



First Step PreSchool, Inc.



Infantcare

Childcare

Preschool

Before/After School

PARENT HANDBOOK

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to create a positive, challenging learning environment that enables children to develop their abilities and interests socially, emotionally and academically.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our philosophy is based on the humanistic approach in dealing with the child's physical, emotional, social and intellectual growth. We do this through a developmentally appropriate program. We believe that children develop and learn best through creative play.

Young children are active learners who learn through hands-on experiences of their own choosing. They benefit from supportive interactions with teachers who provide them with stimulating materials and ample time to explore their environment and to interact with their peers.

The greatest learning achievement for a child is success. In making learning a lifelong joy, our goals are to develop confidence, enthusiasm and a genuine enjoyment in the total learning process. Each child has a beautiful potential to love, laugh and learn.

DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

First Step Preschool is committed to the full utilization of all human resources and to a policy of equality towards children. First Step Preschool will not discriminate against children or their families on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability.

ENROLLMENT POLICY

First Step Preschool promotes the enrollment of children from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds as well as from diverse communities. First Step Preschool prides itself in providing a wonderful environment for all children and admits all children. We service children 6 weeks to school age. Infants will stay together for a period of 18 months if they begin as a newborn.

OPERATION POLICY

First Step Preschool is open weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m, year round.

First Step Preschool is closed on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King Jr Day
- President's Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Fourth of July
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving and the day after Thanksgiving
- The week between Christmas and New Years
- Juneteenth
- 3 Days in late August for mandatory Professional Development for Staff

Children on the School Readiness Grant- If your child is on the School Readiness Grant they must be here consistently and attend for a minimum of 6 hours per day, 5 days per week, for 50 weeks of the school year.

Alternative Care Policy- If you need help finding care for your child when we are closed please call 211. We can also provide you with numbers of our staff who babysit for children outside of work.

Preschool Waiver- Pursuant Public Act 19-121-Section 14, All children entering our preschool room who are younger than 36 months of age must have a written authorization from the child's parent or guardian and the director to attend. A sample form can be accessed on the Office Of Early Childhoods website:

<https://www.ctoec.org/storage/2019/10/Parent-Director-Authorization-to-Enroll-Child-Under-3.pdf>

We have our own form for this that we will have parent's sign.

If severe weather occurs during the course of the day making travel hazardous, you will be called to come and pick up your child early. In the event that inclement weather forces us to not open the school for the day, it will be announced as a school closing on WFSB (channel 3 TV) as well as our Procure App and an emergency text message will go out.

Supervision- All children will be supervised at all times by both sight and sound, this includes while we are both indoors and outdoors, while children are bathrooming, and during nap time. The ratios in our building are 1 staff to every 10 children in our Preschool and School Age room, and 1 staff to every 4 children in our infant and toddler rooms. The Preschool and School Age room can have up to 20 children enrolled daily. The Infants and toddlers can have up to 8 children enrolled in their classrooms daily.

Staff monitor how many children they have in their room by taking attendance throughout the day. They count heads when leaving the room and returning. They assure the children are signed in and out on our Procure app (another way attendance is monitored throughout the day).

Arrival and Departure Time

Arrival begins at 7 am and ends promptly at 9 am. The center closes for the day at 5:30 pm. Children should be brought to their classrooms. Parents **MUST** sign their children in on the Procure App. Teachers are available if you need to speak to them. **All children must be in the building by 9 a.m.** Having a 9 a.m. cut off for arrival time allows the classroom to get settled and start their day in a timely manner. It allows us to take the daily attendance and move staff around to cover other classrooms if we have staff out for the day. It allows us to get our lunch count early in the day and report to our vendors. It allows you as parents to prepare for public school drop off which will end at 8:50 a.m. If your child has a doctor appointment in the morning they must be in by 11 am to attend for the day.

If you are running late in the morning please call to let us know. Failure to follow our cut off time can result in your child not being able to attend for the day at the discretion of the supervisor in charge.

When you pick your child up, please assist your child with coats, hats, etc. Be sure to **sign your child out** on the Procure App. It is important that you establish a consistent departure time for your child.

Children learn routines quickly and feel more secure knowing their parents will arrive at the same time every day. A child will watch other children leave with their parents and will start to look for their own. First Step Preschool is open until 5:30 pm. If you are running late, please call to let us know. If you know ahead of time that your pickup will be different from the usual time, let us know.

