CHILDREN FIRST
POLICIES FOR PARENTS

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HOURS AND CALENDAR

Children First follows a calendar based on (although not identical to) the Durham Public School calendar, including summer vacation. Children attend school Monday through Thursday from 8:30 to 1:00, ending their day with lunch. On Fridays, children have the day off, and teachers plan, prepare the environment, document children's work, and do administrative tasks.

TUITION POLICY

For information on tuition and tuition aid, please visit www.childrenfirstschool.org

LATE PAYMENT AND NON-PAYMENTS

You will receive an invoice in your family mailbox for tuition along with any extra charges for the month (pizza potlucks, late arrival fees, etc.) on or just before the first of each month. To pay your bill, simply put a check in Donna's mailbox by the fifth of the month (or the first weekday after the 5th). Payments after that day are considered late. As a very small non profit, Children First does not have the financial flexibility to absorb the impact of late payments.

Each family will be allowed one late payment (payment after the fifth of the month in which the payment is due, but before the tenth) with no penalty. We know everybody forgets sometimes! For subse quent late payments, we charge a $20 penalty.

After the 10th of the month, there is a $5 penalty each day for late payment. In other words, tuition paid on the 11th will include a $25 penalty, on the 12th, a $30 penalty, and so on. Families who are in financial diffi culty are encouraged to talk with Donna about working out a payment plan, but must ask before payment is late in order to avoid penalties and must then meet the terms of any payment plan agreed upon.

Families will be asked to pay either annually, quarterly or over 10 months in their standard contract. If a family needs to amortize their payments over 12 months, they may do so by special arrangement, with a balloon payment at 10 months (e.g. tuition will be fully paid before summer break).

If no satisfactory plan is put in place regarding late payment of tuition, or if the family is not following through on plans made about late tuition, the matter will be referred to the board for review.

WITHDRAWAL

We feel strongly that families should be at Children First if and only if they feel confident that our program is a good match, and we want all our famil ies to have the freedom to make early education choices that are right for them, even if that should mean leaving us. At the same time, the Children First budget is based on full enrollment. Having a family leave the school with little notice places us at considerable financial risk and jeopardizes the situation of the remaining families in the school. For this reason, we require that families who wish to withdraw give at least three months written notice. If a family decides to leave before the three month notice period is over, they will still be responsible for paying tuition for the three months unless we can find another family who accepts the space and begins paying tuition sooner than that. In this situation, we would make every effort to fill a space as soon as possible to avoid placing financial hardship on a departing family.

TERMINATION OF SERVICE

Under certain circumstances , the Children First Board of Directors may decide to terminate services to a family:

- Nonpayment of tuition.
- Child behavior that is consistently posing serious physical or emotional difficulty to other children or to teachers and that has not improved after consultations between teachers and parents. If this problem occurs, we will help parents with appropriate placement and referrals for the child.
- Habitual violation of any policies discussed in this handbook , including persistent late pick-ups.

LUNCH

Children bring their lunches from home. Child care licensing rules require that kids' lunches contain 1 serving of milk, 1 protein-rich food, 2 servings of veg etables or fruits, and 1 serving of grain. These same rules also prohibit us from serving children "junk food" like chips, candy, sugared dr inks or other desserts.
State licensing actually requires that we offer your child milk if you do not send it. Please let us know if your child CANNOT drink milk, and we will have you write something to exempt your child from this requirement. We strongly recommend avoiding juices- kids tend to drink them fast and first, which affects how much of the actual food they will eat

There is a shelf in the office where you will store

your child's lunchbox. If you bring things that need to be kept cold, you can just use an "ice pack" in your lunchbox. If you want to send warm foods, you're welcome to send a thermos container and just set it on the shelf beside the lunchbox. Please mark both the lunchbox and the thermos with your child's name and/or sign. You can't imagine the pathos of food getting into the wrong hands at lunch! We will unpack the food from your child's lunchbox and put it on his or her plate on the tab le. Children will pick a unique plate from our assorted set of 12 that will be theirs throughout the year.

SNACK

Children First provides snack, some combination of whole grain bread, cereal and crackers ; fruits and vegetables ; and cheese or nut butters. Snack is available to children all morning. Please let us know about your child's allergies and dietary restrictions and we will adjust what we serve as needed.

