

# Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool Family Handbook



**"Growing kids the Vermont way!"**

**Our Mission:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool is committed to providing young children high quality education with a focus on community, sustainability and local environmental issues.

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## **VISION/MISSION STATEMENT**

**Our Vision:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool will provide excellence in all aspects of education. It is a place where children and nature are nurtured and the whole preschool environment is a learning resource.

**Our Mission:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool is committed to providing young children high quality education with a focus on community, sustainability, local and Vermont environmental issues.

## **OUR PROGRAM**

**Philosophy:** Our approach starts with looking at and knowing the child. We want to know as much as possible about their interest, weaknesses, strengths and emotional needs. We are really good at getting kids to want to come to school. We get them emotionally involved through field trips, sing-a-longs, hikes and transforming the room.

Our classroom reflects the variety and complexity of children's needs. We work to create a "family." That is why you will see warm, intimate spaces: couch, pillows, lamps, lots of books, plants and displays of children's creative art work.

We talk about how to make and keep friends, living a good healthy life and being responsible, giving and loving.

It is important to find connections to others and find oneself. These connections and responsibilities need to be taught. Belonging to a group means being needed and believing that you have something vital to contribute.

In our classroom, we build a sense of community. Each morning, the children use each other's names and get to know their interests and feelings. Your child is learning to take turns without arguing, pouting or quitting. Your child continues to learn about community through sharing, inviting others to join, solving conflicts and being friendly.

*We do not do for children what they can do for themselves.* By sensitively observing, listening, actively participating and documenting discoveries of the children, we are able to provide appropriate materials and activities. We encourage children to make connections, see relationships and take multiple perspectives throughout their thinking.

We maintain an atmosphere of respect and peacefulness in the classroom by listening to the children and their concerns, helping them solve conflicts

cooperatively and teaching respect and empathy for people and the natural environment.

We work hard to have my students develop their minds, hearts, bodies and spirits in a nurturing environment that encourages inquiry, stimulates curiosity, embraces creativity and inspires a passion for learning.

We are incredibly dedicated and invested in teaching your child.

We also encourage parental involvement in all aspects. Parents are invited to visit anytime and participate in our activities. We will strive to create a preschool community that we all will enjoy

**Program Description:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool offers a full day program for children 3-5 years old. Our program runs from 8:00am to 3:00pm with after care available 3:00pm-5:00pm (pre-registration is required for aftercare) and early arrival 7:30-8:00am.

**Curriculum:** Our curriculum is based on the Responsive Classroom and Vermont Early Learning Standards (VELS). Activities address all developmental domains, including cognitive, social emotional and physical. Activities are planned in response to children's needs, interests and questions about their world. We feel children learn best through play and we provide opportunities for children to play and explore their environment frequently throughout their daily schedule. Teachers observe and record individual and group behavior and plan activities, projects and themes to support and extend children's inquiries, the exploration of their environment and their relationships. Teachers plan curriculum in all content and developmental areas as a flexible framework for teaching and to support the development of daily plans and learning experiences. The classroom environment is set up to promote independence and the opportunity for discovery and experimentation. Curriculum is developed to be accessible to all children based on the recognition that children differ in their learning styles, home lives and in the ways that they understand and represent their world.

**Inclusion Policy:** Our curriculum and materials will actively reflect the human spectrum. We welcome and support all families regardless of family structure, socioeconomic, racial, religious and cultural backgrounds, gender, abilities or preferred language. We strive to include teachers that reflect the diversity of the population of families we serve.

- Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool strives to meet the needs of all children in our child care programs. In order for some children to achieve success, a variety of resources or interventions may be necessary.
- When teachers feel they would benefit from additional resources to better meet the needs of children within their classrooms, the teacher should inform the Director of his or her concerns. The Director will work with the teacher to identify resources, brainstorm strategies to support the child's success in the classroom.

Guidelines for reviewing requests from teachers for additional classroom assistance:

1. Teacher(s) meet to:
  - a. Review concerns
  - b. Review age appropriate behaviors in relation to concerns
  - c. Brainstorm strategies
  - d. Identify resources (i.e. trainings, consulting teacher recommendations for teaching)
2. Teacher and family meet to:
  - a. Communicate concerns in a positive manner
  - b. Request parent input/insight
  - c. Determine mutual course of action
3. Teacher journal positive behavior and document inappropriate ones.
4. Establish criteria for evaluating agreed upon action
5. Set time frame to evaluate/re-evaluate
6. Monitor plan for effectiveness
7. Keep supervisor informed of status of plan

**Preschool Program:** For children 3 through 5 years old. The Preschool program serves no more than fifteen (15) children per day. The Preschool program provides familiar structure within which children can make choices throughout the day about the activities in which they will take part. The teachers work to create a balance of activities based on the children's interests and open-ended free play. The teachers work with the children to

extend and enrich their interactions with each other and with the diverse available materials to encourage creative play.

