint OOL/Information to Parents/May 2019 Page 2 of 2 investigation, you are also entitled to review the OOL's Complaint Investigation Summary Report, as well as any letters of enforcement or other actions taken against the center during the current licensing period. Let us know if you wish to review them and we will make them available for your review or you can view them online at <https://childcareexplorer.njccis.com/portal/>.

Our center must cooperate with all DCF inspections/investigations. DCF staff may interview both staff members and children.

Our center must post its written statement of philosophy on child discipline in a prominent location and make a copy of it available to parents upon request. We encourage you to review it and to discuss with us any questions you may have about it.

Our center must post a listing or diagram of those rooms and areas approved by the OOL for the children's use. Please talk to us if you have any questions about the center's space.

Our center must offer parents of enrolled children ample opportunity to assist the center in complying with licensing requirements and to participate in and observe the activities of the center. Parents wishing to participate in the activities or operations of the center should discuss their interest with the center director, who can advise them of what opportunities are available.

Parents of enrolled children may visit our center at any time without having to secure prior approval from the director or any staff member. Please feel free to do so when you can. We welcome visits from our parents.

Our center must inform parents in advance of every field trip, outing, or special event away from the center and must obtain prior written consent from parents before taking a child on each such trip.

Our center is required to provide reasonable accommodations for children and/or parents with disabilities and to comply with the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (LAD), P.L. 1945, c. 169 (N.J.S.A. 10:5-1 et seq.), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), P.L. 101-336 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.). Anyone who believes the center is not in compliance with these laws may contact the Division on Civil Rights in the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety for information about filing an LAD claim at (609) 292-4605 (TTY users may dial 711 to reach the

New Jersey Relay Operator and ask for (609) 292-7701), or may contact the United States Department of Justice for information about filing an ADA claim at (800) 514-0301 (voice) or (800) 514-0383 (TTY).

Our center is required, at least annually, to review the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), unsafe children's products list, ensure that items on the list are not at the center, and make the list accessible to staff and parents and/or provide parents with the CPSC website at <https://www.cpsc.gov/Recalls>. Internet access may be available at your local library. For more information call the CPSC at (800) 638-2772.

Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that an enrolled child has been or is being subjected to any form of hitting, corporal punishment, abusive language, ridicule, harsh, humiliating or frightening treatment, or any other kind of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation by any adult, whether working at the center or not, is required by State law to report the concern immediately to the State Central Registry Hotline, toll free at (877) NJ ABUSE/(877) 652-2873. Such reports may be made anonymously. Parents may secure information about child abuse and neglect by contacting: DCF, Office of Communications and Legislation at (609) 292- 0422 or go to [www.state.nj.us/dcf/](http://www.state.nj.us/dcf/).

## **The Mustard Seed Preschool's Information to Parents**

### **ARRIVAL/DROP OFF:**

Students are kindly requested not to arrive more than 5 minutes before class start time. We ask that an adult accompanies the child to the main entrance, where a staff member will be present to welcome them and assist with the check-in process. All students should be present and signed in within 15 minutes of the start of their class time. Late drop offs disrupt classmates and classroom routine. Please make every effort to drop off your child on time.

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Attendance is crucial for a child's academic success as they thrive on consistency and punctuality. It is important to ensure good attendance and on-time arrival. If your child will be absent, kindly notify the office beforehand. Students with a prolonged illness lasting 5 or more days must submit a doctor's note before returning to class, with no certainty of make-up days for extended absences.

### **CHILD ABUSE:**

All staff members are comprehensively trained to recognize indicators of child abuse and neglect and are designated as mandated reporters. In the event of suspected child abuse or neglect, or if a student discloses abuse or neglect, it is imperative that a staff member promptly reports the concerns to the NJ Abuse Hotline at 877-NJ-ABUSE. It is important to adhere to the legal obligation of reporting without requiring parental notification, as stipulated by NJ law.

## **COMMUNICATION METHODS:**

Staff will communicate with parents primarily through the ProCare Application messaging feature. All parents will receive an invitation to join the ProCare app. It is important for every parent to have access to their child's profile. Additionally, the school may use paper communication, telephone calls, emails, and in emergency situations, text messaging to communicate with you. It is important that you have alternate emergency contacts for your child should you be unavailable.

