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PARENT HANDBOOK

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Welcome

Thank you for your interest in Mercy's Playhouse! We believe in the philosophy that it is ok for parents to take a break from parenting. We also understand that it is hard to find someone we feel we can trust to watch our love ones as well. This is where we come in. We use our experience to provide a fun and safe environment for the children to enjoy and leave them desiring to come back for more. Mercy's Playhouse wants to give parents the ease of mind that their children are cared for so you can go about your day worry free.

Philosophy Goals

The goal of Mercy's Playhouse is to ensure the parents that they are leaving their children in a safe nurturing environment. We developed an environment that allows the children to learn and explore which will enhance their developmental skills to be lifelong learners. We believe that children should be in a setting where they feel that they are respected as individuals and will feel open to exploring, questioning and using their imaginations for a stimulating experience.

We aim to create an inclusive and diverse environment that respects and celebrates differences in culture, background, abilities, and family structures. In order to ensure the safety and health of children as a top priority, we set high standards for safety, sanitation, and hygiene, and adhere to licensing requirements and best practices.

We strive to provide a healthy home-like environment that fosters their need for love, acceptance, warmth, and security. We emphasize providing age-appropriate activities and learning experiences that encourages children's natural curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Goals include promoting early literacy, numeracy, and social skills development. This combination will enable children to drop their walls so they can grow in all aspects. At our center, children will learn letters, shapes, colors, and number recognition as part of our curriculum as well as arts & crafts, music, science, concepts and storytelling.

We are licensed with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services and comply with the Minimum Standards for Licensed Child Care Centers. State inspections are conducted on a regular basis. A copy of the standards and all inspections are available at the front desk for your review anytime.

Texas Rising Star (TRS)

Our center is in a partnership with the Texas Rising Star program. The TRS program provides a quality-based rating system that daycares volunteer to be a part of. The ratings system used by TRS to determine higher quality and improvements exceeds those of the Minimum Child Care Licensing standards. As a participant, we undergo vigorous improvements to always improve the quality of our center. The star requirements are based on Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs. The program's certification system is based on a tiered ranking system (2- star, 3-stars, 4-star) to encourage centers to achieve the top rank in the certification process. The Texas Rising Star certificate indicates the center's star level.

Curriculum Goals

Our curriculum is based on providers' observations of the needs, strengths and interests of the individual children in care. It builds new experiences and expectations based on children's previously learned knowledge and skills. We make sure to be intentional in the methods used to support children's learning. Our curriculum also supports children with disabilities and children whose home language is not English. We currently use the Frog Street curriculum. We supplement our curriculum with the Texas Guidelines. Our teachers write their assigned classrooms lesson plans based on the curriculum goals and assessments reports.

The Frog Street curriculum is designed to foster positive self-esteem and provide opportunities for creative expression. It provides the support of the development of social skills such as sharing, cooperation and empathy and to enhance physical development through a variety of activities. Lastly but not least, the plans will stimulate cognitive development through exploration and discovery

The staff will also create lesson plans based on children's learning abilities to help support a positive outcome of the child's developmental needs.

Our curriculum starts at 10am-5:30pm. From 5:30pm-6pm, children are engaged in quiet activities prior to waiting for departure.

Curriculum

Our curriculum plays a vital role in our children's development. It allows us to offer experiences that help children learn about themselves and the world.

Our curriculum from Frog Street consists of:

- Interactive materials and equipment to stimulate curiosity, imagination and problem solving
- Physical and planned activities for gross motor skills, fine motor skills, active play, and health and safety
- Social interaction amongst peers and teachers
- Focus on all areas of development
- Cognitive and intellectual activities that focus on memory, counting, shapes, patterns, measurements, art, dramatic play, global learning, and sense of space.
- Language and communication for strengthening communication to improve listening, understanding, and speaking. Understanding how letters and words sound.
- Literacy to help children learn to recognize words in print and books.
- Cultural awareness to develop appreciate for one's own and other cultures
- Approaches to different styles of learning that encourages initiative and curiosity, engagement and persistence and reasoning and problem solving

Lesson Plans

Lesson plans at daycares are essential tools for providing a structured and nurturing learning environment for young children. These plans are carefully designed by our educators and staff to meet the developmental needs and interests of the children in their care. Lesson plans include a variety of activities, such as play-based learning, arts and crafts, storytime, music, and outdoor play, to foster physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. They are often centered around specific themes or learning objectives and are typically flexible to accommodate the evolving needs and interests of the children.

