



Parent Handbook and Operational Policies

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This handbook for parents has been prepared to provide information concerning philosophy, policies, and procedures of Little Thinkers. Please read it carefully so that you will better understand the role we all play in making this years' experience a special time in the life of your child.

If you have any questions regarding any part of the handbook, please feel free to call the Little Thinkers office at (281) 578-6787, and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

After reading this handbook in its entirety, please sign and return this page to the Little Thinkers office. This form states that both parents have read and understand all parts of this handbook and agree to abide by the policies set forth in the handbook.

As a parent/guardian of a child enrolled at Little Thinkers, I have read and understand all parts of the Parent Handbook and agree to follow all policies and procedures outlined therein.

Mother's Signature _____ Date _____

Father's Signature _____ Date _____

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LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents,

We welcome you and your child to Little Thinkers Day Care and Learning Center and pray your child's learning experience here will be happy and wholesome. We strive to give your child the loving care and guidance that children need in their formative years.

As parents, you are cordially invited to visit us, ask questions, and make suggestions. The best assurance for the success of your child's experience is close communication between parents and staff. This handbook has been prepared to help you understand the program and policies as we work together to help your child through a successful year.

As we are excited about having your child in our center will do everything we can to provide a safe, rich and fulfilling experience.

Thank you for the trust and the responsibility you have placed on us by allowing us to be a part of your child's early years.

Sincerely,

Norma Lewis,

Director

PURPOSE

Our purpose is to provide your child with the very best care and enrichment environment possible. Our program is designed to foster social, emotional, intellectual, and physical growth; helping children acquire an understanding of self and others in an atmosphere of warmth, personal respect, individuality, and positive support. We also seek to:

- Help each child develop a positive self-image
- Help children learn to be responsible for their own actions.
- Provide an early childhood resource to parents.

PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy behind our curriculum is that young children learn best by doing. Learning isn't just repeating what someone else says; it requires active thinking and experimenting to find out how things work and to learn firsthand about the world we live in. In their early years, children explore the world around them by using all their senses: touching, tasting, smelling, and looking.

PROGRAM GOALS

We are a Licensed Day Care & Pre-School through:

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
2221 West Loop South
P. O. Box 16017
Houston, TX 77072-6017
(713) 940-5276

Caring for your children's well-being through enforcement of safety regulations, loving environment, mutual respects, and good manners. Diversity respect is a main goal. To give working parents peace of mind, knowing their children are receiving the best possible education and care.

Little Thinker's goal is the development of your child in your absence to assure a daily activity enriched with the elements that will help them to be able to stand up to the world. Every child is treated as an individual and encourages following their unique developmental path.

Our Program is designed to:

- Promote each child's self-development.
- Develop safe and healthy habits in young children with an emphasis on proper hygiene, sound nutrition, exercise, and physical care.
- Foster positive self-esteem.
- Provide opportunities for creative expression.
- Support the development of social skills such as sharing, cooperating, generosity, and empathy.
- Stimulate cognitive problem solving skills with an emphasis on the concepts of cause and effect, classification, space, time, numbers, shapes, and colors.
- Strengthen communications skills necessary for listening, reading, writing, and speaking by providing an environment rich in the practical uses of words.

CURRICULUM

The most important goal of our early childhood curriculum is to help children become enthusiastic learners. This means encouraging children to be active and creative explorers who are not afraid to try out their ideas and to think their own thoughts. Our goal is to help children become independent, self-confident, inquisitive learners. We're teaching them how to learn, not just in preschool, but all through their lives. We're allowing them good habits and attitudes, particularly a positive sense of themselves, which will make a difference throughout their lives.

Our curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development:

- Social - to help children feel comfortable in school, trust their new environment, make friends, and feel they are a part of the group.
- Emotional - to help children experience pride and self-confidence, develops independence and self-control, and has a positive attitude toward life.

- Cognitive - to help children become confident learners by letting them try out their own ideas and experience success, and by helping them acquire learning skills such as the ability to solve problems, ask questions, and use words to describe their ideas, observations, and feelings.
- Physical - to help children increase their large and small muscle skills and feel confident about what their bodies can do.

The activities we plan for children, the way we organize the environment, select toys and materials, plan the daily schedule, and talk with children, are all designed to accomplish the goals of our curriculum and give your child a successful start.

Age appropriate skills and concepts form the core of our curriculum. Lead Teachers plan opportunities for practice of these skills and understanding of these concepts within themes based on interest of the children. Hands-on activities enhance growth and development in social, emotional, physical, and cognitive areas.

