



THE ARK SCHOOLS
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FAMILY HANDBOOK

WELCOME TO OUR SCHOOL

Revised 03/25

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HANDBOOK PURPOSE

This handbook contains information that parents need for reference during the school year. It covers several topics designed to give parents a general overview of The Ark Schools and Childcare Licensing policies and procedures. Please be aware that not all topics related to your school can or will be included in this handbook. However, it is designed to cover areas most important to your child's success in The Ark Schools. Please be aware that this handbook is updated yearly, while policy adoption or revision and changes in the law may occur throughout the year. Changes in policy or law that affect handbook provisions will be made available to parents through newsletters, the school website, and other communications.

Please review the entire handbook and keep it as a reference during the school year. If you have any questions about the information in the handbook, please contact your School's Director.

As used in this handbook, "The Ark Schools" refers to The Ark Education, LLC, the legal entity governing all The Ark Schools. The term "school" refers to the school your child attends.

In addition to this handbook, each school may have school-specific procedures that will be included in the Appendix. Questions regarding the policies or requirements at your school should be directed to the appropriate School Director.

VISION AND MISSION

VISION

The Ark Schools aim to be the premier childcare provider in underserved communities.

MISSION

We are committed to serving our communities by developing the next generation of leaders.

VALUES

Love
Education
Community
Safety



OUR APPROACH



At The Ark Schools, we focus on child-centered teaching, developmentally appropriate practices, and the belief that 'play is a child's work.' Our goal is to develop each child's confidence, creativity, Leadership, and life-long learning skills in our program. To support this goal, we use a curriculum encompassing a vast body of research-based practices and brain-based research to encourage a child's social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development.



OUR PRIORITY

At The Ark Schools, our top priority is ensuring that every child in our care is healthy, safe, and happy. Our facilities are designed to meet the highest safety standards, and our team of expert staff is devoted to providing the best possible care for your child. We offer a nurturing environment that fosters learning and growth so that each child can reach their full potential

Operational Procedures

ADMISSION PROCESS

Children are eligible for admission at the age of six weeks. The admission process begins with a tour of the school. Children are enrolled on a first-come, first-served basis, depending on availability in the most developmentally appropriate class. Children are placed on an interest list if there is no availability in the most appropriate class. Spaces are filled from the interest list according to the following priority system:

- The Ark Schools staff children
- Partnerships Children
- Siblings of currently enrolled children
- Previous families of The Ark Schools
- General Public

Children must be able to benefit from participation in an inclusive group setting. If, after a tour and discussion of the child's needs, it is determined that The Ark Schools is not a good fit for the child, The Ark Schools will attempt to give resources and information about other programs that may benefit the child and family.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ENROLLMENT

After parents are notified of the admission date, you must complete The Ark Schools Enrollment Application (found on our website) and pay the non-refundable registration fee.

Upon receipt of the enrollment application and payment of registration fees, the parent receives the enrollment agreement, family handbook, permission forms (photo, CACFP, sunscreen), nutrition forms (if applicable), and health and immunization forms.

On the first day a child attends school, the office must have the following in each child's file:

- A completed enrollment application, including schedule & tuition agreement.
- A signed Enrollment Agreement
- A completed set of enrollment paperwork
- Completed medical action plan (if applicable)
- A health assessment by a licensed physician
- A record of immunization or a completed exemption form

PLEASE NOTE: We are required to have each of these forms in our files in order to maintain our license to operate. State law requires us to exclude from school any student whose files are incomplete until we have received their missing paperwork.

A non-refundable registration fee is due at enrollment and is charged every fall, payable by September 1, to cover administrative costs. If a child is withdrawn from the program and subsequently re enrolls, a new registration fee is due at that time



WITHDRAWING

We require a two (2) week written notice if you need to withdraw your child. You are still responsible for tuition if a Thirty-Day notice is not given. Your account will be sent to a collection agency if the tuition is unpaid. Closing an online account does not constitute withdrawal from the school or the end of the payment obligation.

