

Parent Handbook

Shepherd of the Valley Preschool

1723 Park Lawn Road
Hacienda Heights, CA 91745

(626) 965-7076

sotvpreschool.org

sotvpresch@gmail.org



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WELCOME FAMILIES

As the newest members of our family, we look forward to serving you and your family. Let us know what we can do to help you. We look forward to getting to know you. It's important to us that you feel at home here. We'll try to earn your trust and loyalty in the weeks and months ahead. We'll be doing our very best.

The policies and procedures described in this Parent Handbook are important for you to know and understand. Please read carefully and ask us questions if something is unclear.

OUR MISSION

It is our mission to care for and teach the young children in our care to the best of our ability. We believe this work is the most important and rewarding work we can do. All children are deserving not only of our love and compassion, our respect and understanding, but they also always deserve our very best efforts on their behalf. We dedicate ourselves to this service to children and their families: that they be successful, happy and healthful; capable and competent in dealing with life's challenges; and deeply appreciative of the wonders that life brings.

OUR HISTORY

Shepherd of the Valley Preschool was established in 1984 as a mission of Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church to help meet the needs of the community for an early childhood education and care facility. It is run by a staff of trained early childhood educators and governed by a Board consisting of congregation members and parents of children enrolled in the school. The Preschool is designed to provide an educational experience as well as child care for children ages two through five years old.

Shepherd of the Valley Preschool is designed to provide an educational experience as well as child care for children ages two years old through entry into kindergarten. Our staff of enthusiastic, dedicated and skilled teachers provides opportunities for children to learn in a challenging and creative environment. Along with excellent credentials and capabilities, our teachers exhibit warmth and genuine caring for each child's development and needs.

The Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church is the licensee of Shepherd of the Valley Preschool and manages the relationship with Educational Programs Inc. (EPI), which was hired to manage the preschool in November 2021.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Our philosophy is that children need a warm, comfortable non-competitive place to learn about themselves, other people, and the world around them. Philosophy is important because it affects everything we do in school. We believe each child can develop to the fullest physically,

emotionally, socially, and intellectually in an atmosphere of love and trust.

Our philosophy determines the goals we set up for the children and also the program we employ to carry out these goals. A very simple way to determine one's philosophy is to ask, "What kind of adult do I want each child to become?" We want our children to become competent, self-confident adults. To this end, we accept each child for the individual they are and to help them develop a good self-image as a contributing member of society.

Parents often ask if our school has a planned curriculum. We believe children learn by doing. We use Creative Curriculum written by Diane Trister Dodge because it supports our philosophy and NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) standards. Creative Curriculum assures children freedom to learn by doing things themselves. By strategically blending active play, necessary routines, and structured group activity, all within a carefully arranged physical environment, children can and will grow in wonderful and exciting ways.

We make sure children's daily experiences are filled with endless exploration leading to meaningful discoveries. First, we ensure there are always interesting things to do. Second, we provide them the opportunity and the psychological support to explore their world with confidence, eagerness, and curiosity. Third, we constantly watch to be sure they are safe. The structure of our environment and of our day greatly limit the number and kinds of conflicts that arise when children play together. We need challenges, those we provide are designed to be hard sometimes. Sometimes when we reach, we fall down and it hurts. But sometimes we reach all the way to the moon.

Our focus is on child-centered activities. This means that the choices are left for the children to make. This teaches initiative and independence, because the choices are not being made for them. It instills a sense of responsibility and respect, because they must follow the rules. It accommodates greater individualized learning because children proceed at their own pace.

Children's activities center on objects and experiences that develop more fully their understanding of what they can see, touch, hear, smell and taste. Objects are safe, fun and can be manipulated in different ways as children develop their awareness and discover details and relationships. Teachers are trained to understand the sequences children experience as they learn, provide the play props. They set the stage for each learning experience. Then they stand back allowing the children freedom of choice, the freedom to learn it their own way, at their own pace. Teachers recognize when to give individual attention to a particular child; helping a child reach out to share a new discovery, reminding another of a vital piece that is just outside his range of vision, or just giving a quick hug, or a word of encouragement.

Children's natural curiosity and desire to make sense of their world motivates them to become involved in learning activities. We learn best what we do by ourselves. Or as Piaget put it: "Every time we teach a child something we prevent him from discovering it himself."