ARRIVAL

At arrival, we ask you to

- Stop and read the "morning message" with your child. It will be posted daily on a white board outside the office door,and will contain information about the day. This is a terrific literacy practice, as well as an informational exercise . Your child will soon be recognizing other children's signs, then names, and possibly other words that are repeated often on the message.
- Quick, before he or she gets super busy! - Help your child check his/her mailbox and read his/her mail - this will be a huge help in establishing the culture of written communication that is so valuable as early childhood literacy curriculum . We're also posting the kids' calendar and sign-ups in the office, so you can check that with your child, too.
- Fill out a quick check-in form in the office - this lets us know if you're going to be at a different phone number than usual; and who will pick up your child and when .
- Put your lunchbox on the lunchbox shelf , and use one of our sharpies to label it if you need to.
- Scan the bulletin board for announcements , sign ups and information on the curriculum that is developing in the classroom.
- Check your family 's mailbox - that's where you'll find newsletters , invoices, notes from other parents, etc. - and most important of all -notes and presents from your child!
- Check in with one of the teachers - between

8:30 and 9:00 is prime time for asking questions , sharing information, etc. - our intention is to be primarily focused on families and transition between 8:30 and 9:00. At 9:00, we will shift gears and move into the flow of our morning with the kids- ideally, we would have helped all the kids with their good-byes by 9:00. If you are still here - perhaps you have a plan about spending time at school that morning, or perhaps - alas! - you are just running late - we will try to resist the tempta tion to visit w ith you once we've begun to work with children or intently observe their work and play (just as we try to resist the temptation to visit with one another).

- And most important - say good-bye to your child before you leave. We hope you and your child will develop a comforting and pleasant ritual around saying good-bye - we'll talk more about this at your orientation visit.

Parents sometimes ask, "Does it matter what time I arrive with my child?" We would say, "Yes and no." School opens officially at 8:30 AM. Teachers will be here seting up around 8:00 so that we are ready for the children when they arrive. If you arrive early, you and your child are welcome to spend some time together on the playground until we open the doors.

Teachers expect to spend the half hour between 8:30 and 9:00 focused on helping children transition and settle into activity; checking in and visiting with fami lies; and helping children prepare morning snack. By 9:00 , we hope to be fully focused on facilitating children's learning activities and play.

What this means for families is that if you arrive between 8:30 and 9:00 , you'll arrive at the time when the energy and activity of the classroom is focused on the transition . If you arrive later than that, the energy of the classroom will be more settled and "in process" already. We notice that often children are more hesi tant and feel less ownership in activities , or struggle more to enter ongoing play when they arrive later than other children.

So, ideally, we'd like to have everyone here and settled in by 9:00. On the other hand, we hate the "morning rush" as much as anyone , and don't want to make mornings harder for families than they have to be. Also, we love that sometimes parents and kids are able to spend special time together in the morning, depending on the parent's work schedule.

If at any point, we notice that your child seems more comfortable with the transition when he or she arrives earlier, we'll let you know what we

observe and think about it together.

END OF THE DAY

Official pick-up time is 1:00. Beginningat 1:00 or a bit before, we'll be helping children who are still eating finish lunch, gather their things, and get dressed to go home. Unless the weather is very grim, we' ll be out on the playground. Teachers will be available to check in briefly with parents once most the children are outside and will stay outside until 1:15 to help with the transition .

Although we expect kids will be tired (especially those that still nap), families and kids are welcome to hang out as long as they like on the playground, playing and visiting. We ask that they not come back into the classroom to play because teachers will begin meeting, planning , documentation and classroom preparation work immediately follow ing good-byes. Obviously, it's fine to pop in briefly and use the bathroom , or check your mailbox if you need to.

We ask the kids and families to take quite seriously their responsibility for leaving the playground ready for the next day. This is important practically, because teachers have a lot of work to do between 8:00 and 8:30 to prepare for the day, and cleaning up a playground is more than we can reasonably manage; also, if we get rain overnight playground materials may get ruined from being left out. It is also important as part of our children's curriculum - when they pitch in, and see you pitch in, to clean up their own play spaces, they learn respect, responsibility and community.