In using real materials such as blocks and trying out their ideas, children learn about sizes, shapes, and colors and they notice relationships between things. In time, they learn to use one object to stand for another. This is the beginning of symbolic thinking.

For example, they might pretend a stick is an airplane or a block is a hamburger. These early symbols- the stick and the block-are similar in shape to the objects they represent. Gradually children become more able to use abstract symbols like words to describe their thoughts and feelings. They learn to “read” pictures which are symbols of real people, places, and things. This exciting development in symbolic thinking takes place during the preschool years as children play.

Play provides the foundation for academic or “school” learning. It is the preparation children need before they learn highly abstract symbols such as letters (which are symbols for sounds) and numbers (which are symbols for number concepts). Play enables us to achieve the key goals of our early childhood curriculum. Play is the work of young children.

As part of their learning program, children will have scheduled outdoor activities. The outdoor playground is located across from the center on an enclosed, green area. Outdoor activities will be supervised by our Professional Caregivers. Please refer to Exhibit C for safety access to outdoor fenced playground.

Special Programs

- Mother's Day Out (MOD): from 9:00 am to 2:30 pm; available for ages infant through five years; children will not be accepted for MOD before 9:00 am
- Arts and Crafts: available for ages Kindergarten and up
- School Pick Up: available for children attending local elementary schools
- "Kids are Learning" Curriculum

ADMINISTRATION

Little Thinkers is operated under the supervision of the owner, Grace Raven. Ms. Raven is responsible for the general policies and operation of the Center through a Director, who is in charge of the day-to-day administration of the Center. A conference with the Director may be requested should you have any questions or concerns about the policies or procedures of the Center.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Enrollment

Children may be enrolled for existing openings by completing the Enrollment Package and submitting the required fees. Components of the Enrollment Package include:

- ENROLLMENT RECORD / APPLICATION
- CHILD RELEASE AND EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST
- CARE INSTRUCTIONS & BACKGROUND INFORMATION
- HEALTH RECORD (BY PARENTS)
- PHYSICIAN'S MEDICAL REPORT
- ENROLLMENT AGREEMENT

Required Health Records

The Center is required to have on file a physician's report verifying overall good health and required immunizations. Current information on immunization status must be maintained while the child is enrolled. Children four and older are required to have vision and hearing screening. Children are to be checked upon arrival each day for any visible indications of illness. If a child appears ill while at the Center, parents will be contacted and asked to pick up the child immediately. The main reasons for excluding children from the Center are: • an illness prevents the child from participating in routine activities; • an illness requires more care than the staff can provide without compromising the needs of the other children in the group; • a child's presence poses an increased risk to others with whom the child may come in contact.

The Center cannot admit any child appearing to be sick, without a written statement from a doctor or registered nurse certifying no contagious disease is present.

Dietary Restrictions due to allergies must be confirmed by a doctor's written statement.

Immunizations

A copy of your child's immunization record must be on file on or before the first day of enrollment. Immunizations must be current based on your child's age. When your child receives immunizations as he/she gets older, please provide us with a copy of the updated immunizations for your child's file. Tuberculin testing may also be required by the county. Parents who request that immunizations be waived on religious or other grounds must provide a legal waiver. Please see the Center Director if you are not familiar with this procedure. Note: Copies of immunizations records for school-age children are on file at public school and are not required to be on file at this center.

Vaccines/Preventable Diseases (Staff)

We do not require employees to obtain immunizations. We leave this decision to the staff member, as determined between doctor and patient.

Vision and Hearing Screening

In order to meet the Texas Department of Health requirements, Vision and Hearing Screenings will be conducted by state certified vision and hearing screeners for the four (4) year old classes. Parents will be

notified of the date of screening. If your child is absent from the screening, the parent will be responsible for have testing done by the child's doctor. Parents must provide Vision and Hearing documentation within 120 days of enrollment from the child's doctor if their child is four (4) years or older and enrolled after the Center conducted the annual screening.

Ages and Stages - Screening/Monitoring

Because your child's first 5 years of life are so important, we want to help you provide the best start for your child. As part of this service, we provide the Ages & Stages Questionnaires, to help you keep track of your child's development. You will be asked to answer questions about some things your child can and cannot do. The questionnaire includes questions about your child's communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal-social skills.

If the questionnaire shows that your child is developing without concerns, we will provide some activities designed for use with ASQ to encourage your child's development and will provide the next questionnaire at the appropriate time.