**Before and After Care:** Your child will need to bring a change of clothes, food (as stated in the nutrition policy), rest sheet and blanket, outside clothes that are seasonally appropriate and sunscreen (if needed).

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT:** Family involvement is the demonstrated key to a child's successful development. We encourage your participation in Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool and invite you to visit the program at any time to interact with your child and to see the program in action. Families are always welcome at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool! We strive to offer occasional educational workshops, potlucks and picnics in addition to work days during the year of celebrate your children's growth together.

**Parent Conferences:** Individual parent conferences will be held once a year to discuss your child's progress and growth. If you feel you would like additional conferences, please contact your child's teacher.

**Field Trips:** Exposure and hands-on experience is essential for children's growth. The Preschool will participate in monthly field trips and/or community events. Parent volunteers are used for transportation and to maintain appropriate ratios. Your participation is what makes our program special.

**SCHEDULE AND OPERATIONS:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool is open from 8:00am to 3:00pm starting **Tuesday September 8, 2015** through **Tuesday June 10, 2016**. After Care (3:00-5:00pm) is available on daily schedule (pre-registration is required for aftercare).

**Holidays and other closures:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool is closed on the following days:

**October 15, 16: Professional Development Day**

**November 11: Veterans Day**

**November 25-27: Thanksgiving Break**

**December 24-January 3: Winter Break**

**January 18: Martin Luther King Day**

February 22-March 2: February Break

March 1: Town Meeting

April 18-22: Spring Break

May 30: Memorial Day

In the interest of professional development for our teachers, we give them two in-service days annually.

**Weather Related Closures or Delayed Openings:**

- Snow days will be called in conjunction with Lamoille North Supervisory School District.
- Delayed openings or early closing are in conjunction with Lamoille North Supervisory School District.

**Announcements:** It is the family's and teacher's responsibility to find out if and when the Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool will be open.

**Three ways to find out:**

1. Listen to the radio announcement on local radio stations (98.9, 92.9, etc)
2. Call 644-9109 and listen to the updated voicemail message
3. Watch WCAX television broadcast.

**Tuition for Weather Related Closures:**

- There will be a maximum of 3 days per year that families will pay for days closed.
- If closed for 4 or more days, make up days will be scheduled.

**Schedule Changes:** In case of daily absence, please contact Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool by 8:30am to let us know not to expect your child. Please contact your child's teacher if you will arrive to pick your child up earlier or later than expected.

**Clothing:** Each child must have at least one change of clothing available at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool. *Children are likely to take part in a variety of types of "messy" play during their day and should dress accordingly. Clothing that children can manage by themselves contribute*



*to their independence and confidence. Please make sure your child has a pair of sneakers available every day for active play and excursions. We try to spend part of every day outside, so appropriate outerwear is essential.*

**Labeling:** Please label all your child's possessions with your family name or the child's initials. This includes footwear, security items, lunches and jackets. Without labels, the likelihood of having a lost item returned is greatly decreased. Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool cannot be responsible for lost items.

### **NUTRITION POLICY**

Parents supply lunches and morning snack and it is important that all lunchboxes and water bottles are labeled with your child's name. ***It is important that parents notify the teacher and director if their child has any food allergies.*** Meal times are both learning and social times. Children are given as much opportunity for self-help as possible. No child is forced to eat and no food may be withheld as a punishment or used as a reward. Sugary foods affect the children in a variety of ways not conducive to the smooth flow of their day at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool. Please do not send sugary foods with your child's lunch. Great treats for kids include fresh or dried fruit, fresh vegetables or yogurt. A good lunch gives your child energy and a good start to a productive afternoon. We encourage parents to join us for lunch whenever possible!

**All food is labeled with the date that it is opened and is discarded on or before the expiration date.**

### **ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES**

**Initial Application:** Parent handbooks and application forms are available on request. Please include a non-refundable fee of \$175 per child with our application form.

**Waiting List:** When space opens up in the program, the Director will contact parents on the waiting list order to see if the space meets their needs. The first family on the waiting list may hold the available slot by filling out the necessary forms and paying the initial deposit. If the first family on the list

chooses not to pay the deposit, the slot will be offered to the next family on the list and so on.