Families have found that this playground time is really valuable for them as a time to connect with other parents, with their own kids and with other people's kids, and decided last year that it's well worth the clean-up effort. We also learned, over the year, to do some things that make it a little easier to clean up. Some parts of the playground - the water deck, the dress-ups, the woodworking tools, the work table,etc. are closed in the afternoons, so that clean up is more manageable. Also , the playground is really well organized and labeled, so you can tell where things are supposed to go. Generally, we ask that every child and family get in the habit of putting away a few things before they leave, so that the last family doesn't have a huge job to do all alone.

LATE PICK-UP FEES

Because we place a high value on helping children transition and speaking with each family at pick-up time, we rely on parents' timely arrival at pick-up. If parents are late picking up, teachers must supervise children's play and cannot focus

on check in with families. Therefore , we try to be extremely consistentand clear about pick-up time, and about late pick-up fees . There is a five-minute grace period. Pick-ups after 1:05 by the Children First clock are considered late. Charges are 2.50 for pick-up within the first 10 minutes (by 1:15) and $5.00 per fifteen minutes after that.
If you are unavoidably delayed, we suggest using your roster, which includes phone numbers for all parents at home and work, and finding a parent who will agree to be in charge of your child until you can get there. This strategy has helped many families in the past, and works fine for teachers, too. The "parent in charge" simply needs to let us know , or you can call to tell us who will be watching your child on the playground until you can come. Please don't call and ask us to make arrangements with other parents, though - we're pretty busy at that time of day, and don't feel comfortable "brokering" those agreements.

SPEAKING WITH TEACHERS

One of our goals is to balance our availability to adults with our commitment to genuinely focus on our interactions with kids. We have time built into the schedule every day for conversations with parents - early mornings and at pick-up time. If we are busy with the kids, we are likely to arrange to talk to you later. Please know that in either case we definitely want you to speak with us right away if you have a concern or question. It's also OK to e-mail, to call us at home, or leave us a note on our mailboxes in the office asking us to call you.

GETTING INFORMATION

You will get summaries of what is happening in the classroom generally in weekly e-mails, and our "curriculum projections" are posted on the big bulletin board in front of my desk - these are revised after each round of parent conferences.

Your child will have a Portfolio, stored in the office when you don't have it at home. In this binder we collect a variety of examples of each child's work. We save artwork; photographs of block buildings, building set constructions, clay creations, woodworking projects, etc.; picture or written accounts of pretend play; samples of writing from work on reading words; and photographs of special moments, like the first time climbing the loft ladder.

We will update this notebook once every couple of weeksand send it home with your child on Thursday afternoons so you can enjoy looking at it together on the weekend. Please return it again early in the week, so it will be here for us to refer to and enjoy during the week.

When you come in the mornings, you may also find examples of your child's work on the walls or shelves - we'll try to remember to point out what's new.

Work that does not go into the portfolio or that has come down from the wall will go home in backpacks or be put in your family's mailbox to take home.

BIRTHDAYS

At a Children First birthday, children cooperate to make a crown for the birthday child, and spend the morning searching for the "birthday ball" full of small treasures that the Children First Birthday Fairy has hidden somewhere in the school. Meeting is devoted to celebrating the Birthday Child year by year, and families are invited to jo in us to share photographs and memories from each year of the child's life. Often, the birthday family brings in a special snack or dessert to share.

Children often make cards for each other at school; we prefer that they do not exchange presents here. Sometimes children have home birthday parties which include friends from school. Please-if you publicly invite any children from our class, invite them all. The feeling of community we work so hard to nurture really suffers when some children feel excluded. Or, if you prefer a smaller party, please make the arrangements outside of school hours.

HEALTH RECORDS

Each enrolled child must have on file a record of a physical examination and documentation of state-required immunizations. Parents must also complete an Emergency Information form, plus a standing permission form allow ing teachers to administer syrup of ipecac if necessary in emergenc ies, and sunscreen and bug repellent on a daily basis in warm weather. These forms must be updated annually.

MEDICATION

Parents are always welcome to come in and give children medicine themselves if they wish. Teachers will administer medicine to your child at your request , as long as you...

- Complete , sign, and date your permission for us to administer medicine on your child's daily check-in form. along with complete information about times and dosage.
- Bring prescription medicine in its original con tainer with dosage directions on it.
- Place the medication out of reach of children on the medicine shelf in the bathroom, or in the refrig erator lock-box .