## **DISCIPLINE:**

Our policy is to provide an environment of love and encouragement which will enable children to resolve their differences and grow in social skills and self-control. With careful planning our curriculum takes into consideration the child's development and helps avoid many potential situations concerning discipline.

In case of a minor occurrence (with taking turns, sharing, excluding a child, etc.), we encourage the children to work out differences under the direction of a staff member. Sometimes it is necessary to redirect a child or temporarily remove them from an activity. Another positive way we handle misbehavior is to provide the child with the opportunity to visit our calm down corner located in the main hallway. This allows the student to center themselves and affords the teacher an individualized opportunity to talk about the behavior and to gain insight into its cause. If a child repeatedly misbehaves after being spoken with, parents will be called in for a conference and a plan of action will be decided upon.

Aggressive behavior is not acceptable and will be handled immediately by removal of the child from the activity. Children who hit, kick, bite, or otherwise intentionally inflict injury upon another student or staff member will be sent home for the remainder of the school day after 3 incidents. Students who continue to behave violently in the classroom will be dismissed from the program at the discretion of the preschool director and staff.

Children are always spoken to in a calm, quiet manner. No child will be disciplined for misbehavior by the deprivation of rest, emotional responses, food, or outdoor play.

## **DRESS CODE:**

It is important for children to come prepared for active play each day by avoiding unsafe footwear like flip flops or open-toed shoes. As we aim to go outside daily, weather permitting, please ensure children have suitable outerwear for colder days. Additionally, kindly label coats, hats and gloves with the child's name for easy identification.

## **ENRICHMENT:**

Children will be exposed to art, movement, music and cooking as well as other enrichment opportunities each day. Enrichment opportunities are included with your tuition. Additional enrichment programs may become available at an additional cost if done outside of normal school hours.

## **EXPULSION:**

Unfortunately, there are sometimes reasons we must expel a child from our program either on a short term or permanent basis. We will do everything possible to work with the family of the child(ren) to prevent this policy from being enacted. The following are reasons we may have to expel or suspend a child from this center:

### **IMMEDIATE CAUSES FOR EXPULSION:**

- The child is at risk of causing serious injury to themselves or other children.
- Parent threatens physical harm or intimidating actions toward staff members, other parents, or any child(ren).
- Parent exhibits verbal abuse to staff, especially in front of enrolled children.

### **PARENTAL ACTIONS FOR CHILD'S EXPULSION:**

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payments.
- Failure to complete or return required forms for enrollment.
- Habitual tardiness when picking up your child.
- Verbal abuse to staff.

### **CHILD'S ACTIONS FOR EXPULSION:**

- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time.
- Uncontrollable tantrums/ angry outbursts.
- Ongoing physical or verbal abuse to staff or other children.
- Excessive hitting, kicking, biting, pinching, or other forms of physical harm.

## **PROACTIVE ACTIONS THAT CAN BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO PREVENT EXPULSION**

- Staff will try to redirect children from negative behavior.
- Staff will reassess the classroom environment, appropriateness of activities, and supervision.
- Staff will always use positive methods and language while disciplining children.
- Staff will praise appropriate behaviors.
- Staff will consistently apply appropriate consequences for rules. Child will be given verbal warnings.
- Child will be given time to regain control.
- Child's disruptive behavior will be documented and maintained in confidentiality.
- Parent/guardian will be notified verbally and given written copies of the disruptive behaviors that might lead to expulsion.
- The director, classroom staff and parent/guardian will have a conference(s) to discuss how to promote positive behaviors.
- The parent/guardian will be given literature or other resources regarding methods of improving behavior.

## **SCHEDULE OF EXPULSION:**

If the remedial actions above have not worked, the child's parent/guardian will be advised verbally and in writing about the child's or parent's behavior warranting an expulsion. An expulsion action is meant to be a period of time so that the parent/ guardian may work on the child's behavior or to

come to an agreement about future childcare with the center. Parents will be informed regarding the length of the expulsion period as well as the expected behavioral changes required for the child or parent to return to the center.