If you have not arrived by 5:30pm, we will call the persons you have designated as your emergency alternates to pick up your child. If you are late 3 times, on the 4th time (and any time after) you will be charged a late fee of \$10 for every 15 minutes. If there becomes an issue with a child being picked up late consistently we reserve the right to ask the family to leave the program. The staff attends training during the week at night that are mandatory so we need your help in getting them to their training in a timely manner. We also have several staff who have second jobs they need to get to and who also have young children who have extracurricular activities to attend.

Two (2) Staff over 18 years of age will always be in the building during departure at night.

Failure to contact First Step Preschool regarding your tardiness forces us to abide by state law: **A child is considered abandoned and the police must be notified if a parent is more than 30 minutes late.**

When you enter or leave the building please do not open or hold the door open for anyone else. We do not let strangers in our building. Anyone that enters that is not familiar to the staff will be asked for identification.

Evacuation Procedures

If at any time we have to evacuate the center our first evacuation spot is the fence of our playgrounds unless instructed to go to a different location by emergency personnel. All classrooms have an evacuation door to their playground except for the infants who will go out their side door using an evacuation crib to the playground. While the fire alarm is going off no one can enter or leave the building. If we have to evacuate further, we would go to the rock wall in the back of the building. If the evacuation should be prolonged we will begin calling you to pick your children up. If we are in a situation where families are not able to make it safely to our center we will evacuate the children by bus to Company A Firehouse where we will dismiss the children to their families or emergency contacts.

Parking Lot Safety

When picking your children up please be sure to park in a designated spot in the parking lot. Parking along the store fronts is illegal as those areas are designated fire lanes. Your children should be supervised at all times in the parking lot and children should never be left alone in a vehicle. Vehicles should not be left on to idle in the front of the building as fumes could enter into the center.

Our staff will not be responsible for installing car seats in your car or cars of a family member picking up your child. Not all of our staff have children and are trained in properly installing car seats.

Tuition

All tuition is due in a timely manner. Tuition is billed weekly and is expected to be paid by the Sunday of the week of care. We will have automatic payment, any tuition not paid by Monday will be charged automatically through Procure. Every family must have a credit card on file. Please note that some months have 5 weeks in them; therefore your tuition payment should reflect that. Parents will bear the cost of bank charges on checks returned for insufficient funds. The fee for a declined card payment is \$25 and you will see that reflected on your ledger.

Tuition is based either on a half day or full day rate; not hourly.

Tuition is owed whether your child attends or not. You are paying for a spot in the school, as we have to staff the classrooms on the assumption that your child is attending. If your child is absent from the center due to illness, snow, vacation, power shortage or any unforeseen circumstances which may prohibit us from operating, no tuition refund will be made.

Department of Social Services funding is available for those who meet the criteria (please see the Director for more detail). Every 8 months, we will ask for verification. The parent's fee will then be established and approved by both parent and Director. For Children on the School Readiness Grant (see below), your family fee will be assessed by the OEC School Readiness Sliding Fee Scale. The fee will be reviewed by the Director and parent and will be re-determined every 12 months.

Failure to pay tuition in a timely manner will result in your child being dis-enrolled and First Step Preschool reserves the right to take all legal action in our effort to collect monies.

First Step charges a registration fee of \$150 at the time your child is enrolled. This fee can be paid by check or placed on your ledger to be paid along with your first week's tuition. This registration fee can be used toward a credit 1 year after enrollment. If you disenroll prior to your child being in the program for 1 year the fee is non-refundable. If your child enrolls in the 4 year old classroom and will only be with us for a year the registration fee can be put toward a credit in June or August when your child withdraws from our program.

School Readiness Grant

We know that finding affordable quality Early Childhood Education for your children is of utmost importance. We are fortunate enough to be part of the Danbury School Readiness Program. Any Preschool aged child (3 or 4 years old) who resides in Danbury is eligible for this grant. The grant affords you to have tuition based on your income instead of our flat rate. We use your taxes to determine your yearly income which then determines your tuition rate using the OEC School Readiness Sliding Fee Scale. Once we calculate your income we will sign the required paperwork that will go in your child's file. You will also receive a copy of the Fee Calculation form. Children are eligible for the School Readiness Grant here at First Step for 2 years of Preschool. If you require further assistance we will assist you with applying for Care 4 Kids (childcare subsidy). You can access more information on this on the office of Early Childhood's website at <https://www.ctoec.org/general-policies/>

If your child is on the School Readiness Grant and they are going to Kindergarten AND they stay with us all summer before going to Kindergarten, their last day of the program with us would be August 31st.