ARRIVING & DEPARTING

Wonderful discoveries begin as soon as children arrive at school. So children don't miss out on daily lessons and emergent activities, please have your child at school by 9:00 am. There is much careful thought and planning to the organization of our day. If you know you're running late, please call to let us know ahead of time.

State law requires that each child be signed-in with the time of arrival noted, and with a full signature (first and last name) of the person dropping off the child. Children arriving via district, or other special transportation, will be received by staff members, signed in, and be taken to their teacher. It is the parent's responsibility to notify us if their child will be absent.

State law also requires that we not admit children who show signs of illness. Help us keep our center safe for all children. Never bring your ill child to the center. If, in the course of the day, your child should develop symptoms of illness, we will call to ask that your child be picked up immediately, as required by state law. (Our Childhood Illness and Disease Policy will be discussed in detail in its' section of the Parent Handbook.)

When picking up your child, please avoid coming at nap time (usually between 12:30 PM and 2:30 PM) when your departure might be disruptive for the other napping children.

Prior to leaving, each child must be signed out, with the time of departure and a full signature (first and last name) of the person picking them up. This is a good time to check for notes from the staff, newsletters, or other written communication.

We are very careful to release children only to authorized people, with proper identification, that are over 18 years of age. Remember it is unlawful to leave a child unattended in a vehicle at any time.

Any time your child is picked up after normal hours, you will be charged a late pick-up fee. Please make payment to the teachers present at the time of the pick-up.

SAFETY

-We are a smoke free facility.

-SOTV follows guidelines and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, and Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing Division. Whenever the guidelines differ, we will follow the more rigorous requirements. There may be times we will follow even more stricter requirements for the safety of our staff, children and their families.

-There may be times the facility needs to close for safety reasons. It may be reduced hours or all day(s). Parents will be notified asap via phone call, Hi Mama or notes on the sign in sheets.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Employees at SOTV are required to establish and maintain confidentiality for all families enrolled in the program, as well as co-workers. Employees may not discuss enrollment status, financial issues, individual family matters, assessments or progress reports, court orders or custody matters to or in front of any other persons in or outside the center.

COMMUNICATION, VISITS & CONFERENCES

Effective communication with parents is one of our highest priorities. We know how important it is to parents.

We encourage parents to use Hi Mama for communication with the staff and the Director. We post important announcements, holiday reminders, menus, and other messages via Hi Mama as well.

Parent Conferences are available to discuss your child's progress and development. This update is designed to let you know how your child is doing in each of the four areas of development: Socio-Emotional, Physical, Cognitive and Language Development. Parent/Teacher Conferences will be arranged during the year.

We encourage visits and participation in our program whenever and as often as parents are able. Our doors are always open. By visiting, observing, and participating, parents can better appreciate the learning their children experience each day. Parents are then better able to support their child's continued learning and growth.

If you plan on stopping by for a visit, and you have questions or concerns that you want to discuss, it's best to make an appointment. When parent's stop by unexpectedly we do our best to be helpful, but the supervision of the children must come first, and sometimes we won't be able to talk to you for some time. We ask visitors to be respectful of our teachers' first responsibility. We are always happy to schedule a meeting at a more convenient time.

MEETING CHILDREN'S BASIC NEEDS

FOOD AND NUTRITION

We provide well balanced, nutritious meals and snacks. We serve fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as milk. Our meals are low in both fat and added sugar. We provide healthful alternatives to "junk" food.

We serve sunflower butter instead of peanut butter due to allergies for some children. We are a "nut free" campus.

We often talk with the children about where their food comes from, and why good nutrition is important. In this way we prepare children for making informed decisions about the foods they may choose to eat.

Children are encouraged to serve themselves. (These important self-help skills are easily taught if children are provided appropriately sized utensils and containers.)

When parents provide packed lunches for their children or food for special occasions, they should not include candy, soft drinks, or anything with chocolate. Water bottles and lunch box need to be labeled with the child's name.

We try to accommodate the dietary needs of all children. Special dietary restrictions and/or allergies should be brought to the Center Director's attention.

SLEEP

All children are given the opportunity to nap after lunch from about 12:30 until 2:30. After an active morning, most children are more than ready to nap. Occasionally children will not be sleepy. They will need to rest quietly and not disturb the sleep of the other children.