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND FIRST AID

Our teachers are certified in CPR and basic first aid and will administer minor treatment as needed.

In the event of a possibly serious injury or illness, you and your designated personal physician will be notified immediately. If we cannot reach you, we will call one of the emergency contacts listed on your emergency information form.

If the child requires immediate transport to a hospital, we will call an ambulance and go to the hospital you have indicated on your emergency forms. A teacher will accompany the child to the hospital and stay with the child until a parent arrives.

MONTHLY SAFETY DRILLS

Monthly drills include a fire drill, in which all the children practice vacating the building immediately; a CPR drill, in which teachers practice CPR skills; fire safety checks, including a check of smoke detectors and fire extingu ishers ; and a monthly playground safety check.

CHILD-ABUSE REPORTING PROCEDURES

By North Carolina law, we are required to report sus pected cases of child abuse and neglect. If such cases arise, the Administrator will notify the Protective Services Unit of the Department of Social Services .

IF YOUR CHILD IS ILL OVERNIGHT OR BEFORE SCHOOL

If your child is, or has been, ill, and you are uncertain about whether he or she should be attending school, please call before bringing your child in. It's very awkward for both children and teachers to have children arrive, only to be "sent home" because they may infect others.

If there's any question about what to do, we will consult our American Academy of Pediatrics/ American Public Health Association (AAP/APHA) guidelines . If necessary, we will also call our pediatric health con sultant for advice, and get back to you.

IF YOUR CHILD BECOMES ILL AT SCHOOL

If your child exhibits symptoms of illness at School, we will separate him or her from the other children, and a teacher will call you at work and tell you about the child's condition. If the child has a fever over 101 degrees, or exhibits symptoms which our AAP/APHA guidelines say may be serious orr highly contagoius, we will ask you to pick him/ her up immediately.

Sometimes a child's symptoms are less severe or not as easily measured as a high temperature , but are seriously interfering with his/her ability to cope with normal routines at school (e.g., the child is crying constantly and needs to be held all morning; the child seems exhausted and wants only to lie down; the child is complaining of pain frequently and we are having trouble making him/her comfortable). In these cases, teachers will contact parents and discuss the situation with them. Teachers will weigh whatever information parents are able to give about the child's condition, consult with each other, and make a decision about what to do next.

Sometimes, we will decide that because we are able to adjust routines and are clear about what the child needs to be comfortable, the child will be able to finish the day at school, or stay with us for at least a while longer. Other times, either because of the child's condition or the needs of the group as a whole, we will have to ask that parents come and pick the child up as soon as possible.

IF YOUR CHILD HAS A CONTAGIOUS CONDITION

We would like to know immediately if your child has contracted or been exposed to a contagious condition like giardia, chicken pox, measles, impetigo, lice, etc. Any suspected cases of contagious disease will be brought to other parents' attention as soon as possible.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Here is a list of some common problems and how we handle them:

- Chicken pox-If you suspect chicken pox, keep your child at home until you've confirmed a diagnosis one way or the other. If your child does have chicken pox, he/she may return to school six days after onset, or when all of the pox have scabbed over. In mild cases with only a few sores and rapid resolution, an otherwise healthy child may

be able to return sooner with permission of the child's health care provider.

- Conjunctivitis-The child may return 24 hours after beginning treatment.
- Diarrhea-Children with uncontrolled diarrhea pose a significant contagion risk and must stay home until the diarrhea stops.
- Head lice-Don't panic! Occasionally a child will pick up head lice. We suggest that you have your pediatrician prescribe treatment instead of using one of the harsh over-the-counter varieties. Your child may return to School as soon as he/she has been treated.
- Impetigo (pink eye)-The child may return 24 hours after treatment has begun.
- Rash with fever or behavior change-The child may return to school once a health care provider determines the condition is non-contagious.
- Strep throat-Children with strep may return when they have no fever, and no sooner than 24 hours after they begin antibiotics.
- Vomiting-Children who have vomited two or more times in 24 hours must stay home until vomit ing resolves or until the child's physician deter mines that the illness is non-communicable and the child is not in danger of dehydration.