**Changing or Adding Days:** We ask for two weeks written notice for dropping days. Changing or adding days may require waiting until space opens up in the program.

**Withdrawal from Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool appreciates as much notice as possible. A minimum of two weeks written notice is required.

**Termination from Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool:** Teachers at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool are always eager to work through any difficulties that a family might have with the program.

Since our learning takes place in a group setting, our first priority is the welfare and safety of the children and teachers. If a child or parent's behavior becomes abusive towards or threatens the safety or well being of the children, teacher or other adults on-site, **disenrollment** will be effective immediately.

**Termination from the program is always at the discretion of the Director.**

#### **TUITION POLICY**

**Payment schedule:** Monthly payment must be received on the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. There is no credit for vacation days, holidays, sick days or other days when your child does not attend Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool.

#### **Late Fees:**

- Unless previous arrangements have been made with the Director, tuition payments received after the due date will incur a late fee of twenty five dollars (\$25.00) per child.
- A separate late fee of fifteen dollars (\$15.00) per child per time period up to ten minutes will be assessed if a child is at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool past closing time.

#### **YOUR CHILD'S WELFARE**

**Life Changes:** Please let us know about any life changes in your family so we can be sensitive to the needs of your child and your family.

**Who to talk to:** Teachers at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool are eager to hear, address and discuss any questions, concerns or problems you may have with the program. Any matter concerning your child and the daily program of Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool is best handled by you and your child's teacher. Matters concerning Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool philosophy, the overall program and general policies are best directed to the Director.

**Child abuse/neglect policy:** If any Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool teacher believes that a child may have been neglected or abused, that teacher is required by law to report this immediately to the Board of Directors and to the Vermont State Department of Social and Rehabilitative Services. Unless we believe that it puts the child in danger of further abuse, we will inform parents that a report has been made and make an effort to offer appropriate family support and /or referrals. If you feel that you are having difficulty providing for your child's emotional or physical needs or you feel you are experiencing more stress than you can handle, please ask for help! Some community resources include the Parents Assistance Line (800-727-3687), Parents Anonymous (800-544-5030 or 802-229-5724). We would happily search for other options if these resources do not meet your needs.

**Abuse and Neglect Prevention:** We recognize that parents have concerns about the issue of potential abuse and neglect while their children are in the care of others and we have taken a number of steps to promote the safety and protection of children at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool. **We have an "open door" policy at all times to parents.** No teacher is allowed to be alone with a child in a closed room. Teachers are trained in appropriate discipline, focused on redirection and communication. Teachers work with children to promote knowledge and awareness of their bodies, their right to control what happens to their bodies and confidence to tell safe adults about confusing or "secret" situations. We believe that children who are empowered and well-informed are better able to recognize and resist abuse.

**Picking up your child:** As a part of the enrollment process, we require a list of at least two people, preferably three, who will have permission to pick up your child. Under no circumstances will Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool will release your child to an unauthorized person without prior arrangements and positive identification.

### **MEDICAL CONCERNS**

**Immunizations:** Immunizations must be up to date when a child enters Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool, with the exception of families who have chosen not to immunize children for medical, religious or ethical reasons. To meet state licensing requirements, we must have a copy of your child's immunization records on file and it must be kept up to date as your child receives new immunizations.

**Illness Policy:** Illness is common in young children. If your child becomes ill while in care, our first concern is for that child's well-being. Due to state regulations and because children who don't feel well can have a very hard time in group settings, we require that a child be picked up within an hour of notification of any of the following symptoms:

1. Fever of 100 degrees, measured auxiliary (under the arm) which is 101 degrees orally
2. "Goop" around the eye that returns after being wiped away
3. Unexplained rash
4. Three episodes of diarrhea (other than food-related)
5. Vomiting
6. Severe cold
7. Contagious diseases or infections such as bronchitis, strep throat, red or German measles, chicken pox, mumps, bacterial meningitis, shigella, giardia, campylobacter, salmonella poisoning, polio, impetigo, diphtheria, hepatitis A, whooping cough (pertussis), scarlet fever or roseola
8. Infestations such as lice, scabies, pinworms or ringworm

In the absence of any of these symptoms, the Director retains discretionary ability to send a child home who is exhibiting any type of severe illness-related discomfort.

**Returning to Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool after illness:** Before a child can return to Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool after any of the above, all of the following that apply must be true:

- a. The child is medically improved, meaning free of any of the above symptoms, for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing or other symptoms, affecting medication.
- b. If the child was suffering from a communicable disease, the child is no longer in the contagious stage of that disease.
- c. The child has been on antibiotics for more than 24 hours in cases of bacterial infections.
- d. The child has been treated for and is free of lice, scabies or pinworms.