If the questionnaire shows some possible concerns, we will contact you about getting a more involved assessment for your child. Information will only be shared with other agencies with your written consent. A consent form to use this screening toll will be provided in your enrollment package, and we will need your signature if you do or do not wish to participate in the screening/monitoring program.

Children are initially assigned to a group based on their age, skills, and overall level of development as evaluated by the Director and Lead Teachers involved. Normally, all children enrolled are advanced to a new class at the beginning of each "school" year in the fall. Interim class re-assignments may occur at other times when recommended by the Director, based on reassessment of developmental progress and availability of space, following a consultation among Lead Teachers, parents, and the Director.

Tuition and Fees

Registration Fees

A non-refundable registration fee of \$100.00 per child or \$150.00 for families with more than one student is charged at the time of registration.

Annual Supply Fee

A non-refundable annual supply fee of \$85.00 for one student or \$125 for families with more than one student is charged at the time of register and on the child anniversary thereafter.

Tuition Fees

Fees vary depending on age groups and programs chosen. Fees are subject to change on a yearly basis. A month notice will be given before any changes are made. Always know that the smallest feasible increase will be taken.

Activity Fees

Fees will be charged for some special events such as field trip activities or special functions taking place at the school.

NOTE: All checks should be made payable to Little Thinkers. Your canceled check will serve as your receipt. Receipts will be given for cash payments and should be saved as proof of payment. Payments may be mailed, or either brought to the school office by an adult. Tuition payments are due weekly on or before the first school day of the week. A \$35 late fee will be assessed when a payment is received after 6:30pm on the second school day of the week for which the payment is due.

Failure to make timely tuition payment within two weeks from the due date may result in termination of the child's enrollment.

There will be a \$35.00 fee for all returned checks. If a check is returned, future payments will be requested to be paid in cash.

Withdrawal of a Child from the Program

Enrollment will be considered terminated if:

- The Center receives one full month advance written notice of withdrawal, effective the last day of the month.
- The Parents fail to comply with this Agreement, the Parent Handbook, or any other rules of the Center.
- The Center, in its sole discretion, determines it is unable to meet the needs of the Child, or that it is not in the best interest of the Center or other children enrolled to have the Child continue in attendance.
- There is serious illness.

The Center and its staff retain the sole right and responsibility to determine any disputed factual matters regarding termination of enrollment. No refund of tuition will be given without a two-week notice of the intent to withdraw the child from the program.

Hours of Operation

Little Thinkers is open Monday through Friday from 6:00am to 6:30pm. Children will not be accepted for care before 6:00 am. If a child leaves the Center after 6:31 pm for any reason a Late Pick-up Charge of \$1.00 PER MINUTE will be due and payable. Late Pick-Up charges are calculated to the time the child physically leaves the Center.

Extended hours: Must be scheduled two weeks ahead. Hourly rate is \$15.00.

School Calendar and Holidays

Little Thinkers follows a year-round schedule and observes the following holidays:

- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the Friday following
- Christmas **
- New Years' day
- Martin Luther King Day (In service)
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day (July 4th)

**Christmas to be determined yearly

Emergency Closing of Center

Additional closings may be necessary due to weather conditions. The Center will close whenever Katy ISD close due to weather conditions. In the event of bad weather during the day, please monitor broadcast TV stations or call us, as Little Thinkers will close if Alief ISD closes and children must be picked up immediately. The Center will re-open when Alief ISD re-opens.

Arrival and Departure of Children

Children may not enter or leave the Center unless accompanied by an adult. Departing children will normally be released only to parents or other persons shown on the "Child Release Authorization List" form. Any person not known to the staff must give a picture ID.

Please call the Center in advance if someone different (not regular) will be coming for your child. We will ask for identification when they arrive.

Little Thinkers is required to maintain daily attendance records. Please be sure to sign your child "IN" and "OUT" each day on the "SIGN-IN & SIGN-OUT LIST". The attendance sheet is also used during evacuation drills to ensure all present are safe and accounted for.

Meals and Food Service

The Center provides infants formula and all baby foods. Parents are welcome to provide any special foods they consider necessary; these food must be provided in small, labeled lunch box or bag. All containers and lids must be labeled with the child's name.

Nutritious breakfast, morning snacks, lunch and afternoon snacks, milk, and juice are provided by Little Thinkers. Posted monthly, menus are varied. Meals are served family style, allowing children to participate in setting and clearing tables. Notify the Director of any special dietary restrictions. The Center must receive the written statement of a physician or a licensed dietician for special therapeutic diets. No outside fast or innutritious food.

