

**St. Jerome
Early Childhood Center**



**A Faith Based
Year Round Pre-School
Childcare Center
Since 1980**

**Staff Handbook
2023-2024**

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Welcome to St. Jerome Early Childhood Center

We are pleased that you are a member of our team! At St. Jerome Early Childhood Center, we are dedicated to developing each child's self-esteem and the creative gifted abilities of each child in a faith supportive environment both for our staff and families.

We want to welcome you to our Team! Whether you are a new employee, or have been with us for some time, you are much appreciated and valued.

Mission Statement

*The primary purpose of St. Jerome Early Childhood Center
Is to provide a supportive environment in which child, parent,
and community shall benefit.*

*Our Center shall provide an educational learning environment in
which each child through his or her efforts, can realize his or her
God-given capabilities.*

*The Early Childhood Center experience shall include
spiritual, physical, and social development as well as
personal guidance given by skilled personnel whose
primary interest is the child.*

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Our Mission

The Primary purpose of St. Jerome Early Childhood Center is to provide a supportive environment in which child, parent, and community will benefit.

Our Center shall provide an educational learning environment, which each child through his or her efforts, can realize his or her God-given abilities.

The Early Childhood Center experience shall include Spiritual, physical, and social development as well as personal guidance given by skilled personnel whose primary interest is the child.

Educational Program

Our Program

Our program philosophy is based on sound child development principles based on how children grow and learn. Our program follows principles of developmentally appropriate, comprehensive, and addresses all areas of a child's development. The curriculum and classroom environments have appropriate materials, which fosters hands on, concrete, and tangible learning while based in a "play centered philosophy". The curriculum encourages diversity and addresses the needs, interests, and abilities of each child. We focus on developing a love of learning. We teach and practice Christian values by praying, introducing age appropriate Bible stories and songs, and setting good examples.

CENTERS

We use center based education practices, meaning that young children learn mostly through play. Our centers represent the different aspects of the "whole child". Toys in each center should be safe, age appropriate, and changed out regular. Throughout the year toys will be cleaned, and on a regular basis when children place them in their mouth.

LESSON PLAN BOOKS

All lesson plan books are furnished by the school and are the property of St. Jerome Early Childhood Center. The lead teacher turns in lesson plans a week before on Thursday for review. As a classroom team all staff work on lesson ideas and plans together.

Educational Program

"What is developmentally appropriate practice"?

You probably have noticed that in our classrooms there is a lot of Movement, playing and exploring.

Research and experience tell us that to be effective with young children, teaching practices need to be "developmentally appropriate". Meaning, educators need to think first about what young children are like and then create an environment with experiences that are in tune with children's characteristics.

Early childhood is a time of life quite different from adulthood, and even from the later school years, Children 3 -6 years learn far better through direct interactive experiences than through just listening to someone talk. They learn extraordinary amounts through play and exploration. What young children learn needs to be relevant and interesting on the day they learn it, not just in the context of some future learning.

Based on such knowledge about what children of this age are like, we design our program to fit them.

A developmentally appropriate program like ours is age appropriate. To make the program a good place for every child, we gear our classroom environment and activities to this community and the families involved, We're eager to learn as much as we can about each child's family, cultural background, past experience, and current circumstances. With this knowledge we work to create a program that fits the children and the families we serve.

Employment at Will

Employment at SJECC may be terminated by SJECC or the employee, expressed or implied, guaranteeing employment for any specific duration.

Equal Employment Opportunity

SJECC prohibits, forbids and does not tolerate discrimination against anyone on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, veteran status, or disability. All employees, managers, supervisors, and job applicants are guaranteed the same employment opportunities. No person or employee, no matter his or her title or position, has the authority expressed, actual, apparent or implied, to discriminate against another employee of this organization.

SJECC will not discriminate against any employee, manager, supervisor, or applicant on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, veteran status or disability. SJECC's supervisors and or managers will make all recruitment, placement, selection, training and layoff decisions based solely on center needs without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, veteran status, or disability.

SJECC will conduct and administer all personnel procedures including compensation, benefits, discipline, training, recreational and social activities, and safety and health programs without regard to an individual's race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, veteran status, or disability.

SJECC prohibits verbal, physical, or visual conduct that belittles, demeans any individual on the bases of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, veteran status, or disability.