The parent/guardian will be given a specific expulsion date that allows the parent sufficient time to seek alternate childcare (approximately one to two weeks' notice depending on risk to other children's welfare or safety). Failure of the child/parent to satisfy the terms of the plan may result in permanent expulsion from the center.

It is the preschool's policy to require a full month's tuition payment for the month in which a child is expelled, regardless of the date of expulsion.

### **A CHILD WILL NOT BE EXPELLED**

If a child's parent(s):

- Make a complaint to the Office of Licensing regarding a center's alleged violations of the licensing requirements.
- Report abuse or neglect occurring at the center.
- Question the center regarding policies and procedures.
- Without giving the parent sufficient time to make other childcare arrangements, except in cases of immediate cause for expulsion.

It is the policy of The Mustard Seed Preschool that no reimbursement of tuition or fees will be given if a child is expelled from our program.

### **EXTRA CLOTHES:**

In the event of an accident, each child should have a labeled plastic bag containing a complete change of clothing stored in their locker/cubby for easy access. We strongly recommend that every student carries a spare change of clothes, irrespective of their potty-training progress, as accidents can occur, and we want to ensure your child can promptly change into clean clothing. Soiled clothes will be returned to parents in a sealed Ziplock bag.

### **FINANCIAL OBLIGATION:**

Tuition must be paid online through ProCare with an ACH bank deposit. Cash and checks will only be accepted on a case-by-case basis. There is no fee passed onto parents when using ProCare.

It is a parent/guardian's obligation to pay tuition on time and in the full amount. Your student's full monthly tuition is due by the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month. We will provide a 7-day grace period for monthly payments. If tuition is not paid in full by the 7<sup>th</sup> of each month, a \$25 late fee will be imposed for that month. If tuition remains unpaid by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, a written warning notice for termination of enrollment will be given to the parent. Students may not return to school until payment or payment arrangements have been made.



If a family runs into a financial hardship regarding tuition, please notify the Director ***before*** your payment is due. The church may have resources available to help including information on registering for subsidized care, payment plan options, and scholarship opportunities.

Any returned checks / insufficient funds / cancelled payments are subject to a \$35 fee.

### **HEALTH RECORDS:**

All students are required to receive a physical prior to the start of school and annually thereafter. A physician is to fill out the required health form and return it before the first day of school. In addition to the completed health form, all students must submit their immunization records, or a letter stating the family's right to refusal along with their student's blank immunization record. All records must be kept up to date throughout the year.

### **ILLNESS:**

Please carefully read our policy on the management of staff and student illness.

#### ***Policy on the Management of Illness***

If a staff member or child exhibit any of the following symptoms, they should not attend the center. If such symptoms occur while at the center, the staff or child will be removed from the group, and parents will be called to take the child home.

- Severe pain or discomfort
- Episode of vomiting
- Elevated temperature of 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Lethargy
- Severe coughing
- Yellow eyes or jaundiced skin or neck stiffness
- Red eyes with discharge
- Infected, untreated skin patches or rashes
- Difficult or rapid breathing
- Skin rashes in conjunction with fever or behavior changes
- Skin lesions that are weeping or bleeding
- Mouth sores with drooling
- Actively draining sinuses that are not clear in color

Individuals, whether staff members or children, who are sent home from the center due to illness are required to observe a 24-hour period before returning, unless accompanied by a doctor's note. Subsequently, upon exhibiting symptom-free status or obtaining a healthcare provider's attestation that they no longer pose a significant health risk to themselves or others, re-entry to the center is permitted, barring any contraindications stipulated by local health authorities or the Department of Health.

Furthermore, individuals who experience illness-related absences exceeding three consecutive days or aggregate to ten days within any thirty-day period, are obliged to furnish a doctor's note upon returning to the school premises. These measures are implemented to

uphold the health and welfare standards of our community, aligning with best practices recommended by relevant health authorities.

**EXCLUDABLE COMMUNICABLE DISEASES:** A child or staff member who contracts an excludable communicable disease may not return to the center without a health care provider's note stating that the child presents no risk to himself/herself or others. Note: If a child has chicken pox, a note from the parent stating that all sores have dried and crusted is required. If a child is exposed to any excludable disease at the center, parents will be notified in writing.