ABSENCES, SICK DAYS, AND VACATIONS

We schedule teachers and budget for the everyday costs related to running our school based on the schedule you agree to when you enroll. We will charge your full tuition rate if you plan for your child to attend any day during that billing period. We will also charge the full tuition if your child is absent.

If your child will be absent due to illness, vacation, or other family activities, please notify the school staff immediately. If your child is usually transported from another school to our school-by-school bus or one of our school vehicles, please notify us of your child's absence before the scheduled transportation time.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

From time to time, we receive requests from university programs or childcare researchers to observe our classrooms. In activities that suggest documentation or release of specific child information, we won't say "yes" without first obtaining permission from parents and guardians of the children in the involved classrooms.



YOUR CHILD'S FIRST DAY

Preparing for the first day of school can be exciting, but it can also be an overwhelming and anxious time – we understand! We will work with you to make your child's first day the best it can be. Don't hesitate to share any concerns you have before that first drop-off. If possible, we recommend new students start with a few half days, gradually lengthening their time. This helps your child become familiar with the new environment and new faces and reduces anxiety. Each child is unique in their patterns and ease of adjustment to new situations.

Be sure to talk with the staff daily during the transition phase. A consistent daily schedule (arrival and departure routines) also helps children adjust to a new routine and environment. You're always welcome to call any time to see how your child's adjusting or download the Brightwheel app for updates throughout the day.

On the first day, we ask that you send in the items listed below. Please make sure to label each item with your child's name.

- Please provide two complete sets of extra clothes, including socks, for your child. It's always a good idea to keep a sweater or sweatshirt at the center, too. Clothing should be updated periodically to make sure it still fits and is appropriate for the season.
- Diapers and wipes (if applicable). These items will stay at school.
- A small blanket for a nap, a small pillow, or a comfort item is optional. We'll keep these items in your child's cubby and ask that you take them home weekly to wash them.
- A child-sized tote or book bag to send soiled clothes and art projects home in.



HOURS OF OPERATIONS

The Ark Schools is open Monday-Friday from 6:30 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. All children are required to be at school by 8:30 for AM instruction. Although the center is open twelve hours a day, we strongly encourage you to leave your children at the center at most 8 hours a day when possible.

Holidays and school closures: Barring extreme weather or other unforeseen circumstances, our schools are open during regular operating hours on regularly scheduled days. Our schools are typically closed on the holidays listed below:

- New Year's Day (January 1)
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day (January 15)
- Presidents Day (In-Service/PD)
- Memorial Day (the last Monday in May)
- Independence Day (July 4)
- Labor Day (the first Monday in September)
- Thanksgiving Day (the fourth Thursday in November)
- Day After Thanksgiving
- Christmas Eve (December 24)
- Christmas Day (December 25)

Hours and closure dates are set and posted annually but may change anytime. Tuition will not be discounted for holidays. We calculate tuition based on annual enrollment; holidays are considered when we set our yearly prices. We understand it is hard for parents to find alternate care during holidays. Occasionally, we will open on regular closed holidays. If the school remains open, there will be an additional charge for care during the holiday.

ARRIVAL



Mornings can be busy times, and they often set the tone for our day. Help your child have a successful start to their day by doing the following when you and your child arrive at school:

- Sign your child in using the Brightwheel App and your check-in code. There is a kiosk at the entrance, or you can use your smart device to check-in.
- Parents must accompany their child to and from the classroom each day.
- You must connect with the teacher upon your child's arrival. This is a wonderful opportunity to share any important information they should know about your child's morning or changes to their schedule.
- Help your child wash their hands before playing.

Please plan to bring your child to school by 8:30. We want each of our students to gain the most they can from their experiences at The Ark Schools. When children consistently arrive late, they miss out on educational opportunities and fun activities that the teachers have carefully planned.