Rules

Clothes

Children's clothing should be comfortable, allowing complete freedom of movement, washable, and suitable for daily indoor and outdoor activities. Since children spend time outdoors almost every day, parents should consider weather conditions when planning daily dress. To encourage development of independent bathroom skills, children's clothing should be easy for them to manipulate with a minimum of assistance.

Children must wear shoes which are practical as well as comfortable. A complete change of clothing (every item labeled) should be kept at the center

Parties

Birthdays and holidays are an especially exciting time for young children and the Center will be pleased to help your child celebrate with classmates and staff if arrangements are made in advance. Parent participation is welcome, but not required.

On your child's birthday you may send cupcakes, cookies or muffins to be shared at afternoon snack. Party planning should attempt to minimize disruption of routine and prevent unwarranted anxiety for the children. Balloons are a choking hazard for young children and should not be brought into the Center. If birthday invitations are distributed at the Center, all children in the class should be invited.

Toys

Toys and personal belongings from home should be limited to "show-and-tell" days. This will avoid lost possessions and hurt feelings. Children should not bring in candy, gum, or money. The Center will make reasonable efforts to safeguard children's personal belongings and clothing, but will not be responsible for lost or damaged items. Everything your child brings or wears to school should be permanently labeled.

Rest

Nap or rest time (for all preschool children) is a supervised period that last approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours in the early afternoon right after lunch. Even if your child does not sleep, he/she will need to relax quietly during this period. Little Thinker will provide cots and parents are asked to provide a small blanket for their child. The blanket is to be taken home every Friday and laundered.

Assorted Don'ts and "No-No's"

- No bubble- or chewing gum.
- No toy weapons of any kind.
- No glass containers.
- No hard candy, popcorn, or nuts.
- No latex balloons.
- Don't send money with a child.
- No pet cats, dogs, or other live animals may be brought into the Center.
- Don't leave medicine in a child's bag.

Non-Discrimination

Little Thinkers does not discriminate. Children and staff of all races, nationalities, and religions are welcome. The Center respects cultural diversity and incorporates it into the daily curriculum.

The Center supports inclusion of all children, regardless of their abilities. To implement inclusive practices, the Center will develop appropriate training programs which will prepare parents and staff to meet the needs of children and their families. Little Thinkers is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

Visitation Procedures

Little Thinkers has an "Open Door" policy on parents' visits. We recognize and support parents' desires to see and spend time with their children whenever they can. Please feel free to stop by and visit us any time; however, we appreciate parents keep their visits short (about 20 minutes) on an attempt to minimize disruption of routine and prevent unwarranted anxiety for the children. Parents are always welcome and the office is opened to any cares or concerns you may have.

Release of Children

Little Thinkers will not release a child to anyone other than those persons specifically authorized by the parents on the Enrollment Form. Child will be released only to adults age 18 and older whose names appear on the Enrollment Form and who also provide proper photo identification.

If you call to inform us of someone picking your child, we must determine if the person calling is the parent. The person picking up the child is to check in through the office. They must sign the sign-out sheet and provide the proper identification (driver's license). This is for your child's protection.

Parents should provide the center with names and telephone numbers of any person designated to pick up the child

Any person picking up a child in an impaired condition (ill or under the influence of drugs or alcohol) will be encouraged to allow us to find alternative transportation.

No child will be released to an unauthorized person.

Child Custody Issues

It is Little Thinker's intent to meet the needs of the children especially when the parents may be experiencing difficult situations such as divorce, separation, or remarriage. Sharing information about such situations may be helpful to our staff and will be held in the strictest confidentiality. Little Thinkers cannot legally restrict the non-custodial parents from visiting the child, reviewing the child's records, or picking the child up unless Little Thinkers has been furnished with legally filed, executed, and current documents. Copies of all court documents must be submitted to the center. In case of conflicts, the proper authorities will be contacted.

Absences

Full tuition payments are due regardless of absences for whatever reason. After six months enrollment, a child is eligible to receive a 50% tuition discount for two weeks per year of absence from the center or a full free week per year. The child may not attend school any day of the week(s) for which this discount is applied. A written request for this discount

Illness

One of the most serious challenges facing group care situations for young children is preventing illness. Our staff will strive to maintain the highest standards of cleanliness. Proper hand washing procedures will be followed and taught to the children. Toys, eating surfaces, toileting, and diapering areas will be sanitized between children's use.