**COMMUNICABLE DISEASE REPORTING GUIDELINES:** Some excludable communicable diseases must be reported to the health department by the center. The Department of Health's Reporting Requirements for Communicable Diseases and Work-Related Conditions Quick Reference Guide, a complete list of reportable excludable communicable diseases, can be found at:  
[http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/reportable\\_disease\\_magnet.pdf](http://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/reportable_disease_magnet.pdf).

**STITCHES & BROKEN BONES:**

Any student receiving stitches or experiencing any broken bones within 24 hours of school meeting times cannot attend school for another 24-hour period. Upon return, student must have a doctor's note stating:

- 1) Allowable activities
- 2) Participation restrictions
- 3) Medical approval to attend school

**IMMUNIZATIONS:**

All inoculations need to be current and in compliance with State requirements. Any child whose record is not current and in compliance with health standards may be asked to leave the program until the form is turned in. Should your child's health record show a need for a particular inoculation, you will be advised and will have 2-3 weeks from that time to see your physician and meet the requirements set by the state. If a family declines to have their child immunized for any reason, a written letter must be provided to the school stating such in order to be compliant with NJ office of Licensing requirements.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY:**

Generally, The Mustard Seed Preschool will follow the Brick Township School District's closing/delayed openings due to inclement weather. However, if our grounds are deemed unsafe by the school Director or the Board of Trustees, we may deviate from Brick Townships schedule. The following policy will be in effect concerning inclement weather closings, early dismissal and/or delayed opening: **Closings** - Parents will receive notification if The Mustard Seed Preschool is closed for the day because of severe weather. **Delayed Openings**- in the case of delayed openings due to inclement weather the school shall open at 10:00 AM. **Early dismissals** – if the school needs to close early, we will contact parents to notify them of the early release time.

## **MEDICATION:**

It is the policy of the preschool to not dispense medication to a child. Parents or caregivers may be called in to administer over the counter/prescribed medications if they need to be given during school. However, lifesaving medication will be monitored and administered if a student is under life threatening conditions without it. This includes the use of inhalers, insulin, and epi pens.

Medication will only be given when ordered by the child's health care provider and with written consent of the child's parent/legal guardian. A "Permission to Give Medication in Childcare" form is required. All information on the Permission Form must be completed before the medication can be given. Copies of this form can be requested from the director. Additional paperwork or requirements regarding medication may be needed to safely administer them to your child.

**NOTIFICATION OF WITHDRAWAL:** Families who decide to withdraw their child from The Mustard Seed Preschool prior to the end of the school year are required to provide written notice to the school director at least 30 days prior to the intended date of withdrawal. This allows for adequate time to adjust enrollment and staffing. Upon receipt of written notice, parents will be responsible for paying tuition for the remaining 30-day period. The prorated amount will be calculated based on the daily rate of childcare at the current tuition rate and will be owed before departure. This policy ensures a fair and timely resolution for all parties involved and helps to maintain a smooth and efficient transition for our families.

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT:**

Our school welcomes parent involvement. There are several ways you can be involved in our school:

- Occasional classroom helper
- Guest reader
- Career day speaker
- Share a special talent or skill
- Buildings and ground help
- Bulletin board helper
- Serve on the school board as the parent representative

## **PARKING LOT:**

Cars are to be parked in designated parking spots within the back lot. Please do not park in the driveway or fire lane. Be mindful of others when pulling in and out of the parking spot.

## **PICK-UP:**

Students are to be picked up promptly at the end of their school day. We realize that a late pick up might occasionally occur due to an emergency, but excessive lateness will result in a \$25 late pick up fee each day a parent is late. Habitual late pickups are a cause for expulsion. Please communicate with the school if you are running late on any particular day.

Each child may be released only to the child's parent(s) or person(s) authorized by the parent(s) to take the child from the center and to assume responsibility for the child in an emergency if the parent(s) cannot be reached. If a non-custodial parent has been denied access, or granted limited access, to a child by a court order, the center shall secure documentation to that effect, maintain a copy on file, and comply with the terms of the court order.