Sometimes children are very sleepy when they arrive in the morning. They are encouraged to rest quietly in a comfortable spot until they feel like joining their group's activities.

Parents must provide sheets for their child's cot. They must be cleaned weekly, as must all blankets and/or pillows.

CHILDHOOD ILLNESS & DISEASE

To prevent the spread of contagious disease, children with symptoms of illness may not attend.

Children with a temperature of 100 degrees or more will be sent home. **State law requires that parents pick children up as soon as possible should they develop symptoms while at our school.** We are not trained, nor have the facility to care for groups of ill children. Children sent home may not return until they have been symptom-free (or improving) and fever-free for 24 hours without medication.

If your child develops one of the highly contagious diseases or conditions listed below, or a similar disease or condition requiring care of a physician, a written statement from your physician that your child may safely return will be required at the time of readmission:

Bronchitis	Herpes	Mumps	Rubella
Chicken Pox	Impetigo	Pertusis	Salmonellosis
Conjunctivitis (pinkeye)	Influenza	Pinworm	Scabies
Fifth's Disease	Measles	Pneumonia	Strep Throat
Giardiasis	Meningitis	Ringworm	Scarlet Fever
Hepatitis A & B	Mononucleosis	Roseola	Tuberculosis

Lice epidemics occur even when the best precautions have been taken. This is because of its high communicability and the fact that parents often do not understand how to treat it most effectively. If your child contracts lice, see your doctor or the local health clinic immediately. In order to return to school, children have to be nit free

If your child has tubes in their ears, be sure you let us know. During the summer months especially we have a lot of water play that could result in damage to your child's ears.

To insure the good health of the children in our care, children (and center staff) with symptoms of illness will not be admitted. Children who develop symptoms while in our center are removed from their groups and isolated from the other children. Their parents are then notified and required to pick their children up as soon as possible. We are required by state law to follow these procedures.

Symptoms of illness include, but are not limited to the following:

- Temperature – We require that parents immediately pick up their child whenever it exceeds 100 degrees when accompanied by unusual behavior or other symptoms. Children will not be admitted until they have been fever free and symptom free for 24 hours.
- **Symptoms and signs of possible severe illness** – Unusual lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty breathing, wheezing.
- **Uncontrolled Diarrhea** (two times).
- **Vomiting** (two or more times in previous 24 hours).
- **Mouth sores with drooling.**
- **Rash**
- Child is excluded from the center until **symptom free**. When symptoms:
 - exceed the guidelines of our illness policy
 - interfere with the child's ability to participate or
 - compromise the caregiver's ability to adequately care for the group.

CHILDREN'S MEDICATIONS

IMPORTANT NOTE: The limitations described below have resulted from legal and liability concerns. We regret any inconvenience they may cause.

We dispense medication only once a day around lunchtime. Please discuss with your doctor how this affects your child's medicine dosages or scheduling.

It is a requirement that parents request in writing all medications they wish their child to receive. In addition, we require a doctor's prescription and/or note. We cannot usually give medicine on an "as needed" basis. **Medication should never be left in a child's cubbie, backpack or lunch box.** Give medications to center director or authorized staff member.

Non-prescription medication must be accompanied by a note from your doctor detailing what is to be given, how much, to whom, and the date. Medications prescribed for persons other than your child will not be dispensed.

If you have given your child medicine before bringing them to school, please let us know; often children's behaviors are directly related to reactions to medications. Medications must be kept in their original container, with all labels intact.

If your child has a serious medical condition that requires treatment, please see your Center's Director to be sure we can meet your needs, for example, asthma and diabetes.

CLOTHING

Every child has a labeled cubbie in which their belongings are kept. There should be an extra change of clothing there at all times that is appropriate for the current weather. (Potty-learning children should have more than just one!) **Everything should be labeled.** We are not responsible for lost clothing.

Many of our activities are messy and hard on clothing. We paint a lot, and play with things that stick and stain. We don't expect children to keep their clothing "clean" it's just not possible. Inexpensive and easily cleaned outfits are most appropriate for school wear. Expensive or delicate clothing are very inappropriate.