Children should be kept at home when they meet the following exclusion criteria:

- Temperature of 100.4 or higher, in the past 24 hours.
- Conjunctivitis ("pink eye"), redness of the eye and/or lids, usually with yellow discharge and crusting.
- Bronchitis, which begins with cough, and a slight elevation in temperature. The cough may be dry and painful but gradually becomes productive.
- A rash you cannot identify which has not been diagnosed.
- Impetigo: red pimples, which become small vesicles surrounded by a reddened area. When blisters break, the surface is raw and weeping. Look for signs in neck creases, groin, underarms, face, hands, or edge of diaper.
- Diarrhea three or more times within 24 hours (watery or greenish BM's that look different and are more frequent than usual).
- Vomiting within 24 hours (more than usual "spitting up").
- Head Lice; live contagious insects or their nits (egg sacs) that infest hair. Children will not be readmitted without being free of live lice and nits, or must have a written note from a physician, local health authority, advance practice nurse, or physician's assistant stating that they are no longer contagious and may return to school.
- A severe cold with fever, sneezing, and nose drainage.
- An unknown illness without obvious symptoms other than unusual paleness, irritability, tiredness, or lack of interest.
- A contagious disease, including measles, chicken pox, mumps, roseola, strep throat, etc.

Children may be brought into the Center if they have only a slight fever, a mild cold or allergy, an allergic rash, diaper rash, prickly heat, a loose bowel movement, dietary or medication diarrhea. Children with a diagnosed bacterial infection may return 24 hours after beginning treatment with antibiotic medication if they are able to participate normally in the program.

While we regret the inconvenience caused by strict adherence to these guidelines, our concern for all the children dictates a very conservative approach when dealing with health matters. Because of conflicting medical opinions about the advisability of re-admitting children receiving treatment who still appear ill, the Center will err on the side of safety when making such decisions and ask for your tolerance and understanding.

Should your child contact a contagious illness, please notify the Center immediately so other parents can be alerted to the possibility of exposure.

Parents are encouraged to administer medication outside the Center. All medication must be furnished in the original prescription container, with an appropriate dispenser, marked with the child's name, date, and directions for use; placed in a labeled plastic ("Zip-Lock") bag, and handed to a staff member with a fully completed form.

Medication Authorization Form

In the event of an injury or medical emergency, trained staff will immediately administer first aid and notify a Director if further assistance is needed. If we believe the situation may call for parent involvement or professional medical attention, the Center will attempt to contact a parent or other authorized emergency contact. If the condition is serious, the Center will call 911 for an EMT response or will transport the child to a hospital Emergency Room.

Daily Health Checks

A health check is defined as a visual or physical of a child to identify potential concerns about a child's health, including signs or symptoms or illness and injury, in response to changes in the child's behavior since the last date of attendance. Observation of the child and communication with the child's parent or guardian are the key elements of a health check.

Medication

No medication will be given to the child unless administered by the parent. Exceptions will be made for life threatening illness, such as asthma or allergic reactions. We keep Benadryl ointment/spray and Neosporin for insect bites or cuts. We keep a permission sheet that you must sign before we can use either of these. You will only need to sign this form one time, and will be ongoing.

Procedures for Handling Medical Emergencies

- Take the child to the nearest emergency room.
- Give the child first aid or CPR
- Contact the physician in the child's record
- Contact the child's parent
- Ensure supervision of the other children in the group

Emergency Preparedness/Fire and Safety Drills

Fire drills are conducted each month. The outdoor relocation site is the east side parking lot along the fence line. Severe weather drills are conducted at least once every three months with the indoor relocation site being the Toddler's Classroom. Children younger than 24 months, or children who have limited mobility or who otherwise need assistance, will be relocated in evacuation cribs or Bye Bye Buggy. An overview of the Emergency Preparedness Plan (Attachment A) is available for review at the end of this handbook.

Parental Notification

Special Activities

Parental permission is required for the following special activities:

Transportation

Little Thinkers transports children under the following circumstances: field trips, to a designated evacuation site, for emergency medical treatment, and from Public School. All drivers are Little Thinkers Staff and hold a valid state driver's license, and our vehicles are properly maintained and insured. Parents must sign a permission form for children to be transported. Field trips encourage broad awareness of the environment and develop self-assurance in children. They also provide opportunities to improve social skills and discover exciting new worlds. Children three and older will periodically travel on field trips. Notice will be posted at least a week in advance. Each field trip will require a permission slip to be signed by a parent or guardian and

returned to the teacher. Parent participation in these excursions is encouraged and appreciated. When a class goes on a field trip, all children present that day must participate.