With respect to NJ regulations, a written plan specifying the procedures to be followed if the parent(s) or other person(s) authorized by the parent(s) fails to pick up or is late in picking up a child at the time of the center's daily closing states the following:

1. The child is to be supervised at all times by staff members or after-care personnel.
2. Every effort is to be made by staff members to contact the custodial parent(s) and/or other person(s) authorized by the parent(s) to care for the child.
3. An hour or more after closing time, and provided that other arrangements for releasing the child to his/her parent or authorized person have failed and the staff member cannot continue to supervise the child at the center, the staff member shall call the Division's 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-792-8610) to seek assistance in caring for the child until his/her custodial parent(s) or other person(s) authorized by the custodial parent(s) is available to care for the child.

In addition, if the parent(s) or person(s) appears to be physically and/or emotionally impaired to the extent that, in the judgement of the Director and/or staff member, the child would be placed at risk or harm if released to such an individual, the center may ensure that:

- The child may not be released to such an impaired individual.
- Staff members attempt to contact the child's other parent, or an alternative person(s) authorized by the parent(s); and
- If the center is unable to make alternate arrangements, a staff member shall call the Division's 24-hour child abuse hotline at the number

### **SEPARATION:**

Some children have trouble saying goodbye to parents when coming to school. We will do our best to help the child transition to their school day. Several calming strategies will be used to help children with separation anxieties. Parents are requested to keep their drop-offs and pick-ups timely and efficient. If you have any concerns, please reach out to us.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA STATEMENT:**

This social media policy applies to parents as well as staff of The Mustard Seed Preschool. This policy includes but is not limited to social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, snap chat, etc.), Twitter, You Tube, etc. It is our responsibility to offer a safe and secure environment for our children. As such it is essential to maintain the privacy and security of all our families.

- A photo release must be signed by a parent/guardian giving permission for the school to use their child's photo in any publications used for promotion or advertisement for the school. Posts will not contain personal information about the child, including their name, classroom, or other identifying information other than "student" at The Mustard Seed Preschool.

- No photos taken of the children within the school setting or at special events by visitors, parents/guardians, or staff are to be posted for public viewing, except those of your own child.
- No public discussions are to be held or comments made on social media sites regarding the preschool children, parents, or staff that could be construed to have any negative impact on the school's reputation or that would offend staff, parent or child associated with the school.
- Staff may not take pictures of students on their personal devices except when using the ProCare application. Photos of students may not be kept on personal camera rolls. Staff are required to delete any photos of children regularly and may never share photos with anyone except the school director.
- Staff members may not 'friend' request parents or caregivers, nor accept friend requests from parents or caregivers of current students.
- Parents/Caregivers should not send friend requests to staff.
- Please report any staff/parents who request access to your personal social media accounts to the director of the preschool.
- Parents and staff should not communicate with each other outside of the ProCare application, except in emergency situations. Any communication done outside of the ProCare application by staff members needs to be reported to the Director.
- Parents and staff should report any concerns to the Director.

Any staff member, parent or volunteer found to be posting any of the above may face disciplinary action up to and including termination.

### **TOYS:**

Please do not send toys to school. We cannot guarantee the safety of your child's personal toys and it can cause disruption to the classroom. Any toys or trinkets children bring in will be sent home with parents or required to remain in the child's backpack.

Additionally, we encourage students to focus on their learning and socialization during school hours. Bringing toys to school can be a distraction and may lead to lost or damaged items. We appreciate your cooperation in helping us maintain a safe and productive learning environment.

### **TRANSPORTATION POLICY:**

Any student arriving at or leaving the school grounds must be transported from an authorized individual listed on the student's registration form. This includes parents, guardians, and emergency contacts. If another person is picking up your child, you must notify the school in writing before the pickup occurs. Students will not be released to anyone not on their approved list. The Mustard Seed Preschool will not provide transportation to any student. All students coming to and being picked up from school must be in proper car seats for their age and size per NJ law.

**VISITORS:**

Visitors are currently welcome by appointment only. If you know someone who would like to see our school, please have them arrange a visit. Visitors will not be admitted into the school building during school hours.

**GENERAL DISCLOSURE:** Failure to enforce a specific policy on a case-by-case basis does not negate the policy or its future enforcement. The Mustard Seed Preschool aims to work with families as much as we can when we are able. Leniency is at the discretion of the school director and school board.