Vacation

Each family who is enrolled for the full year is entitled to one (1) week's vacation without paying tuition. This vacation resets at the beginning of the school year (September). **Your child MUST NOT be attending on the week you use your free week.** Once you let us know what your free week is, that is the week we will put you down for. We staff based on the number of children in the classroom. If you tell us your child will be out we will staff for that. We will not be able to change Free Weeks once you have given us your dates. Families also will not pay tuition for the week between Christmas/Hanukkah and the New Year that the center is closed.

Switching Days

Families who attend part-time have the flexibility of switching attendance days. Switching a day due to illness, holiday, family issue etc. will be accommodated only if class size allows, and can only be switched within the same billing week. We reserve the right to not allow the switching of days if it puts our classroom out of ratio. Tuition is still due as normal in this situation.

Summer Vacation

First Step does run a summer camp that starts during summer vacation and ends the Tuesday before the last week in August.

If you are taking your child out for the summer or going to an abbreviated schedule, this must start the last week in June. Once you have taken your child out or moved him/her to an abbreviated schedule, if your child is school age, they can return to their original schedule the last Monday in August. All other children can return to the normal schedule the Tuesday after Labor Day.

Withdrawals

First Step Preschool has the right to discontinue service to any family. Any child admitted to the program will be enrolled for up to a month trial period to ensure proper adjustment. We will do everything we can to help your child adjust to their new environment. A family may be asked to leave if their child has behavior problems, parental problems, payment problems, etc.

First Step Preschool will make every effort to recommend suitable alternatives that may better suit the family's needs.

If you must leave our program we require 2 weeks' notice. If you fail to give 2 weeks' notice of leaving our program you will be charged the time that remains equaling 2 weeks.

Clothing

To avoid the possibility of a mix-up in sweaters, coats, etc., please identify all extra clothing with your child's name. We request that each child have at least one extra complete set of clothes at the center including socks, underpants, shirts, pants, etc. Please label each piece of clothing, put them in a Ziplock™ bag and keep them in your child's cubby.

Meals

A lunch menu will be posted and handed out to families when they enroll at our center. It stays the same throughout the year and never changes. It is reviewed by our Nutrition Consultant, Kestine Osbourne. You can purchase hot lunch for your child at a cost of \$4 per day. The children eat snacks daily at 10 am and 3pm, and lunch at 11:45 am.

We do not Participate in CACFP (Child and Adult Care Food Program), however our nutritionist reviews our menu to assure that the meals we serve meet the requirements for the Food Care Program.

Good foods to include in lunches are: sandwiches, yogurt, fruit (canned or fresh), hard boiled eggs, crackers, sliced cucumbers, etc. Thermoses will keep soups, macaroni, etc. warm for lunch. Also, we have a microwave available for heating food. **If foods need to be heated in a microwave, safe use of the microwave and maintenance of proper food temperature will be adhered to.**

Infants' parents should provide all their formula, juice and baby food. Bottles and cereals should be clearly labeled and put into the refrigerator. Baby food jars should also be labeled. **There are certain foods that can be a choking hazard for our infants, for this reason the following foods are prohibited in the infant and toddler rooms, Grapes, hot dogs, and string cheese. Please send food in cut in bite size pieces to avoid choking.**

This center does not serve snack so please send your child in with at least 4 snacks per day for (2 snacks for morning and afternoon snack and to go with their lunch). Also we request that you send a reusable water cup/bottle in with your child. Children are allowed access to drinking water all day long whether it is from their own cup or small plastic cups that we keep at our sinks. Please do not send in food with your child that is in glass container, due to safety reasons.

If your child requires any special nutritional needs please let us know upon registering your child. These needs can be anything from food intolerances to specific food allergies, etc. We will keep this information in their file and in the classroom so that all staff are aware.

For families with infants who are sending in breast milk in bags. Each bag of breast milk **MUST** be labeled with your child's full name and the date the milk is expressed.

We are a peanut and tree nut free center!

State law: Ice packs must be in your child's lunch bag.

Toilet Training

Disposable diapers for infants and toddlers must be supplied by parents. If you wish to bring in bulk supply, we will notify you when your child's supply is getting low. Please also send in wipes and any ointments (note: medication administration form must be signed by both the child's doctor and a parent).