Water Play Day

While the weather is warm, the Center celebrates "Water Play Day" on our playground with water hose, sprinkler play, water play table, buckets, cups, etc. All children (except infants) need a labeled towel, swimsuit, and "water shoes" at the Center during the warm season. Please alert the staff if your child has ear tubes or needs ear protection!

Presence of Animals

Parents will be notified of any animals brought to the center. Please do not bring pets in the building with you.

Safety Concerns

After we have ensured the safety of your child, you will be notified immediately if:

- Your child is injured and the injury requires medical attention
- Your child has a sign of symptom requiring exclusion from the Center
- Your child has been involved in a situation that placed them at risk.
- Your child has been involved in any situation that renders the Center unsafe.

NOTE: Parents will be notified when they pick up the child about less serious injuries requiring the staff to render First Aid.

Communicable Diseases/Lice

Parents will be notified in writing within 48-hours if a child in the group has been diagnosed with a communicable disease or if there is an outbreak of lice.

Policy Changes

The Center, at its discretion, may change any policy contained in the Parent Handbook. Parents will be notified of any changes by email or written notice distributed to children's cubbies.

Adult Code of Conduct

Because children need to know that little Thinkers is a safe, nurturing environment for them, parents and other adults who come to the center are asked to abide by the following guidelines while in the building, parking lots and playgrounds:

- No cell phones
- No smoking
- Use appropriate language

- Discuss disagreements privately and calmly away from the children with appropriate management staff only.
- Report concerns about children other than their own to a manager and never address concerns directly with other parents or children.

If a problem exists, the Center wants it corrected as quickly as possible. This can only be achieved if it is identified immediately. Parents are asked to refrain from discussing their concerns with other parents. Parents with concerns should first discuss them with the Lead Teacher of their child's class. Other staff is to avoid discussing any concern with a parent that has not been addressed by the classroom Lead Teacher.

If the classroom Lead Teacher cannot resolve the concern independently and to the satisfaction of the parent, within 24 hours the Lead Teacher should bring the matter to the attention of the Director. If the Lead Teacher is unable to arrive at a solution, the Lead Teacher should ask the parent to schedule a conference with the Director.

Discipline/Guidance

Little Thinkers has a philosophy of positive guidance, incorporating creative teaching and involvement to help children develop self-discipline and inner control over their actions. It is based on mutual respect and an understanding of children's needs and development. Positive guidance uses redirection, verbalization of misunderstandings, consistency, and acceptance of feelings, firmness, and fairness. Children are encouraged to express their feelings verbally as well as to discuss and resolve conflicts rather than "act out" their feelings. In certain situations, a brief "quiet time" is used to allow a child to calm down and recover self-control before resuming group activities. Home and school need to work closely with one another in developing consistent guidelines if and when problems occur.

Biting

Biting is a normal part of development for many young children. Our professional caregivers are trained in various strategies to help deter biting in the classroom. Because we recognize that this behavior can be frustrating to everyone involved, please be assured that we will maintain confidentiality and speak with both families when a biting incident occurs. Appropriate steps will be taken to discourage future incidents and to meet the needs of each child.

Dismissal of a Child

Little Thinkers reserves the right to dismiss any child for any reasonable cause, including but not limited to, the following reasons: the child is unable to participate in group experiences or whose fees have not been paid. We will schedule a conference with the parents to explain the problem.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Participation in parent/teacher conferences is an important activity. This is a time of sharing, which benefits the child, the parent, and the teacher. Little Thinkers believes in a strong partnership between the home and the Center to assure the best experience for the children.

Lead Teachers will invite you to participate in a parent conference twice a year to discuss your child's developmental progress. During these conferences, there will be opportunities to discuss the child's progress and needs at school and for you to ask any questions you may have. A parent or teacher may request a conference any time a need arises.

Parental Participation

Little Thinkers strives to assist parents in understanding the developmental stages their children experience, enabling them to contribute most effectively to the child's growth and enrichment. Parents are encouraged to visit the Center and observe how their child interacts with the staff and other children. Brief conversations with teachers are always welcome, while longer discussions should be arranged by appointment. If you call in advance, you will be assured of having adequate time for discussion with individual teachers or the Director. The Center website, www.littlethinkers.com, provides easy access to the Parent Handbook, Illness Exclusion Policy, Holiday/Closing Calendar, enrollment information, child development & parenting information. Parents of infants and toddlers can expect to receive a written "Daily Report," detailing certain of their child's experiences throughout the day. Phone calls to parents are made in some instances, such as when children become ill while at the Center and must be picked up.