Lesson plans are taught individually by the classroom teachers of each class at the scheduled time. All lesson plans are approved by the director of operations. Materials that are needed for the lesson plans will be acquired by the center in order to complete implementation.

Results from the assessments will be used to help provide a focused lesson plan to meet the children's developmental needs. Lesson plans will be posted on the bulletin board for viewing.

Accommodating Families/ Parent Communication

We have a zero-discrimination tolerance policy. We do not discriminate due to race, color, nationality, sex, age, or religious affiliation. Our program supports families and children that may need additional accommodations.

For families with special needs children will need to communicate with us to see if we have the staff and capabilities to be able to provide for the child before we can accept them. To request a disability accommodation or special services, contact the director at 210-455-6748 or email Mercy.Galvan@MercysPlayhouse.com. Parents may enroll their children in the center as space becomes available.

If your child needs certain types of therapies while in our care, we will provide space to accommodate these therapy sessions or will be more than happy to have the therapist work with your child within their normal environment.

Our center showcases diversity, traditions, and inclusiveness throughout the center. We encourage families to participate in special events and share family photos showing the family diversity and traditions to be used in your child's classroom to help them gain a sense of belonging.

Remember, communication with our staff is key so we can provide the upmost care for your child.

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play at daycares is a fundamental component of early childhood development. It provides children with opportunities for physical activity, exploration, social interaction, and exposure to the natural environment. During outdoor play, children can engage in a range of activities that promote physical fitness, including running, jumping, climbing, and riding tricycles. This helps them develop essential gross motor skills. Moreover, outdoor play fosters social skills as children interact with their peers, learn to share, take turns, and resolve conflicts, all within a supervised and safe environment.

It is a requirement that children spend time outside for outdoor learning activities, unless it is raining. Children are scheduled to spend time for at least 30 minutes in the morning and at least 30 minutes in the afternoon. Since staff and children will be outside, please adhere to our outdoor playtimes as we may not be able to answer the door. Children will go outside in hot or cold weather so please dress your child in weather appropriate clothing. We will be taking extra precautions if the weather is too hot or cold for outdoor play.

Hours of Operation

Monday – Friday:

8am-6pm.

Holidays

We will be closed on: New Years, MLK, Battle of Flowers, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Eve, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and day after Christmas. If there are holidays during the week, parents are still responsible for paying the full week fee. Holidays are subject to change yearly so parents will be notified when this happens.

Payments, Fees, and Refunds

Daycare

Monday-Friday weekly daycare fees are \$140 a week for the ages 2-12. Payments are due every Monday. Any family who is unable to pay must communicate with the director for payment arrangements. There are no penalties for paying late at this time.

There is a \$1 per minute late pick up fee starting at 6:01 until the child is picked up after closing. For example, if the child is picked up at 6:23pm, the late fee will be \$23.

There are no refunds after the week has been paid.

If parents want to keep their slot, they must pay for the week. Parents are allowed one vacation week out of the year to hold their slot for the week without paying. If parents already exhausted their vacation week, they must pay for the week regardless if they show up or not or risk losing their spot to the next waiting parent.

There is a \$10 registration fee to start and an annual \$10 re-registration fee afterwards.

We accept CCS payments. CCS payments are due by the third business day of the month. If CCS payments are not paid in time, the director will report the nonpayment to the CCS case manager and this may result in the termination of services.

We do not offer services to care for infants at the moment.

Drop-In Care

One child - \$10 per hour

2 children (family members) - \$8 per child per hour

3 Children (family members) - \$7 per child per hour

*Children staying for 8 hours or more will be charged a flat rate fee of \$50 per child for the day.

- Parents will be charged for the first full hour even if child does not stay the full hour.

After the minimum time (one hour), additional minutes will be prorated in 15-minute increments.

After School Care

Mercy's Playhouse will be offering After School Care for the school year Monday – Friday from 3pm-6pm.

- Children must be enrolled into Mercy's Playhouse.
- \$50 per week for each child.
- Children picked up after 6pm will be prorated child drop-in prices in 15-minute increments for extra time stayed. (\$2.50)
- We do not offer transportation.
- Spots are limited.

Tour Policy

Tour policies are in place to create a secure and orderly environment while offering prospective families a transparent and informative experience. They help ensure that the daycare's daily operations and the children's routines are not disrupted while maintaining the utmost care and safety.

If you are interested in a tour, please give our director a call so we can schedule a tour. Tours may also be given upon walk-in request depending on what stage of the schedule the daycare is in. For example, our staff may be engaged in outdoor play and will not be able to give a tour at that time.