One of the most important tasks children learn at this age is how to dress themselves. By providing children with clothing they themselves can do without out help, parents provide their children with opportunities for taking responsibility for themselves, building self-esteem, and aid in their physical development. Hard to fasten or undo snaps or buttons are frustrating, especially for the potty-learner. Ask your child's teacher or the director for suggestions.

During the summer be sure to send a swimsuit and towel; we usually have no extras. During colder weather jackets or sweaters are needed. In winter, every child should have one in their cubbie regardless of how the weather is in the morning.

Jewelry is not recommended and strongly discouraged. It can snag on climbers or other equipment; it can be the source of conflicts, and is easily lost or misplaced. This includes chains, earrings, bracelets, etc. The only exceptions are emergency medical information or child identification bracelets. While there are allowed, we ask that they fit snugly around the wrist.

Light-weight tennis shoes with Velcro fasteners are the most appropriate shoes for school. **Sandals are prohibited**, as they are all types of shoes that fail to cover the foot completely, e.g. open-toed shoes, thongs, etc. Footwear with slippery soles are not allowed. Children need soles that grip the ground or the rungs of climbers.

SPECIAL NEEDS OF TWO'S

Parents are expected to provide us with diapers and wipes – if we have to supply you with either, we will have to charge you for them. (Be sure to label the containers with your child's name.)

Children's social nature and the examples of older children serves to promote children's potty learning in group care situations. Sometimes children develop an interest and a desire to use the potty almost before we're ready. Still, two things need to happen for potty learning to prove lasting.

First, it should happen only when the child is ready: starting too early results in frustration for the child, the parents, and the caregivers. Second, parents and caregivers should adopt a team effort – parents and caregivers must communicate frequently and effectively, both must understand that this is something the child will do when they decide to. Success for the child is inevitable, but persistent encouragement and sharing of successes will help the process. WE want to ensure the experience will be a positive one for all concerned.

MEETING CHILDREN’S EMOTIONAL NEEDS

SELF ESTEEM

One of our more important tasks is helping children feel good about themselves. How children feel about their abilities and self-worth greatly impacts their growth and development, how well they get along with others, even their ability to enjoy life. While talking about self-esteem sometimes gets pretty “touch-feely”, it’s importance for young children cannot be overestimated.

Development of healthy self-esteem depends on three aspects of children’s lives:

First, children must know that they are accepted and loved unconditionally, regardless of who or what they are, whether or not they do things that irritate or disturb us, whether or not they do things we like. Indifference, feigned appreciation, criticism or condescension have powerful effects on children, especially when expressed by those upon whom they depend.

Second, children, must experience genuine accomplishment. We must provide them with ample opportunities for challenging themselves in ways they themselves will find meaningful.

Thirdly, children must be given opportunities to observe and experience positive role models, especially parents, family members, teachers, etc. Children should know people who themselves have high self-esteem.

DISCIPLINE

Children’s misbehavior arises for many reasons and takes many forms. Teaching appropriate behavior is one of the more important parts of our job. “Discipline” refers to those actions we take to ensure the development of children’s ability to act responsibly. First we must minimize how often children misbehave. Then we must help them learn to make better choices especially when they are mad or frustrated. We do this by providing an anchor and a compass. The anchor is our unqualified love and acceptance of them. The compass is the small but important set of rules and consequences that govern behavior in our classroom settings.

Many discipline problems can be, and are, avoided through careful planning of activities and setting up of the play environment. By ensuring that activities are interesting and varied, that there are plenty of materials to go around, and that there is enough space so focus and attention remain on the task at hand, many conflicts are avoided altogether.

Our understanding of children’s development helps us in our planning. For example, we know it is very hard for two-year-olds to share: developmentally they are at a stage where they are asserting

their independence, their autonomy. Rather than create conflict, we teach two's about sharing in very controlled situations, so they will know and understand the words, even before they are emotionally ready to play with others in a cooperative way. In free play we carefully watch for conflict and intercede before things can get out of hand.

Sometimes children, like adults, can get carried away with their emotions. When this happens, a teacher may try one of several techniques. The teacher may try to distract and redirect a child to a different activity or group of children. If he/she feels the child needs her personal attention or involvement, she/he may play with the child herself or talk with them. Whatever will work to allow the child to regain control of themselves so they may again play with others. Sometimes, as a last resort, it will be necessary to have the child play away from others until they have cooled down. This happens when they present a danger to themselves or others. Time-outs should never last more than a few minutes.