When children are ready to begin toilet training, there must be a joint effort between parents and First Step Preschool staff. Toilet training should begin at home where the child feels most comfortable. Once your child is consistently using the bathroom at home, we will continue it here at school to aid in their success! The Preschool classrooms are not licensed to provide diaper changing services. We strongly suggest that your child is toilet trained before entering our Preschool classrooms as they do not have diaper changing stations. We are always available to give tips and strategies for toilet training should you need.

Outside Time

All of our classrooms go outside everyday (weather permitting) for large motor activities. The children will go outside on the playground, up on the hill for activities or walk around the plaza for 30 minutes in the morning and 30 minutes in the afternoon for a total of 60 minutes. If we cannot go outside due to weather or unsafe temperatures whether too cold or too hot, the children will be engaged in 60 minutes of large

motor activity in their classroom or throughout the building. Classroom large motor activities will include, riding trikes in the hallway, dancing, balance beam, tunnels, obstacle course, balls, exercise, yoga, etc.

Photos

We take a lot of photos of the children here at First Step. We like you to see what they have done here during the day. We also like the children to see how we are all unique and different. Included in our enrollment packet is a photo permission. Please sign that sheet if you give First Step permission to take and display photographs of your child/children. We also have a Facebook Page and website where we will post pictures from time to time. We also have teachers that do shared albums with their phones and we post photos throughout the day using our Procure app. If you do not give us permission to post pictures of your child/children on social media please specify that on the photo permission sheet in our enrollment packet.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

Records

Health records will be kept for each child. These are required by the **State of Connecticut Department of Health** and are maintained by the center's registered nurse consultant Lisa Zustovich. Each child must have a physical examination (documented on the ED 191 form) and current immunizations prior to admission and **yearly** thereafter. When your child's physical is close to expiring, you will be notified so that you can arrange an appointment for your child's annual physical.

Medications

In order for medication to be administered (both over the counter and prescription) to a child, it must be prescribed by the child's doctor or dentist. A medication administration form with the physician's written order and signature and the parent's signed permission to administer a specific medication must be brought to the child's teacher with the medication (in the original box) to be administered. Please **do not** put the medication in the child's lunch box as it must be stored in a designated safe area. When staff administer medication to your child, they will log it in a form that is kept with the medication order. Only staff who are trained in Medication Administration will administer medications to your child. Sunscreen can be applied to your child during the summer months. All families must fill out the non-prescription form with the name of the sunscreen for us to apply it to your child.

We suggest you keep a supply of medication administration forms at your pediatrician's office. A new form is needed with each prescription.

All medications are kept in a storage bin in a locked closet.

In order for any medications to be administered here our staff must have the Administration of Medication Training on file and keep it current.

Illness

Your child's health is important to us. For the protection of all children, your child **should be kept home if he or she displays any of the following symptoms: nausea, temperature over 100, vomiting, diarrhea, a rash or conjunctivitis, heavy nasal discharge, discharge from the eyes or ears.** Please exercise caution and keep your child home for **24 hours** before they return to school. As a reminder a child can still feel ill even after 24 hours past the last symptom. For this reason, please monitor your child before sending them back to school. It is a long day for the children and being home and "looking better" is much different than coming in to school for 8 or 10 hours and having to get through a full day while not 100% better.

Should your child be diagnosed with RSV it is the policy of First Step that your child remain out of school for a minimum of 2 school days after diagnosis and the child should not have a fever for 24 hours and their cough should no longer be persistent and bothersome.

Should your child be diagnosed with the flu it is the policy of First Step that your child remains out of school for a minimum of 3 school days after diagnosis, be fever free for 24 hours and all flu symptoms should be subsiding and no longer persistent and bothersome for the child.

If your child becomes ill while at First Step Preschool, we will call you immediately and ask you to pick up your child. The child's teacher or Director will attend to the child while waiting for the parent. If the parents are unable to be reached, we will call the persons designated by the parents on the enrollment form. **Your child must be picked up within an hour of us calling you.**

Should your child require a screening such as dental, vision, or hearing we suggest you see your child's Pediatrician. If you need further assistance we do have the Lions Club visit one time per year to provide vision screening for the children. If you need further assistance we can refer you to a physician or an agency that can help you find one for your child.

Should you find yourself in need of medical insurance, a medical home, or a site for your child's screening or immunizations please see the Director. The Director can assist you in getting you the resources to find these things such as contacting Community Action.