**Medication:** Parents who give a child medication before arrival at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool must notify the teacher about the kind of medication and the time and dosage given. Parents must fill out a separate medication form for each medication to be administered at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool. All prescription medications must be in the original container. Non-prescription medication will be administered to make children comfortable. We recognize that this type of medicine acts only on a child's symptoms. If more than two days of use is requested, we ask that parents consult a practitioner to determine the underlying cause of discomfort. A doctor's note is required in this instance or if parents want the teacher to administer medication in excess of the recommended dosage as stated on the label.

**Notification of Infectious Disease:** Signs will be posted on the Parent Bulletin Board if a Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool child or teacher has been diagnosed with an infectious (communicable) disease. A sign will specify the disease, the date the child or teacher was last in the center and possible symptoms.

**Emergencies:** In the event of an accident where medical attention is needed, we will proceed as follows:

1. For a minor bump or bruise, Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool teacher will administer first aid and leave an accident report for parents.

2. For a more significant injury such as a cut, a fall or a head injury, Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool teacher will administer first aid and contact parents to decide if further medical treatment is necessary.
3. For a more serious accident, Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool teacher will call 911, which will provide emergency medical care and transport to one of the following hospitals: Copley Hospital or Fletcher Allen Health Care. The Director will contact parents or their designees immediately. Physicians will perform only life-saving techniques until you are reached to give permission for further treatment.

## **DISCIPLINE**

**General Philosophy:** Learning opportunities at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool often arise from a child's first attempts at communication. We view these incidents as steps that affect how a child will relate to other children in the future. Disciplinary methods can include redirection, active listening and reinforcement for positive behaviors. Teachers might give children words they can use to express themselves to others, help them notice the feelings and needs of others and help them negotiate when conflict arises. The limits are firm and clear:

- It is not ok to hurt anyone
- We solve problems by talking about them
- A problem isn't solved until everyone is ok with the solution.

We want children to think of Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool as a place where they will be safe from injury, safe to try new things and safe to make mistakes. Children who are empowered and taught to be responsible for their own behavior will be our most effective future problem-solvers.

**Extreme Behaviors:** Some children will go through phases during which they consistently hurt other children by biting, hitting or otherwise acting out. This behavior can occur for many reasons. When it happens, Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool teacher will evaluate when, where, why the behavior is most frequent and will alter elements of the program to keep other children safe and to meet the child's needs more effectively. Teachers will help the child see the pain and anger other children feel when they are hurt and will plan ways to give the child more support in interactions with others. During this process, the child's teacher will keep in close contact with the child's

parents to keep them informed about steps taken in the program and to involve them in the planning and redirection process for the child.

**Corporal Punishment:** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool prohibits the use of corporal punishment by any adult on the premises. Corporal punishment is defined as any act of physical force used to punish a child. While at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool, no child shall at any time be subjected to corporal punishment. Reasonable, controlled physical force may be used in the following situations:

1. To protect a child, teacher or any other person from injury.
2. To prevent destruction of Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool or its materials or equipment.
3. To restrain or remove a child whose behavior interferes with Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool functions if that child refuses to comply with a request to refrain from further destructive acts.

#### **TEACHERS**

**Simply the best!** Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool is committed to attracting the best teachers available. Our program hinges on the professional competence and the commitment of our teachers. Teachers are paid based on education and experience.

**Teacher Qualifications:** The program is led by a team consisting of a regular full-time teachers, part-time teachers and substitutes. Regular full-time teachers have a BA in Elementary Education or a related field and experience working with groups of young children. Part-time teachers have either experience or training, but not necessarily both, although many do. Substitute teachers work under the direction of regular full-time teachers to fill in for absences. All substitutes spend an (1) eight-hour training day at Mary Elizabeth Center and Preschool before filling in for regular full-time teachers. Only experienced substitutes who have worked a minimum of forty hours and have been approved by regular full-time teachers are left on their own with children.

**Directed by your child:** In accordance with our child-directed philosophy, the teacher guides and organizes activities, but does not impose or direct. They are able to make limits clear, consistent and understandable to all children while being sensitive to each child's needs. A teacher might provide paint, a painting surface and paint-related utensils, but if a child chooses to paint on or with his/her feet the teacher recognizes, encourages and may choose to expand on that child's choices and its developmental importance.

Validating the child's choice encourages experimentation, innovation and feelings of self-worth that will serve the child well during formal education and "real life".