SJECC Expectations

While employed by SJECC, we expect the following from all members of the staff:

- ⇒ **Teamwork:** You must recognize that each of us is a member of one team at SJECC. In addition to our daily responsibilities part of our job is to help our team, children, and the center succeed.
- ⇒ **Responsibility:** Focus on productive teamwork and solutions; focusing on "who is to blame" is destructive to team unity and doesn't solve any issues.
- ⇒ **Cooperation:** Work with one another and respect individual time and needs. The beauty of being different reflects the beauty of God. Learning from each other is key.
- ⇒ **Sensitivity:** In all you do at SJECC, be sensitive toward those with whom you interact while conducting yourself with humility
- ⇒ **Responsiveness:** Observe and listen to parents and children, and respond to those needs in a flexible, caring, professional and patient manner.
- ⇒ **Loyalty:** Be faithful to our Mission and Vision of SJECC, never do or say anything to undermine its reputation.
- ⇒ **Dedication:** Always place the interests of the children first.
- ⇒ **Flexibility:** Always be flexible to change, this attribute is needed when working with children. The environment is ever changing and it takes flexibility to be able to manage.
- ⇒ **Reliability:** children need care and it takes a reliable person to be there for them when they need them on a daily basis
- ⇒ **Attendance:** Staff should always be punctual. Timely and regular attendance is crucial to the seamless operation of SJECC; unexpected absences and tardiness diminish the quality of care we provide. If you know you will be absent or late for your shift call one of the administrators ahead of time, or the soonest so that arrangements can be made.

General Policies

- ⇒ **Patience:** Having lot's and lot's of patience is a top expectation at SJECC. Children are God's kingdom and it takes loving patience to care for children. Patience working with other staff members is also a high expectation throughout SJECC.
- ⇒ **Professional Growth:** Each employee at SJECC will complete 24 professional growth hours every year, from hire date to hire date (1 year). You are responsible to provide the certificate of the professional growth hours to the office.
- ⇒ **Absences:** In case of absences, staff must notify the administrator as soon as possible that he/she will not be at the center for their shift. For time off a "request for time off" form needs to be filled out and submitted with two weeks before date requested. You are responsible for finding coverage. Absences will be recorded and submitted for approval. Emergency call-in's will be signed off and submitted upon return to center.
- ⇒ **Controlled Substances:** The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston prohibits the use, possession for consumption, sale, or dispensing of illegal drugs and narcotics on its premises. The presence of any person who is under the influence of illegal drugs or involved in the abuse of alcohol or drugs is also prohibited and is grounds for immediate termination.
- ⇒ **Dress Code:** Appropriate attire, must be worn at all times. Staff are to have no visible tattoos or facial piercing. Pants, long shorts, skirts, and appropriate tops are to be worn. Do not wear flip flops, tank tops, low cut blouse, short dresses, or torn jeans. Any attire that displays profanity shall not be worn.
- ⇒ **Personnel Records:** The information recorded in the personnel records is extremely important to you and the Center. If you move or change your phone number be sure to report the changes to the office. All staff must sign the Arch-Diocesan Ethical/Moral Policy when hired.

General Policies

- ⇒ **Clocking In/Out:** All employees are responsible for clocking in and out at their designated shift on time and for lunch/breaks.
- ⇒ **Accidents:** If a staff member or child is injured on campus, report it immediately to a director. If emergency or police are needed, a director is to be notified at once. If a staff/child is injured on campus, only the parents, police or fire department or paramedics may transport to the hospital. The staff member is to submit an Incident Report Form within one hour after the accident has occurred and immediately after administering first aid notify administration.
- ⇒ **Cell phones**-Using our personal cellphones is prohibited. This means outside or in room. This is a major infraction where licensing and Center rules are concerned. We are responsible for the well
- ⇒ being of the children in our care and this is non negotiable. For Brightwheel each room should use the tablets provided.
- ⇒ **Termination:** SEPARATION OF EMPLOYMENT 1. Resignation In order to help facilitate a smooth transition, employees who intend to resign from employment are encouraged to provide two weeks' written notice to their supervisor. Failure to provide two weeks notice can result in early termination.
2. Termination Employees of the Archdiocese are employed on an "at will" basis, and the Archdiocese retains the right to terminate an employee at any time, for any reason, with or without notice.
3. Job Abandonment Employees who fail to report to work or contact their supervisor for three consecutive workdays shall be considered to have resigned from employment due to job abandonment.

Professionalism

Staff members are professionals and as such should be loyal to and consistently avoid criticism of and gossip about administration and other staff members when dealing with parents, children, or the community at large.

Opposition of center policies/regulations is grounds for dismissal. Staff members have an obligation to inform a Center administrator of problems or concerns that are detrimental to the center.

Confidentiality is expected of all staff when it comes to information about children, parents, staff, etc. that is private and would be damaging if disseminated. Staff members should adhere to professional ethics in (a) discussing with candor and moderation in staff meetings and in parent-teacher conferences the problems relating to individual children; (b) never discussing personal information of children with those who have no authority over them.