Handicap Accessibility

There are three handicap accessible entry ways to get to our center. There is a ramp on both sides of the complex and a ramp at the center. There are no steps inside our facility. Our bathroom is handicap accessible.

Admission Requirements

Registration form must be filled out and submitted along with the \$10 registration fee. The registration fee is a recurring fee once a year. All information is viewed as confidential and secured privately. Parents must provide updated immunization records and a physical (One year is rime frame is allotted to obtain a well-med checkup for licensing).

Payments and Fees

We accept cash and credit/debit. We do not accept checks. Yearly fee for registration is \$10. The fee for late pickups will be a one dollar per minute starting at 6:01. The late fees only apply to full time and part time children.

Withdrawal from Program Procedures

If for any reason a parent wants to withdraw their child from our program, we ask that you communicate with the director about the intended last day of care.

Ages Permitted

Our facility is designed to accept children of the ages 2-12. Children who are not potty trained must provide diapers and/or pullups and a container of baby wipes as needed. All children regardless of age must have 2 changes of clothes at the center at all times. An extra set of clothes is permitted in case of an accident.

P-PM-05 Program Assessments and Parent Conferences

Our programs provide a monthly developmental checklist for our staff to share with the parents about their child's progress. Our assessments are done every month. Results of the assessment are used to help teachers write lesson plan activities to meet the children educational needs. The following areas will be assessed: language and literacy, cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, science, technology, mathematics, social studies, and emergent

literacy. A summary of their progress and results are shared and discussed during parent-teacher conferences. This information is kept in the child's folder and gives the staff and parents the opportunity to help the child reach their developmental milestones. During the conference teachers will ask the parents for any feedback, comments, or concerns regarding the assessment. We hold parent conferences twice a year to discuss child development.

When assessment identify concerns, appropriate follow-up, referral, or other intervention is used. Our families are part of the assessment process with regular communication, partnership, and involvement. Once the assessments are complete the teacher will discuss the child progress during parent-teacher's conference. If the teacher feels that an earlier meeting is needed, they will call you to schedule a time to discuss the assessment results. If the center Director or teacher feels that your child needs additional support outside our facility, we will offer support our families allocating other community services that their child may needs. No referral will be made without the legal guardian consent.

P-PM-01 Program Support

Our programs support children that needs additional accommodations to help meet their needs. The programs provide material that they can engage in as they go through their experiences. Staff will work closely with family whose child may need special accommodations so the child can reach their full potential and master their goals. We do not discriminate against race, religion, sex, or national origins. Each family's cultural values are respected.

Physical Activities

The center provides many opportunities to engage in physical activities by indoor and outdoor play (weather permitted). Our center is designed for children to utilize physical play throughout the whole day. The only sedentary period will be during nap times. Our age-appropriate activities allow children to move their bodies freely by utilizing balls, bike riding, kicking, dressing up, etc. Each activity is based on the child's abilities and cultural values.

Our teachers will interact with the infants in their daily physical activities to encourage exploration throughout their environment. Infant floor time will be supervised to observe developmental milestones such as head and neck support, crawling, kicking, reaching, grasping, and rolling.

Screen Time

Screen time rules and guidelines for daycares, or early childhood education settings, are crucial for ensuring the well-being and development of young children. Our movie and video game areas will provide age-appropriate content. For our daycare students, they will be limited to screen time to one hour per day according to licensing standards. Screen time will not be used to replace but supplement daycare activities such as, hands-on, real-world experiences and interactions. It's important for daycares to create a healthy balance and a developmentally appropriate environment for young children, focusing on their physical, social, and emotional development.

Children younger than 2 years old will not have any screen time. Children older than 2 years old may have up to an hour of screen time for the day. There may be days where children will not have any screen time at all.

For our drop-in and after school care members, screen usage will be allotted for homework.

Clothing Guidelines

All children that attend is required to bring to 2 changes of clothes. Clothing must be labeled with child's name or initials to prevent loss.

Children's clothing should be comfortable, allowing them to move freely. Avoid clothing with rough seams, tight elastic, or choking hazards, and choose soft, breathable fabrics. Dress children appropriately for the weather, whether it's cold, hot, or rainy. Ensure they have appropriate outerwear, such as coats, hats, gloves, and raincoats. Encourage children to wear closed-toe shoes with non-slip soles to prevent accidents and injuries. Sandals and open-toe shoes may not be suitable for all activities.

These clothing rules help parents and caregivers ensure that children are appropriately dressed for various activities, settings, and weather conditions, while also promoting safety and comfort. It's important to balance these rules with allowing children to express themselves and develop a sense of autonomy in their clothing choices.