Disease and Illness Exposure

Infectious diseases (also known as transmissible diseases or communicable diseases) is illness resulting from an infection and are caused by microscopic germs (such as bacteria or viruses) that get into the body and cause problems. Some — but not all — infectious diseases spread directly from one person to another. Infectious diseases that spread from person to person are said to be **contagious**. Contagious diseases (such as the flu, colds, or strep throat) spread from person to person in several ways. One way is through direct physical contact, like touching or by direct contact with an individual's discharges.

Some examples are Chicken Pox, Group A or B Strep, Measles, Hepatitis, etc. Should we have a confirmed case of a communicable disease at the center, we would be responsible for reporting such cases to the Department of Public Health. Besides reporting the communicable disease to the Department of Public Health we will also take the following steps:

1. Use Universal Precautions such as handwashing, sanitizing all surfaces and toys in the affected classroom(s), wearing gloves during meals, diaper changes and cleaning up any bodily fluids.
2. The child(ren) or staff member with the communicable disease would have to remain absent from the center until they are cleared by a physician.
3. Report the communicable disease to the classroom(s) in which there is a confirmed case.
4. We would exclude any under-immunized child if a vaccine preventable disease to which children are susceptible occurs in the program.

We will also report contagious illnesses to families and staff on an as needed basis where we have cases in the classroom. These illnesses will include Conjunctivitis, Strep, RSV, Fifth Disease, Impetigo, Flu, and any other illnesses that are pertinent.

Infant Sleep Policy

All children in our infant room will be put down for a nap at their own individual time and will sleep in a crib with a firm mattress and sheet that fits tight to their mattress. All children 12 months old and older will only have a breathable blanket put on them for nap (e.g. receiving blanket). No nap toys, stuffed animals, bottles, pillows, quilts or any other soft items will be placed in a crib with a sleeping child. All children 12 months old and younger will be put to sleep on their backs in a sleep sac only.

If an infant arrives at our program in a car seat and they are sleeping, they will be taken out of the carrier immediately and placed in a crib. Children will not be put to sleep or sleep in a swing, car seat, bouncer, stroller or any other type of infant seat.

FAMILY POLICY

Parents and First Step Preschool, Curriculum and Assessment Plan

You are important to us. We want you to feel at ease with us and know that you are welcome to visit us any time. There is so much that we have in common that spending a little extra time visiting now and then will give us a chance to talk about events that might not get covered in the daily comings and goings. If you can, you might consider bringing your lunch to First Step Preschool and joining your son or daughter for our midday meal.

Parental input is valued and actively sought by staff members. It is so important that you share with us information about your child or family that may influence the behavior of your child here at the center. We will conscientiously share information with you about your child's center-based experiences. Supplementing daily written communication in all our programs are articles teachers distribute regularly that address parenting concerns for each age group. The classrooms also send out a monthly newsletter detailing what the children have worked on in the classroom, what their next topics of learning will be, important dates for the classroom and center, as well as photos of the children engaged in their activities.

For the curriculum, we use the CT ELDS. The ELDS is a set of standards that tell us what children birth to 5 should know. The teachers use these standards in planning learning experiences, observing the children and documenting their progress. Each child will be observed throughout the year and assessed 3 times per year using these observations (November, March and June). Only their classroom teachers observe the children while doing group work, during solitary play, during outside time, and any other important times throughout the day. The child assessments are used to inform you of your child's progress here at our program, to individualize learning experiences for your child as well as the group, to improve our instructional practices and to plan for program improvement. After each assessment period, the classroom teachers will provide you with a parent teacher conference to let you know how your child is doing. At this conference you will receive a written report regarding your child's progress and development in the program. Included in this written report are areas of strength for your child, areas that need to be worked on and any suggestions that you and your classroom teacher come up with to help your child's experience in the classroom be successful. The information gathered and discussed is kept confidential and is used to help meet the needs of your child. During the conferences, we encourage you to ask questions or speak with your child's teacher about any concerns you might have regarding the assessment, the process in which the information was compiled and how it will meet the needs of your child. 3 Parent Teacher conferences will be offered during the school year. Please watch out for notices to come home regarding this.

Please feel free to talk frankly with us about any concerns you may have regarding your child at any time of the year. First Step Preschool staff have your child's interests at heart and will work with you to meet your child care needs. The Director is available to talk with you at your convenience, on the phone or in person. We want this to be a great experience for your child and for you.