Teachers need to use wisdom when establishing relationships with parents outside the normal center routine. Favors given to a parent could carry with them some unreal expectations of the teacher by the parent. No phone numbers of any teachers are to be given out without the expressed permission of that teacher, and the approval of administration.

Personal Cell Phones: are not to be used in classroom or playground. No texting or making phone calls at any time while on duty. If you have an emergency and need to make a call or check your phone please ask for someone to relieve you. The best time for checking texts is during your break or before or after your shift. Our eyes should be on the children at all times, Cell phones should not be on our possession/priority during shift hours. Disregard using your personal phone for Brightwheel. Use the tablet provided by the center for inputting information.

Calendar Closures

Holiday Closures

- New Year's Day
- Good Friday and Easter Monday
- Memorial Day
- July 4th
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving (Thursday and Friday)
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day

When a legal holiday falls on a Saturday the preceding Friday is observed as the holiday. When a legal holiday falls on Sunday, the following Monday is observed as the holiday. One must work their shift the day before and the day after the holiday to have a requested holiday approved.

Request time off slips must be given in writing with 2 weeks of anticipation to the director. A classroom cannot permit more than one person off at a time. The request form must be filled out completely including a substitute for coverage and submitted for approval.

General Policies

Arrival and Departure

Our responsibility begins when the child is placed in the care of a staff member and ends when the child leaves the center. For safety reasons, please do not allow children to run in the hallways, as this is not permitted, and children should never leave the building ahead of an adult. Our front door is designed so that a child could open it in case of an emergency. We do not want any children running outside while they are unsupervised.

If someone other than the child's custodial parents will be picking up the child from the Center, we need to be notified in advance. We require proper ID before releasing a child to someone other than his/her custodial parent or legal guardian. SJECC reserves the right to refuse release to a person picking up a child that appears to be under the influence of a substance that impairs their ability to safely drive a child home. The next designated person will be called to pick up the child, and the proper authorities are to be notified if necessary.

When parents bring their children and pick them up from SJECC they must sign their children in and out through Brightwheel QR Scan.

When or if a teacher or aide needs assistance in the room, please use the classroom buzzer to call the front office. Please plan accordingly for materials and planning lessons. A good quiet time would be nap time as it's a great time to catch up on updating Brightwheel and have lessons ready for after nap.

General Policies

Nap Time

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services requires that all children take a rest period after the noon meal. Naptime in general begins at 12:30 PM and ends at 2:30 PM (2 HOURS). The classroom lights are not to be turned off until then and there should be a light turned on to be able to count how many kids are in the classroom (restroom light on/lamp). You must not force a child to sleep or put anything in or on a child's head or body to force the child to rest or sleep. For children who are awake after resting or sleeping for one hour you are to provide a quiet alternative activity until the rest time is over for the other children. For children who sleep in a crib, you must take the child out of the crib for other activities when he/she awakens. When placing the nap mats on the floor do not block entrances or exits, create enough space between the doors. Please remember our minimum standards regarding infant sleep. Infants should not sleep in restrictive devices. No blankets or anything in the crib even if provided by parents, it's a state rule.

All mats are required to be placed in a plastic bag, a small-sized blanket from home may also be included; all napping materials must have the child's name on it. In addition, mats are required to be taken home at the end of the week to be washed over the weekend. This will also be done on Wednesday or Thursday for those children who will not be attending on Friday's.

Hiring Staff to Baby-sit

Parents sometimes ask staff members to baby-sit for them after hours. St. Jerome Early Childhood Center does not take responsibility and is not liable for any services or after hours care our employees may provide outside our premises. It is our policy to receive permission from an Center administrator before you give parents your phone number and before agreeing to baby-sit. Reference our privacy protection policy.

General Policies

Toilet Training

Fostered when the parents have started the training at home first.

Diaper Changing procedures to reduce the spread of germs

- Wear gloves at all times & prepare your area with supplies, liners, table cover and diapers.
- Clean the child. Always wipe front to back. Keep solid-diaper away from any surfaces that cannot be easily cleaned. Secure bag for solid.
- Keep a hand on the child for safety at all times. Remove trash and place used wipes in solid diaper an place in trash can. Remove and discard gloves.
- Replace diaper. Slide a fresh diaper under the child. Fasten the diaper and dress the child.
- Wash child's hands. Use soap and water to wash the child's hands thoroughly. Return the child to a supervised area.
- Clean up and remove liner from the changing surface and discard in the trash can. Wipe up any visible soil with damp paper towels. Wet the entire surface with disinfectant. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Tablet/screen time.