Gang-Free Zone

Under the Texas Penal Code, any area within 1000 feet of a childcare center is a gang-free zone, where criminal offenses related to organized criminal activity are subject to harsher penalty. To review the requirements regarding gang free zones, please refer to Attachment B at the end of this handbook.

Provisions for Breastfeeding Mothers

Mothers have the right to breastfeed or provide breast milk for their child while in our care. Comfortable provisions will be made within the center for breastfeeding mothers. Please inform the office of your intentions to breastfeed on site so that arrangements can be made.

Minimum Standards and Licensing Inspection Review

Parents may review a copy of the Minimum Standards and the Little Thinkers' most recent Licensing Inspection report anytime during its hours of operation.

Preventing/Responding to Child Abuse or Neglect

The Center is required by law to report any apparent incidence of child abuse or neglect defined as "no accidental infliction or threat of infliction of physical, emotional, or mental harm to a child."

"Any person having cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect shall report to any local or state law enforcement agency, and in addition, reports shall be made to (1) the Texas Department of Protective & Regulatory Services; or (2) the agency designated by the court to be responsible for the protection of children."

All such reports must contain the name and address of the child, the name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child, and any other pertinent information.

Our Professional Caregivers are required one hour of child abuse and neglect training annually with the focus on prevention, recognition and reporting of abuse. The training includes:

- Factors indicating a child are at risk for abuse or neglect.
- Warning signs indicating a child may be a victim of abuse or neglect
- Internal procedures for reporting child abuse or neglect
- Community organizations that have training programs available to child care center staff members, children, and parents

Opportunities for additional training are provided throughout the year.

Our Parent Board has additional information regarding abuse and neglect of children. Please speak to the Center Director concerning these resources.

Licensing/Child Care Regulations/Notices/Contact Information

The office has posted copies of the center's license, most recent licensing inspection report, and other required notices. A copy of the Texas "Minimum Standard Rules for Licensed Child Care Centers" is available in the office and on the web at:

www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Child_Care_Standards_and_Regulations/pdf/final746.pdf.

Parents should also be aware of the following important contact information:

- Local Child Care Licensing Office (713) 940-5276
- Texas Child Abuse Hotline 800-252-5400
- Child Care Licensing Web Site www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care

Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) Recall List

This Center is responsible for reviewing the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission recall list. You may view all current and past recalls through the CPSC's Internet website at: www.cpsc.gov.

JUST PLAYING POEM

When I am building in the block room, please don't say I'm "just playing". For you see, I'm learning as I play about balance and shapes. Who knows, I may be an architect someday.

When I'm getting all dressed up, setting the table, caring for the babies, don't get the idea I'm "just playing". For you see, I'm learning as I play; I may be a mother or a father someday.

When you see me up to my elbows in paint or standing at an easel, or molding and shaping clay, please don't let me hear you say, "He is just playing." For you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm expressing myself and being creative. I may be an artist or an inventor someday.

When you see me sitting in a chair "reading" to an imaginary audience, please don't laugh and think I'm "just playing". For you see, I'm learning as I play. I may be a teacher someday.

When you see me combing the bushes for bugs, or packing my pockets with choice things I find, don't pass it off as "just play". For you see, I'm learning as I play. I may be a scientist someday.

When you see me engrossed in a puzzle or some "plaything" at my school, please don't feel the time is wasted in "play". For, you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning to solve problems and concentrate. I may be in business someday.

When you see me cooking or tasting foods please don't think that because I enjoy it, it is "just play". I'm learning to follow directions and see differences. I may be a cook someday.

When you see me learning to skip, hop, run and move my body, please don't say I'm "just playing". For, you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning how my body works. I may be a doctor, nurse, or athlete someday.

When you ask me what I've done at school today, and I say, "I just played", please don't misunderstand me. For you see, I'm learning as I play. I'm learning to enjoy and be successful in my work. I'm preparing for tomorrow. Today, I am a child and my work is play.

-Anita Wadley

ATTACHMENT A

LITTLE THINKERS EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN (OVERVIEW)

In the event of an emergency situation that requires an evacuation of Little Thinkers Child Day Care Center, one of the following plans shall be implemented. In all situations, the caregiver in charge when evacuating shall:

- Take an accurate attendee list;
- Account for all children and staff as they board/depart vehicles;
- Bring any necessary medications / supplies and emergency records;
- Take a cellular phone if available to be used for emergency notifications.