Time-outs should never be used as punishment. Children this young will often not be able to connect the punishment with the crime. It is more effective to have consequences that result from certain unacceptable behavior. For example, riding a tricycle in an inappropriate way results in the child having to get off; or throwing blocks across the room results in not playing in the block center. When these kinds of limits are used consistently, problem behaviors happen only infrequently.

Not surprisingly, children's behavior at school is affected by what's happening at home. It's important for parents to share with us things like new family members, moving to a new home, parents separating, new step-parent, etc. Any of these can have significant psychological effects on children. Our responses will be more effective if we understand what they're thinking or feeling.

When children's actions become dangerous to other children, themselves, or to staff members, and we are unable to help them change, parents must be willing to work with us. Parents will need to meet with the Center's Director to develop a plan. It can mean seeking help from a mental health professional. Ultimately, if children's problem behavior fails to change other childcare arrangements will need to be made.

SECURITY OBJECTS, SHARE TOYS, ETC.

Security objects such as blankets or special toys are often very important to young children. They provide assurance and comfort during times of high anxiety. They play an important roll in helping children feel safe.

We do work with children to help them feel comfortable about leaving their special objects behind when they are playing. Most of the time they are left safe in the child's cubbie, available at a moment's notice, but increasingly far away as the child engages in active play. In time children no longer need these objects as they become secure in their environment.

Blankets, pillows and stuffed animals must be laundered at home regularly and often, at least weekly.

Children love sharing things with their friends. Most of our classrooms have share days once a week. However, in order to avoid unnecessary envy, jealousy and conflict we encourage share toys

to “found” objects, such as shells, feathers, or other objects from nature, books, cds, tapes, or records.

Please be sure that everything sent to school is very clearly labeled. Don’t rely on being able to recognize something. Also, please do not send purses, money, or Chap Stick. These, and any other inappropriate item will be confiscated and placed in the Director’s office.

*A recipe for Great Children:
Take Great Parents add some High Quality Childcare, warm
with love and understanding for as long as necessary!*

MONEY MATTERS

Our services are provided year-round. Tuition payments must be made in advance. Payments must be made in advance on a monthly basis. Monthly payments are due prior to the opening of the center on the first weekday of the month. They are late and subject to a late payment charge if not received by the close of school on the third working day of the month.

Tuition is payable to EPI (Educational Programs Inc.) either by mail, or by delivery to the center office. Please do not give payments to members of the staff. Payment must be by check, money order or via Zelle (admin@epischools.com). No cash will be accepted. A charge will be made for all returned checks.

Because of the limited size of our classes, tuition is due whether your child attends or not. There are no make-up days. In cases of extended illness, tuition must be paid for the first week of absence; the second week will not be charged if a doctor’s note is received for that time period. Starting the third week of illness, tuition needs to be paid or parent’s may choose to dis-enrolled.

In cases of facility closure or absence due to LA County Public Health Dept., CDC or Dept. of Social Services’ guidelines, up to five consecutive days tuition will be charged.

A non-refundable, registration fee is charged at the time of enrollment and an annual registration fee and other fees are due on an annual basis. See Tuition Rate sheet for details.

Families may choose to dis-enroll from the school, with two-week’s written notice, at any time. If no notice is given, regular tuition is charged.

If a family wishes to re-enroll at some future date, they will need to pay all applicable registration fees again.

An annual Facility Fee is charged every March 1 and is payable to SOTV (Shepherd of the Valley Presbyterian Church). These fees are used for facility repairs and improvements.

Late pick-up charges should not be paid to SOTV or EPI, but should be paid directly to those staff members present at the time of the late pick-up.

Tuition is due for all holidays for which we are closed: New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Presidents' Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, *Juneteenth, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Thursday and the Friday following, Christmas Eve and Day (or observed).

We also close for two In-Service Training Days, the first of which occurs in the Spring, the second, in the Fall. The exact dates are listed on our annual calendar. Tuition is due for those days as well days school closes early. A list of closures is distributed to families at the beginning of each school year and with enrollment packets.

*Effective 2023, SOTV will be closed in observance for Juneteenth.