Lost and/or Damaged Items

We will not be held responsible for any lost and/or damaged item that is brought into our center. We will not reimburse or replace lost/damaged items. Please label all items visibly and clearly to ensure this does not happen.

Discipline and Guidance

There will be no harsh, cruel, or unusual treatment of any child. Unacceptable behavior will be addressed immediately and parents will be informed at pick up. We are a center that believes in methods that promotes self-direction and self-esteem. We will apply positive redirection from unacceptable behavior and encouraging good behavior. If the child continues their disruptive behavior, for the safety of others, parents will be notified immediately pick up the child.

We follow the Challenging Behavior Site Plan as follows:

1. The child will be separated from the other children to prevent injuries and give the child time to self-regulate. This room will be a designated a safe place for the child. A teacher will be in the room with the child at all times. The child will not be in seclusion.
2. The behavior will be recorded on an antidotal record sheet so staff can communicate with the parent when discussing their child's behavior.
3. Staff will share their concerns with families to develop strategies and interventions.
4. When challenging behavior persists or becomes dangerous to self, others, property, and staff, the Director will work closely with families to develop a plan for potential referrals for additional services.
5. A family may have to withdraw their child from the center if all strategies fail.

The antidotal record sheet will consist of:

- Description of behavior and the incident that triggered the behavior
- Strategies to prevent future disruptive behaviors
- Strategies on how to deal with disruptive behaviors
- Implementation of the plan and record improvements and progress

Staff will maintain continual communication with parents and guardians regarding the child's behavior. Ongoing documentation and progress reports will also be kept. Staff will be sensitive to different cultural beliefs and values.

Arrival Procedures

Children can begin to arrive at 7:30am Mon.-Fri. Full time children attending Mercy's Playhouse must arrive no later than 10am Mon-Fri. in order to participate in daily

activities. It is required that children must be accompanied with an adult upon arrival and departure. Please bring ring the doorbell to notify staff and we will be able to bring the child in from the door. There will be no need for parents to come into the facility unless needed. The staff will place all of your child's belongings in their assigned cubbies and will sign the child in for you. This will ensure a quick drop off to minimize separation anxiety and allow the child to engage in play as soon as possible.

The child can be dropped off with us at anytime and are not penalized for late arrival. We only recommend an arrival time so the child can make the most of their day and not miss out on certain activities that are planned. Arriving at the recommended time also ensures that interruption of the children's learning opportunities is minimized.

If the child is late due to a medical appointment, only proper documentation from the doctor will allow the child to be accepted.

Drop-in children do not have a set schedule to arrive at the facility.

Children will be signed in and given a thorough health check before being let in.

Drop Off Procedures

Please make drop offs brief. The longer the parents stay during the drop off, the harder it will get for all parties. A quick wave goodbye with the assurance that you will be back later to pick them up is all that is needed. Although children may cry in the beginning, they quickly get involved in play or activities as soon as the parents are gone. Here are a few things that can be done to make the departure go even smoother:

- Let the child know about the new arrangement in advanced. Explain to the child what he will be able to do and experience at our center such as playtime, learning and meeting new friends. Answer any questions the child may have and reassure that you will always return for pickup.
- Tour the place with the child so your child can be comforted knowing that you are part of this new adjustment as well. The director will be more than welcome to allow this to happen.
- Let your child know that you will have to leave them there for a brief period of time and stick with the plan.

Releasing Children from Our Care

Parents/Guardians will be required to show their IDs before picking up the child. We will cross reference and confirm identity before releasing the child. Only parents listed in the authorized pick-up list will be able to pick up the child. Any alternative persons doing

pick up (must be 18 years old or older) must have a valid driver's license or Texas ID and the identification number must match that was given to the center. Payment is also required prior to pick up.

In case of an emergency, you may call and give authorization for someone else to pick up your child, but they must also have a picture ID. We will always call or text back to verify the information. CPS children can only be released to the ones that are on the pick-up list that have passed a background check. The case workers name and number must be put on the enrollment form. We will need a copy of the paperwork stating that you have guardianship of the child/children.

- If children are not picked up one hour after closing, SAPD will be called.
- Children may also be released to Law Enforcement and Child Protective Services.
- If staff feels parents are intoxicated or appears to be under the influence of drugs, SAPD will be called if an alternate pick up is not resolved.
- Once the child(ren) are signed out of our care, Mercy's Playhouse will not be responsible for any accidents thereafter.

Absences

We ask that parents take the time for parents to call and communicate with the director that the child will not be attending for the day. This allows other parents to bring their child or children in to utilize our drop-in services.