Staff will remain with and care for the children at all times during an event. Attendance will be checked whenever children are moved. Staff will bring any necessary medications, supplies, and emergency records. Children under 24 months of age, or children who have limited mobility or who otherwise need assistance will be relocated in evacuation cribs or the Bye Bye Buggy.

In the event of a natural emergency, i.e. tornado, severe storms, etc., the children and other occupants of the building will shelter in place in the childcare center Toddler's Classroom which is designated as our indoor relocation site.

In the event of an emergency that requires the children to evacuate the building, but remain on the premises, the outdoor evacuation area is the East side parking lot of the building along the chain link fence line.

In the event of an emergency requiring a nearby secured evacuation, the children will walk behind the East chain link fence and across the parking lot of next door church to Living Word Church building where they will remain accompanied by caregivers while family/guardian/emergency contacts are notified of the situation and arrangements are made for either the transporting home or care taking for the remainder of the day.

If the emergency environment is confined to the immediate area of the child care facility, e.g. fire or toxic fumes and the children must evacuate away from the center, the children will walk to Living Word Church where they will remain accompanied by caregivers while family/guardian/emergency contacts are notified of the situation and arrangements are made for either the transporting home or care taking for the remainder of the day. The place of safety is close by and within walking distance.

Off-Campus Evacuation Location

Living Word Church
13833 Richmond Ave.
Houston, TX 77082
281-497-9673.

The Emergency Evacuation and Relocation diagram can be found in each classroom posted near the door. A complete Emergency Evacuation Plan may be reviewed in the office upon request

ATTACHMENT B

GANG-FREE ZONE INFORMATION

As a result of House Bill 2086 that passed during the 81st Legislature, Regular Session, Chapter 42 of the Human Resource Code will be amended to include Section 42.064 requiring that information about gang-free zones be distributed to parents and guardians of children in care at licensed child care centers.

What is a gang-free zone? A gang-free zone is a designated area around a specific location where certain gang related activity is prohibited and is subject to increased penalty under Texas law. Specific locations where certain gang related activity is now prohibited include, but are not limited to, public schools, playgrounds, video arcade facilities, and day care centers. The area that falls within a gang-free zone can vary depending on the type of location. For example, certain gang-related criminal activity that occurs within 300 feet of a video arcade facility is a violation of the new law, whereas certain gang-related criminal activity that occurs within 1000 feet of a school or day care center is a violation of the law.

How do parents know where the gang-free zone ends? The gang-free zone is within 1000 feet of your child care program. Maps may be produced for the purposes of prosecution and may be updated by the local municipal or county engineer. Parents may contact their local municipality to attempt to obtain a copy of the map if they choose to do so.

Why are gang-free zones needed? Similar to the motivation behind establishing drug-free zones, the goal of the gang-free zone is to deter certain types of criminal activity in areas where children gather by enforcing tougher penalties.

What does this mean for my day care center? Child care providers are required to inform parents or guardians of children attending their center about the new gang-free zone designation. This means parents or guardians need to be informed that certain gang-related criminal activity or engaging in organized criminal activity within 1000 feet of your program is a violation of this law and is therefore subject to increased penalty.

When do I have to comply with the new requirements? The law is already in effect and providers should begin sharing information regarding gang free zones immediately.

For further information, please contact your licensing representative or your local licensing office.

ATTACHMENT C

LITTLE THINKERS OUTDOOR SPACE ACCESS PROCEDURE

Little Thinkers will provide an outdoor facility for children under the age of 12-yrs-old; which is not connected to the center; however, it is accessible by a safe route. The outdoor facility is located right across from the center, separated by about 50 feet from the main entrance of the center. In order to access the playground fenced area, teachers will properly install safety cones along the pass way and also will install traffic signs indicating passing of pedestrian, a second caregiver will make sure to stop the traffic with traffic stop signs until children have safely entered the playground area and the gate to the same has been closed behind the last child entering the playground area.

The outdoor fenced playground will be monitored by center director and director's assistance directly from inside the center through direct view through glass walls and windows; furthermore, caregivers in charge of any group of children at the playground fenced area will use devices like walkie-talkies to communicate with the center in case of emergencies and/or restroom time.

This outdoor fence playground will not be used by any other persons when enrolled children would be most likely to use it. Little children might be transported with the use of push-carts, strollers or other means of transporting infants and toddlers.

A safety/first aid kit will be available at all time when enrolled children are using the fenced playground/outdoor area.