- There should be zero screen time. All other rooms should not use the tablet for screen time at all. If you are playing a song/video children should not be able to see the video/song instead they can sing-a-long. The only time a movie is permitted is for PK3 on Friday's only to the extent of a movie length of time and only a TV provided by the center is used.

General Policies

Medication for Students

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services mandates that medication is to be administered by SJECC only upon written authorization by the parent. No verbal or phone instructions can be accepted. Following state standards, we will administer medication as follows:

- Prescription medications must be in the original container labeled with the child's name and will be administered per label directions.
- Medications will not be administered after the expiration date. Any nonprescription medication is to be labeled with the child's name and the date the medication was brought to the center and in the original container. The center must administer it according to label directions if approved in writing by health personnel or the child's parent/guardian. We cannot administer acetaminophen.
- The center must return medications to the child's parent/guardian when no longer needed. The Center must dispose of medications when child is withdrawn from the center or when the medication has expired.
- Only administration will administer medication, and medication must be locked in the medicine cabinet unless otherwise directed.

Incidents

Anytime a child is hurt, teachers must notify parents through Brightwheel of the occurrence, and an Incident Report must be filled out and brought to the office. After administering First Aid the office should be notified and an incident should be filled out immediately. Any cuts, scrapes, falls, bites etc, should be noted and signed by staff member, parent and director.

Biting: Biting is a difficult and uncomfortable issue to deal, if you have a biter in the classroom make sure you report the incidents, notify parents and seek background information (teething, frustration, attention, imitation, tiredness, independence, leadership, speech delay, etc.). If the Biting continues, the director will schedule a conference with parents and decide continuation care.

Emergency Preparedness Plan

Every classroom is responsible for reviewing our emergency preparedness plan and reference it during drills.

In case of Fire: If you see a fire, notify office staff or the person in charge. The alarm will sound, then calmly gather children and class list and exit the building using the appropriate route. The teacher should lend the children out of the room. Be sure all children in your care are accounted for. Keep children calm and together. Your go bag and roster should be in hand for emergency contact and ratio count.

***** If Primary Exit is Blocked:** Exit building through the secondary exit or through the side door. Proceed as above. Each room has those two routes mapped out and posted in the room.

Tornado/Hurricane Warning: An announcement over the intercom (if available) will state the possibility of danger. Calmly gather children and proceed to the hallway. Line the children up along the wall of your classroom. All children should be on their knees facing the wall. Their heads should be touching the floor, with hands clasped over the back of their neck. Try to keep the children as calm as possible.

Toxic Fumes (Outside): Stay in the classroom with doors shut. Outside doors should be shut and secured by office staff or person in charge. Remain inside until warning is over. **Toxic Fumes (Inside):** When alarm sounds, calmly gather children and class list and exit the building toward the parking lot. Proceed along sidewalk in front of parish offices and around to the gym or church as directed by the director in charge to safety.

Intruder/Lockdown: Code word: "The Holy Spirit" will be announced on the intercom and everyone should remain quiet and go to non visible place in your classroom. All blinds should be closed and all door windows should be covered with lights off. All children should be counted in ratio. When it is safe the all clear will be announced.

Medical Emergency: Immediately call for help (use intercom if alone and able). Separate all children in your care to an area removed from the emergency. Stay with the person needing medical attention until help arrives. Follow First Aid and/or CPR directions given in your individual class. Reference any allergy plans in place in your classroom and identify those plans by having them visible to all staff with a picture of the child of who the plan belongs to.

Playground Rules

Any activities/games that involve students in potentially harmful physical contact with each other or the equipment are forbidden. Playground equipment is to be used in the manner for which it was designed. Students are not to walk up the slide or jump from one piece of equipment to another, etc. Students are not allowed to play in areas out of view of supervisors. Teachers on duty are to be on duty not only in a physical way, but also in a mental way.

Teachers must be aware of the activities of the whole group of students they are monitoring. The teachers on duty must be spread out in different areas of the playground. During inclement weather children will not go outside, but will participate in alternative activities in the classroom or open area room. Tricycles should only be used for PK and they should be used in the PK playground,

Prevention, Prevention, Prevention is the key! Observe the children at all times. Avoid gossiping with other staff members. Follow the children everywhere they play and look out for insects. Report ant piles or any hazardous equipment that may be broken or need of repair.

Always on our feet ready to catch the children before they fall or hurt themselves. Outdoor playground time is crucial time for great observation and supervision of all children.