If the child is absent due to a medical issue, proper documentation from the doctor must be supplied in order for the facility to accept the child. This is for the safety of the children and staff.

For children under the CCS program, if the child is absent for 5 consecutive days, it will have to be reported to the agency. This may result in the child being removed from the program.

Updating parent information

We ask that you keep all of the information within our files current. This will ensure there is no confusion or mistakes.

If there is a change in contact information, please let us know immediately so we can update our system. It is vital that we have up to date information such as emergency

contacts and phone numbers in case of illness or other forms of emergencies. Parents may give information verbally, email, or handwritten at any time.

Family Communications and Participation

Families are welcome to participate in the daily activities we have with the students. If parents have any concerns that they need to voice, we encourage them to schedule an appointment with the director so they can be addressed. Parents may also call or send email to setup a parent conference at their convenience.

There are many ways a parent can be involved in our center:

- Parties for holidays and birthdays
- Parent meetings with the staff or director
- Graduations
- Food drive and Donations
- Fundraisers
- Parent-Teacher Conferences

A drop-box will be provided at the front desk for parents to anonymously suggest ideas and changes. It can also be used for communication between the facility and parents.

Food and Snacks

We serve a well-balanced breakfast, lunch and snacks throughout the day. Children are allowed to engage in social conversation with their peers during meal time. Children are never rushed to complete their meals. Food is never used as a form of punishment, reward or incentive.

If your child has food allergies, please let us know so we may accommodate. If a child has a special dietary need, a written notice from the physician is required. The notice will be shared with the kitchen staff and teachers. The staff are trained in food allergies and preparedness. The staff will also provide information to parents on sample menus for healthy eating to promote healthy eating habits.

Breakfast is served 8am-9am. If your child does not make it to our breakfast time, please provide them breakfast before arriving.

Lunch is served 12pm-12-45pm. Snacks starts at 2:30pm.

Outside prepared breakfast, lunches, and snacks are permitted and must be labeled clearly. The food will be refrigerated until the child is ready to eat. Snacks provided are nut-free and we require outside foods to be nut-free as well.

Food Allergies

Food allergies are immune system reactions to specific proteins found in certain foods. When someone with a food allergy consumes or comes into contact with the allergenic food, their immune system mistakenly identifies the proteins in that food as harmful invaders and mounts an allergic response. This response can range from mild to severe and can occur within minutes to a few hours after exposure to the allergen.

Common food allergens include:

1. Peanuts
2. Tree nuts (e.g., almonds, walnuts, cashews)
3. Milk
4. Eggs
5. Soy
6. Wheat
7. Fish
8. Shellfish (e.g., shrimp, crab, lobster)

Symptoms of a food allergy can vary but often include:

- Skin reactions (hives, itching, eczema)
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)
- Respiratory symptoms (sneezing, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath)
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, or throat
- Anaphylaxis, a severe and potentially life-threatening allergic reaction that can lead to difficulty breathing, a drop in blood pressure, and loss of consciousness

Food allergies can be diagnosed through various tests, including skin prick tests and blood tests that measure the presence of specific antibodies (e.g., IgE) to certain food proteins. The most effective treatment for food allergies is strict avoidance of the allergenic food. In some cases, allergists may prescribe epinephrine auto-injectors to be used in case of anaphylactic reactions.

It's important for individuals with food allergies to carefully read food labels, inform restaurant staff about their allergies, and be vigilant about cross-contamination, as even small traces of allergens can trigger a reaction. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of food allergies, and many food products are now labeled to indicate the presence of common allergens, making it easier for people with food allergies to make safe choices.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the practice of feeding an infant or young child with breast milk produced by their mother or a milk donor. It is the most natural and recommended way to nourish and nurture babies during their first months of life. Here are some key points about breastfeeding:

1. **Nutritional Benefits:** Breast milk is considered the ideal source of nutrition for infants. It contains essential nutrients, antibodies, enzymes, and hormones that are perfectly tailored to meet a baby's needs. Breast milk provides complete and easily digestible nutrition, promoting healthy growth and development.
2. **Health Benefits:** Breastfeeding offers numerous health benefits for both the baby and the mother. For the baby, it helps protect against infections, reduces the risk of certain diseases, and supports brain and immune system development. For the mother, it can aid in postpartum recovery, reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, and promote bonding with the baby.
3. **Bonding:** Breastfeeding fosters a strong emotional bond between the mother and the baby. Skin-to-skin contact, eye contact, and the physical closeness during breastfeeding help establish a strong emotional connection.
4. **Convenience:** Breast milk is always available at the right temperature and does not require preparation, sterilization, or heating. This makes it a convenient option for feeding, especially during nighttime feedings.
5. **Economic Benefits:** Breastfeeding is cost-effective as it eliminates the need for purchasing formula and feeding supplies. It can save families a significant amount of money over the course of a baby's first year.
6. **Immune System Support:** Breast milk contains antibodies and immune factors that help protect the baby against infections. It can also be easier on a baby's sensitive digestive system compared to formula.
7. **Recommended Duration:** The World Health Organization (WHO) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the

first six months of a baby's life. After six months, complementary foods can be introduced while continuing to breastfeed up to two years or longer.