If at any time you have a concern regarding a staff member, an incident that happened here at the center, a need that is not being addressed or a situation that you witness that made you uncomfortable, it is imperative that you see the director right away. If the Director is off site at the time please see Marie Skok (Assistant Director and 4 year old teacher). If the Director needs to be reached you can always contact us through our email firststeppreschoolinf@gmail.com. We will work swiftly to rectify any situation that makes you uncomfortable.

Should you ever need assistance that is not for your child such as Parenting classes, job training, finding access to college courses and any other adult education services please see the Director. The Director can refer you to the correct agency such as Community Action, Family Children and Aid, The Womens Center, etc.

Confidentiality Statement

Please be advised that anything you share with the staff here at First Step Preschool will be kept confidential. All children's records are kept confidential and information is not shared about your child or family to any other agency without having a consent to share information signed by all parties.

Parent Board of Advisors

The Center maintains that all parents should participate in the decision making policy of the Center. The Parent Advisory Board is made up of parents, teachers and staff of the Center and works to enrich the program. Parents choose to participate through volunteerism, special events and field trips. Parents can serve for one year on the parent advisory board.

Family Literacy

First Step Preschool has an established relationship with the public school to increase literacy and the benefits of reading for the whole family. Monthly newsletters include a book list to borrow from. First Step Preschool also provides each child with an application for their own town library card if they do not have one. Events at the library are posted and families are encouraged to attend. Parents are encouraged to come in and read their child's favorite story, or any story, to the children. The staff provides the children with experiences in communication through play by sharing, reading, conversing, writing and drawing.

Servicing Children with Disabilities

First Step Preschool has always had an ongoing communication with the early childhood intervention programs in our area such as the Danbury and New Fairfield School Districts. We have initiated contact when necessary with possible candidates for a Preschool Evaluation. We have welcomed the Special Education staff to our center to provide Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech Therapy to the children in their own environment. We encourage the parents to have their child screened if they have any concerns regarding their child. We can help you with that process with referral forms and or contacts for staff in the districts that can help guide you on having your child evaluated. We also work with Birth to 3 for those children younger than 3 years old.

First Step Preschool has been very successful in working with children with disabilities because so much of the disability can be developmental at this stage in their young life – our staff works with all children individually to check for their progress and understanding of basic concepts and skills. If the staff member finds a child who they may have concerns about, they speak with the Director and the parents to see what modifications, strategies and evaluations are necessary at this time. If the decision is made to move forward, we will assist the family in contacting the School district in which they live to schedule a screening. The screening often takes place at a location within the School District with their professionals but they are always welcome to screen a child here at our center where the child is most comfortable.

If a child is receiving Special Education Services from the New Fairfield School District, bussing is provided to their site at the Early Learning Center.

Education Plan

The children at First Step Preschool will follow a flexible daily schedule that meets the individual needs of the diverse population of children and families served by our program, including those with cultural, language and developmental differences.

The daily schedule will include indoor and outdoor physical activities, which will allow for fine and gross motor development.

The daily schedule will include opportunity for problem-solving experiences that help to formulate language development and sensory discrimination. The children will have the opportunity to express their ideas and feelings through creative experiences in all parts of the program including: **Arts and Media, Dramatic Play, Music, Language, Motor Activity, Language and learning experiences, experiences that promote self-reliance, health education practices, child initiated and staff initiated experiences, exploration and discovery, varied choices in materials and equipment, individuals and small group activities, active and quiet play, rest, sleep or quiet activity, nutritious meals and snacks, and toileting and clean up.**

The children will be exposed to technology here at First Step. We use iPads for learning experiences such as looking things up that the children are asking about, educational games, music and movement, and for letter of the week songs and games. The iPads that we use in the classroom came to us from the Office of Early Childhood with approved educational games for children ages 2-5. Using technology appropriately in our classrooms is a standard that we also follow as part of our NAEYC accreditation.

During the course of the day the children may use the iPad on their own for a period of 8 minutes (in our preschool classrooms only and the teacher sets the timer). If you do not wish for your child to use the classroom iPad for these educational games please let our teaching staff know. We are happy to work with you on whatever your comfort level is with your child being exposed to technology in our classrooms.