Discipline and Guidance

Classroom management is an important element in creating a safe and comfortable classroom community. Discipline and guidance are important in achieving classroom management. *Teachers are to focus on positive behaviors of our children and to provide consistent, age appropriate limits. Therefore, our discipline policy consists of positive reinforcement, redirection, and time out (or quit time). A caregiver may only use positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourage self-esteem, self-control, and self-direction.

The use of physical punishment, yelling, ridicule, or disrespect of the child is NEVER permitted by anyone at St. Jerome Early Childhood Center.

Forms of punishment that are prohibited include, but are not limited to: corporal punishment or threats of corporal punishment; punishment associated with food, naps, or toilet training; pinching, shaking, or biting a child; hitting a child with a hand or instrument; putting anything in or on a child's mouth; humiliating, ridiculing, rejecting, or yelling at a child; subjecting a child to harsh, abusive, or profane language; and placing a child in a locked or dark room, bathroom, or closet with the door closed

At the Center we believe in positive behavior management. Teachers will work with children on sharing materials, taking turns, being good listeners, finishing tasks, cleaning up after themselves, following safety rules, solving problems, and making good decisions. Acceptable behavior for is valued and encouraged. If a child displays inappropriate behavior, the teachers will discuss the problem with the child privately, explaining what is expected and its consequences. If the problem continues, teachers will remove the child from the area where the problem exists and guide the child's attention to a different activity. Continued problems shall result in the removal of the child from the group for a short "quiet time". This quiet time is to be appropriate for the child's age and development, which is limited to no more than one minute per year of the child's age. It is important that discipline is individualized and consistent for each child, appropriate for the child's level of understanding, and directed toward teaching the child acceptable behavior and self-control.

During operating hours an employee may discipline the employee's own child as long as the employee does not violate the requirement specified in this subchapter.

Parent Involvement

"The parent is the child's first teacher and is seen as the primary Educator of the child."

Communication with Parents

Any letters or flyers sent out to parents or students by a teacher, organization, or anyone else must have the approval of a Director first. A copy of every significant communication to parents must be left in the office prior to distribution. Staff replies promptly to parent messages during normal center hours. If messages are afterhours then response should be within 24 hours. Communication should only be directly about the child and the school activities. When in doubt contact the office about any messages pertaining to administration subjects for example: tuition, behavior, etc.

Parent/ Teacher Conferences

Conferences with parents are held at parents request. The classroom teacher cannot discuss children's progress at the door because of time restrictions and consideration for the class as a whole. The teacher's primary concern is the supervision of the children, therefore, our teachers are not allowed to conference at the door, during center hours. How many children am I supervising? That number should be automatic. Always count, count, count. Make it a song and have them sing along. Staff have to know exactly how many children are in their care at all times. Especially when transitioning from outside to inside or giving teachers a break.

Minimum Standards

Minimum standard Book:

A copy of the minimum standards is available in the Main Office. READ IT! Do not rely solely on the information in this handbook.

Important Phone numbers:

Local Licensing Office: 713-940-5277

Child Abuse Hot Line: 1-800-252-5400

ALL, staff is expected to be knowledgeable in the Minimum Standards for Child Care. Failure to Adhere to these Policies may result in Disciplinary action, up to an including termination.

Parents will be notified, when:

- Child is injured, and requires medical attention.
 - Child has a symptom requiring exclusion from SJECC.
 - Child has been in a situation that put the child at risk.
 - Child is in any situation that renders the center unsafe (fire, flood...).
- ⇒ Parents will be notified of much less serious injuries at time of pick up (incident report).
- ⇒ Parents will be notified in writing within 48 hours of becoming aware a child has contracted a communicable disease that the law requires the center to report.
- ⇒ Parents will also be notified in writing within 48 hours of an outbreak of lice or infestation in the classroom.

Ratios

How many children am I supervising? That number should be automatic Always count, count, count. Make it a song and have them sing along. Staff have to know exactly how many children are in their care at all times. Especially when transitioning from outside to inside or when being relieved for a break/ Changing teacher aids.

Staff Agreement

Dear Teachers,

Schools are successful to the degree to which all members of the Center are aware of and are willing to follow and enforce the rules and policies that govern them and their students. Each of us has the responsibility to assist and support each other, while adhering to the policies set forth in the Staff Handbook (on Brightwheel). The purpose of this page is to ask everyone's cooperation in becoming familiar with and being committed to these policies. We ask all our Teachers to read the handbook, sign the acknowledgment form below, and return it to the Director.

Sincerely,
Mirna Grant,
Director

St. Jerome Early Childhood Center
Family Acknowledgement of Handbooks
2023-2024

I have read the Staff Handbook, and I accept my responsibility to support all school regulations that govern me and the children of St. Jerome Early Childhood Center.

Date

Print Name

Signature