8. **Challenges:** While breastfeeding is natural, it can sometimes be challenging. Some women may experience difficulties such as latch issues, nipple pain, low milk supply, or breastfeeding in public. Many of these challenges can be addressed with support from healthcare professionals, lactation consultants, and support groups.
9. **Breastfeeding in Public:** Many countries have laws protecting a mother's right to breastfeed in public. It's important to create a supportive and accepting environment for breastfeeding mothers.

Breastfeeding is a deeply personal and individual choice, and not all mothers are able to breastfeed for various reasons. In such cases, infant formula can be a suitable alternative to provide essential nutrition to the baby. Ultimately, the choice of how to feed a baby should be made based on the mother's and baby's unique circumstances and needs.

For parents that are breastfeeding, can do so in a comfortable place of privacy in the facility's designated place. For more information on breastfeeding visit:

<http://www.medelabreastfeedingus.com/breastfeeding-guide>
<http://www.breastmilkcounts.com>

You have a right to breastfeed in public.
Breastfeeding Help: 855-550-6667

Storing, Handling and Feeding Breast Milk

Storing, handling, and feeding breast milk properly is important to ensure its safety and nutritional value. Here are some guidelines for each of these aspects:

Storing Breast Milk:

1. **Use Clean Containers:** Use clean bottles or storage bags specifically designed for breast milk. Make sure they are BPA-free.
2. **Label Containers:** Always label the containers with the date of expression to ensure you use the oldest milk first (first in, first out).
3. **Use the Right Amount:** Store breast milk in small amounts (2-4 ounces) to minimize waste.
4. **Refrigeration:** Breast milk can be safely stored in the refrigerator for up to 3-5 days at 32-39°F (0-4°C).
5. **Freezing:** If you want to store breast milk for a longer period, you can freeze it. Use a deep freezer if possible. Frozen breast milk can be stored for up to 6-12 months at a temperature of 0°F (-18°C) or lower.
6. **Avoid Overfilling Containers:** Leave some space in the storage container because breast milk expands when it freezes. Do not fill to the top.

7. **Avoid Multiple Freezing/Thawing:** It's best to freeze breast milk once, and thaw and use it only once. Repeated freezing and thawing can lead to a loss of some of its beneficial properties.
8. **Thawing:** Thaw frozen breast milk in the refrigerator or by placing it in a bowl of warm water. Do not use a microwave, as it can create hot spots that may scorch the milk or destroy its nutrients.

Handling Breast Milk:

1. **Hand Hygiene:** Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before expressing, handling, or feeding breast milk.
2. **Clean Pump and Equipment:** If you're using a breast pump, clean and sterilize the pump parts according to the manufacturer's instructions.
3. **Use Freshly Expressed Milk:** Ideally, use freshly expressed breast milk when possible. This ensures that it retains the most nutrients and immune factors.

Feeding Breast Milk:

1. **Use a Clean Bottle:** Ensure that the baby's feeding bottle is clean and sterilized.
2. **Check the Temperature:** Warm refrigerated or thawed breast milk by placing the bottle in a container of warm water. Do not microwave it. Test the temperature on the inside of your wrist to ensure it's comfortably warm, not hot.
3. **Feed Promptly:** Once breast milk is thawed or warmed, it should be fed to the baby within 1-2 hours. Do not leave it out at room temperature for an extended period.
4. **Don't Mix with Fresh Milk:** Avoid mixing freshly expressed milk with previously frozen or thawed milk unless you plan to use it all immediately. Mixing milk temperatures can be unsafe.
5. **Discard Unused Milk:** Any leftover breast milk that the baby doesn't consume should be discarded to avoid bacterial contamination. Do not refrigerate or refreeze previously warmed milk.
6. **Follow Your Baby's Feeding Cues:** Feed your baby according to their hunger cues, not a strict schedule.