Transition Plan

First Step Preschool has an ongoing relationship with the public school – the families go on a field trip to the primary school and attend a Kindergarten orientation where they are introduced to the teachers. This orientation is called Mini-K. Through Mini-K the Kindergarten teachers are able to meet and play with the children for a short period of time to get to know them. Input from the school Director and head teacher is also provided to the public school with parental permission to help with placement for the following year. Following the Kindergarten screening, any concerns or inconsistencies are discussed with the family and teacher. Sometimes, samples of work are provided to the public schools to help with the paperwork and assist with the process. We have a developmental file on each child which is passed on to the public school if it is requested and the family gives permission for it to be shared. We also have a chance, through workshops, to meet and talk with the Kindergarten teachers. In these workshops our staff is able to get an idea of what the local districts are looking for the children to know when they enter their classrooms.

The district also gives us a list of books to display in our classrooms that the children will also see in the Kindergarten classrooms.

Professional Development Plan

First Step Preschool is committed to professional development of all the staff. By educating all the staff from management, head teachers, teachers and teacher's assistants, we can offer the children and parents a tremendous amount of resources. All new staff attends a new hire orientation and training that includes child abuse, benefits of childcare, policy and procedures, nutrition, etc. New staff is also trained on our curriculum and how to use it in the classroom and in lesson plans and how to use our assessment tool. The staff is provided a list of workshops that are offered by School Readiness and other community resource agencies. In addition, individual teachers have a tremendous input on areas they would like to learn more about pertaining to a class or situation. These workshops are usually small in size and coordinated with other preschools in the area. This flexibility offers the staff an opportunity to meet every child's needs and offer assistance where applicable.

The staff receives training by attending workshops sponsored by School Readiness and other community groups. They receive training in curriculum, assessment, literacy, social-emotional development, cultural diversity, special needs, dual language development, etc. First Step Preschool also offers workshops to their staff in CPR/First Aid, administration of medicine and Epi-pen training. In terms of curriculum and assessment, a certified trainer from the Office of Early Childhood will set up a series of trainings with the staff. The curriculum and assessment tools are used during those trainings until staff feel comfortable implementing them in the classroom. Guidance and Modeling how to use the tools is given after the trainings are over should the staff have questions or concerns with using them in the classroom. All staff are required to take 1% of their annual hours worked in training hours each school year. They each have a professional development plan that we review at the beginning of the school year.

Staff members are encouraged to take the college courses offered by School Readiness through Charter Oak or another college in Connecticut in order to work towards an Associates or Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood. Administrators are encouraged to participate in professional development and attend workshops in best business practices.

Quality Measures

Here at First Step we believe that we provide quality early childhood education for all children. In order to maintain this high level of quality, it is important to measure our effectiveness regularly. Please see below how we maintain our effectiveness:

We currently hold accreditation through NAEYC. Every year we do a self-review with NAEYC to maintain our accreditation. Every 5 years NAEYC visits our program for a formal evaluation. The classrooms and director build portfolios showing our commitment to uphold all the criteria that they ask of us.

We have School Readiness Quality monitoring twice a year. During this monitoring we are reviewed on our policies and procedures, lesson plans, etc.

We have an Office of Early Childhood Inspection once a year from a state licenser. We are assessed on the physical part of our building, our policies and procedures and if we are upholding their criteria.

We have reviews of all of our policies and procedures once a year from all of our consultants which is a requirement from the Office of Early Childhood.

CONSULTANTS

First Step Preschool has collaborative agreements with the Greater Danbury area programs and services. The following are some of the collaborating consultants:

- Educational
- Nutritional
- Social Services
- Dentist
- Health Services

Should you need the name and numbers of any consultant, please see the Director. She will provide you with the information. If your child needs to be referred to any services, the appropriate documents to fill out are provided in the office.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT POLICY

First Step Preschool is responsible to protect the health and well-being of each child attending our program by preventing any form of abuse and/or neglect.

Abuse is defined as:

- A child who has had a non-accidental physical injury or injuries inflicted upon him.
- A child who has an injury which is in variance with the history given of them.
- A child who is in a condition resulting from maltreatment, sexual molestation or exploitation, deprivation of necessities, emotional maltreatment or cruel punishment.

Neglect is defined as:

- A child who has been abandoned.
- Is being denied proper care and attention physically, educationally, emotionally or morally.
- Is being permitted to live under conditions or circumstances for associations injurious to his well-being.

Reporting Requirements

All staff are mandated to report abuse and/or neglect in accordance with General Statutes 17a-101. Staff is protected by law from discrimination or retaliation for reporting in good faith. Our staff are trained in Child Abuse and Neglect upon hire.