Proper storage, handling, and feeding of breast milk are essential to ensure your baby receives the best nutrition while minimizing the risk of contamination. If you have specific concerns or questions about breastfeeding and breast milk handling, consult with a lactation consultant or your healthcare provider for personalized guidance.

Dealing with Accidents and Incidents

At Mercy's Playhouse, we strive to take pre-emptive action on preventing accidents. Dealing with accidents and incidents at daycares is a crucial aspect of providing a safe and nurturing environment for children. Proper response and documentation are essential for ensuring the child's well-being and maintaining transparency with parents. Unfortunately,

accidents can still occur under a watchful eye. When this occurs, the child will be rendered medical aid. Whether we notify the parents right away depends on the extent of the injury. Upon pickup, parents will be informed of the incident and will need to sign an incident report.

Illness and Medical Emergencies

For the safety of the children and staff, we reserve the right to refuse any child. If child shows symptoms within our care, the child will have to be separated from the other children to prevent spreading. Parents will also be notified immediately and will be required to pick up the child within the hour. We will not accept children that exhibits contagious symptoms such as the following:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Signs of strep throat and/or sore throats
- Excessive coughing
- Pink Eye symptoms
- Rashes and sores
- Diarrhea
- Lice

If the child has had any of these symptoms overnight, do not bring them to the facility. Children must be symptom free for 24 hours before returning or we may require a doctor's not giving permission for the child to return to child care. If you have given your child medication before coming to the center, you must inform the staff what type and why.

For immediate medical emergencies, EMS will be called to transport the child the nearest hospital. Our staff are certified in CPR and will administer when needed. Parents will be immediately notified of the situation. Emergency contacts will be notified if parents are unreachable. The child must be symptom free from illness for past 24 hours and return with doctor's note.

Oral Hygiene

Our staff conduction visual oral inspections by checking the child's mouth the first week of enrollment and during the school year. If any concerns arise, we will notify the parents/guardians. Our staff will be teaching the importance of hygiene, nutrition, and oral health practices. Our Texas Health Consultant are available to answer any questions and/or concerns you may have regarding oral health, nutrition, or breastfeeding.

Oral health, which includes the health of your teeth, gums, and the entire oral cavity, is essential for overall well-being. Maintaining good oral health offers a range of benefits:

1. **Prevention of Tooth Decay:** Proper oral hygiene practices, such as regular brushing and flossing, help remove food particles and bacteria that can lead to tooth decay. This reduces the risk of cavities.
2. **Prevention of Gum Disease:** Good oral health can prevent and manage gum diseases like gingivitis and periodontitis. Healthy gums are essential for holding teeth in place and preventing tooth loss.
3. **Fresh Breath:** Good oral hygiene practices can help prevent bad breath, also known as halitosis.
4. **Improved Physical Health:** There is a growing body of research linking oral health to overall health. Poor oral health has been associated with various systemic conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and respiratory infections.
5. **Better Digestion:** Healthy teeth and gums are crucial for effective chewing, which is the first step in the digestive process. Properly chewed food is easier for the digestive system to break down and absorb nutrients.
6. **Confidence and Self-esteem:** A healthy smile can boost your self-confidence and self-esteem. It can also improve your overall appearance and make a positive impression on others.
7. **Pain Prevention:** Good oral health reduces the risk of toothaches and other oral pain, which can be quite uncomfortable.
8. **Lower Dental Costs:** Maintaining good oral health can help prevent the need for costly dental treatments and procedures in the future. Preventive care is generally more affordable than restorative care.
9. **Improved Speech:** Properly aligned teeth and a healthy oral cavity can contribute to clearer speech and articulation.
10. **Better Overall Quality of Life:** Good oral health allows you to enjoy a wide range of foods, smile with confidence, and avoid the discomfort and inconvenience of oral health problems.

To maintain good oral health, it's important to establish a regular oral hygiene routine, which includes brushing your teeth at least twice a day, flossing daily, and visiting your dentist for regular check-ups and cleanings. Additionally, a balanced diet, limiting sugary and acidic foods, and avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol consumption can contribute to better oral health. If you have specific concerns about your oral health, consult with a dentist or dental hygienist for personalized advice and treatment.

Immunizations

Current immunization records must be provided at the time of registration. It is the parent's responsibility to make sure all up to date shots received are listed on the records or may result in the child not being accepted. Parents must notify on enrollment form if vision and hearing screening is on file at the child's school. **First time enrollees and all children in our program 4 years old or older must have hearing and vision examinations by September 1st of each year.**

Medication

Prescription medication must be in the original container with label that shows the child's name, date, directions for administering, and the name of physician. Staff will adhere to the dosage and dosage times per instructions. We will not administer medication that the label shows it is out of date. Medicine will be kept in a locked storage compartment out of reach from other children. Refrigerated medicine will have its own area so it does not contaminate food.