Staff will report any incident they feel places a child in danger of abuse and neglect to Department of Children and Families (DCF). The teacher or employee who observed the incident must report it.

An oral report is to be filed within 24 hours of suspecting a child has been abused and/or neglected by calling CARELINE at 1-800-842-2288. A written report (DCF-136 form) must be filed within 48 hours of making the report. A copy will be placed in the child's permanent folder.

Administrative Responsibilities

When abuse/neglect is reported to the administration as having been caused or inflicted upon the child by an employee, said employee will be removed from the classroom. Administration will conduct an investigation and a report will be made to the CARELINE. The child's parents will also be notified by the Director. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken in regards to the employee which may include suspension as set forth in the due process procedures.

First Step Preschool will cooperate fully with DCF in their investigation. The employee in question will be assigned duties that do not involve direct contact with the children (if such duty is available) while the investigation is on-going.

If medical services are required, procedures will be followed as outlined in our medical emergency plan.

Staff will receive a copy of this policy and will be required to read and sign annually.

Parents will receive a copy of this policy at the time of registration.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

Children need a classroom atmosphere that provides understanding, love, kindness and warmth from both their teachers and their peers. Through this, children will develop intellectually, socially, emotionally and creatively.

It is our goal to guide the children in becoming happy, responsible, cooperative participants in our program through positive, non-threatening teaching techniques.

When a conflict occurs, we will work with the individual children and help to resolve the problem through effective communication.

Acceptable means of behavior alteration will include the following:

- The classroom staff will set clear limits.

- Overlooking the activity that is done as attention-getting when in a group.
- Speaking to the child kindly, yet authoritatively, with direction of what he/she should do.
- Taking the child's hand and gently lead him/her to a more appropriate activity.
- Allowing time after expectations have been set for the child to alter his/her behavior.
- Removing misbehaving child from the group to be with a staff member who will redirect his/her behavior.
- Inviting the child back to the group when behavior is acceptable.
- Use of positive guidance and redirection.

There is always continuous supervision by the staff when a child is being disciplined by any of the above steps.

If a discipline problem persists, parents will be asked to attend a conference to try and work out an appropriate solution to the problem. A parent's unwillingness to be supportive and cooperative may result in the removal of the child from the program. If a child's challenging behavior becomes unmanageable or unsafe to themselves (the child is violent in the classroom showing behaviors of hitting kicking, excessive violence to teachers and peers, cursing, threatening teachers and peers, throwing objects or furniture, and refusal to follow the classroom routine) or their peers it may be necessary to suspend the child or expel them from the program. The use of suspension or expulsion is a last resort option and is only to be used after the following measures have been taken:

1. All steps in the discipline policy stated above have been taken assessing the function of the behavior.
2. The parents and classroom staff have met to discuss the child's behavior to work on possible solutions and come up with an action plan to alter the behavior. The family and classroom staff will come up with positive behavior strategies.
3. A referral is made to the local school district and or birth to 3 to identify if any cognitive or developmental delays are causing the behavior.
4. A 3rd staff or one-on-one will be brought in to the classroom to work with the child and assist the classroom staff in altering the behavior. The team will work on positive behavior strategies as outline in the meeting with the family.
5. Outside community resource referrals are made for the family such as Children and Family Aid, ECCP, Favor, Wellmore, etc.

A grace period of up to 60 to 90 days will be given with constant communication between classroom staff, parents, the director and any outside agencies involved. Positive behavior strategies will continue to be used in the classroom setting. Should the behavior not improve the decision to suspend or expel the child will be made, and the program will seek out an appropriate placement for the child (local school district program, counseling services, or a specific program that will be able to cater to the child's needs).

This policy does comply with federal and state civil rights laws.

It is the policy of First Step Preschool to never subject a child to verbal or physical punishment such as hitting, spanking, pinching, biting, pulling on limbs or hair, squeezing and kicking. It is the policy of First Step Preschool to never subject a child to psychological abuse such as calling children names, humiliating them in front of staff and peers, threatening them, scaring them, ridiculing them and making them feel ashamed. It is the policy of First Step Preschool to never subject a child to coercion by forcing them to do or not do something such as eating and cleaning up, physically forcing them to perform an action, rough handling them, and restraining them. The child will not be subjected to neglect or frightening punishment under any circumstances. A child will never be physically restrained by our staff unless such restraint is necessary to protect the health and safety of the child or other people.