DFPS Medicine Requirements

1. Parents must complete and sign an authorization form that gives Mercy's Playhouse permission to administer medication.
2. Prescribed medicine must be in the original container with label that shows the child's full name and date.
3. Staff will adhere to the label instructions when administering medication to the child.
4. Medicine will only be given to the child for whom it was intended for.
5. Medicine will not be administered if past expiration date.
6. A permission form must be filled out each time a parent requests the staff to administer medicine. Thee form must be completely filled out stating the child's full name, name of medication, date, amount and methods for administering the medicine.
7. Mercy's Playhouse staff will only administer medication for life threatening issues such as allergic reactions, asthma attacks, and epi pens.

Emergency Preparedness

- Children and staff are moved to the movie room. If safe to leave the building, take the nearest safest exit. If necessary, secondary exit route is available if safest to take.

- The director and staff are to get the emergency folder to call and notify all parents.
- Stay out of the building and lock down until scene is clear.
- Director will inform staff and children when it is safe.
- Director and staff will count all children for accountability.

Fire Evacuation Plan and Procedures

1. Alarms will sound
2. Gather all of the children and take nearest safest exit.
3. Check all zones and bathrooms for children.
4. If first route/exit cannot be used, secondary exit will be used.
5. Get emergency folder to call and notify all parents.
6. Stand away from building at a safe distance.
7. Count all children immediately after exiting the building.

Emergency Preparedness for Flooding

Relocation Area: Rogers Middle School, 314 Gateway St., San Antonio, TX 78223

Phone: 210-438-6840

Emergency Conditions that Endanger the total center complex

Relocation Area: Walmart, 3302 SE Military Dr., San Antonio, TX 78223

Phone: 210-337-1946

Emergency Preparedness for Severe Weather

In the event that the safety of the center is compromised, all Staff and children will be gathered in the restroom of Mercy's Playhouse. This room is considered the safest area of the facility. If there is a reason the child needs to be moved to another safe area, all employees are trained to transport the child safely and efficiently.

Inclement Weather Policy

Our center practices a severe weather drill 4 times a year and is recorded in the logs. In the event of a severe weather situation, parents will be notified immediately for their children to be picked up. If there is an upcoming severe threat of weather condition such as floodings, tornados, blizzards, and severe chill, we will be closed.

Field Trips, Water Play, and Transportation

Mercy's Playhouse will not be participating in field trips and water play. We also do not provide transportation to and from the facility.

Reporting Abuse and Neglect

Texas law requires caregivers to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services or law enforcement. To make confidential reports, call **1-800-252-5400**.

Monthly Newsletters

Newsletters are an effective means of sharing information, updates, and news with a specific audience. They can be used to inform readers about recent developments, events, achievements, and important announcements at our daycare.

Survey

We strive to become the best we can be and value our parent's input so each year, parents will be given a survey to evaluate our center. We believe we can get valuable parental feedback to help keep an optimal daycare facility that we can all love and enjoy. Surveys will be reviewed and changes will be implemented into our policies. Parents will be notified verbally or written of these changes.

Family Resources

Education Resources:

- [Health & Nutrition Information: \(ChooseMyPlate.gov\)](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov)
- [Tips for Breastfeeding Moms-WIC Works-USDA: \(wicworks.fns.usda.gov\)](http://wicworks.fns.usda.gov)
- [FARE-Food Allergies: \(foodallergy.org\)](http://foodallergy.org)
- [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America: \(aafa.org\)](http://aafa.org)
- [SAHA Community Resources: \(saha.org\)](http://saha.org)
- [USDA Food and Nutrition Service: \(fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/usda-foods-expected-be-available\)](http://fns.usda.gov/usda-foods/usda-foods-expected-be-available)
- [Visit TexasWIC.org to learn more about WIC](http://TexasWIC.org)

Information of interest to parents is available at the front desk. Brochures and handouts on topics related to child development and community resources will be displayed. If you cannot find what you are looking for, please ask our office staff for assistance

Gang Zone Information

Upon enrollment, parents will be given a copy of gang zone information. A copy will also be posted on our wall where it is visibly accessible to all. Gang Zone information will state that any area within 1000 feet of a child care center is a gang-free zone. Criminal offenses that occur within these zones will be subject to harsher penalties.

Handbook Policy

Our handbook is updated as needed and/or annually.