DEPARTURE



It is important to sign your child in and out each day. You can sign your child out via the Brightwheel app at the front entrance kiosk or on your smartphone, like signing in upon arrival. It's also critical that you check in with your child's teachers before leaving. The school closes at 6:30 sharp. A late pick-up fee of one dollar a minute past will be assessed when a child is left beyond the center's operating hours. The late pick-up fee does not constitute an agreement to provide after-hours service. If you believe you will arrive after 6:30, please alert the school by calling the director or notifying your child's teacher via the Brightwheel app as soon as possible. Failure to pick up your child or contact The Ark Schools, and if you or another authorized emergency contact cannot be reached within thirty minutes after closing time, The Ark Schools staff will contact the local authorities.

When you first enroll, you complete an Enrollment Agreement, including the Primary and Emergency Contact and Release sections. These sections authorize specific individuals to pick up your child. You are responsible for maintaining accurate, complete, and current information. Written authorization must be on file at the school before your child is released. For the safety and security of your child, telephone requests are not authorized. Staff members will ask for a government-issued photo ID for anyone not positively known to them.

We know you'll feel more secure and confident when we know who may and may not pick up your child. Please inform the persons listed on your Enrollment Agreement that they'll be asked to verify their identity when they arrive at the school. We will not release a child to any Emergency Contact younger than 18 years of age unless the individual is the legal parent or guardian.



CUSTODIAL & FOSTER CARE

Some families have legal custodial orders that address who is permitted to pick up or visit a child. If there are custody orders or protection orders relating to your child, a copy must be provided to The Ark Preschools for your child's file. This information is confidential and solely for the safety and well-being of your child. Families must update the school's Director when custody orders change or expire. Please note that employees cannot be responsible for supervising parenting time (visitation), so visitation for non-custodial parents is not permitted in our centers.

The Ark Preschools will need to receive a copy of the foster care paperwork for enrolled children in the foster care system. The Ark Preschools will release the child only to the foster parents or the child's caseworker, who must sign the child in and out on the visitor's list and provide proper identification. The caseworker must verify any additions or changes in writing (by letter or fax).

TUITION & FEES

TUITION

We know that your child's early education is important and doesn't come without a price. Paying tuition on time helps ensure that we can continue to retain our highly trained teachers and provide them with a positive work experience. Information about current tuition rates is available upon request and posted on the school's information board. Tuition increases occur in August and typically reflect a cost-of-living increase. All tuition is due in advance of services provided and in accordance with your tuition agreement.

The best way to pay tuition and fees is online through Brightwheel. Tuition balances will generally be posted a week in advance. Through Brightwheel, you can make recurring or one-time payments online using a checking or savings account for no additional fee. If you choose to use a credit card, a processing fee will be added to your payment. The Ark Schools is committed to the security of your personal information online. Brightwheel payment services do not store confidential banking information and have the highest encryption levels on bank transfers. No one at our company or externally has any access to any customer banking records. All families using Brightwheel for payment must complete a two-step authentication process to verify their accounts. If online payment is not possible for you, please talk to the school director about alternate payment methods.

RETURNED CHECKS

There will be a service charge for any returned payments. In the event of a returned payment, a money order will be due immediately, late fees will apply, and immediate termination of services may apply. Payments from customers with prior unpaid returned payments must be, from there on out, in the form of a money order or cashier's check.



LATE FEES



Tuition is due the Friday before the week of service. If tuition is not paid by Monday at noon, a thirty dollar late fee will be assessed to your account. Thursday, your child may not return to school until your tuition and late fees are paid in full. If your child's enrollment becomes suspended due to late payments, you still owe the late payment and fees, plus two weeks' payment in lieu of your advance notice. A twenty-five dollar monthly late fee will be added to your balance for every month that payment is not made. Repeated failure to pay your tuition on time may result in the termination of services. If payment is late more than two times in six months, you will be required to enroll in the automatic payment program.

FAMILY DISCOUNTS



Family discounts apply to families with two or more actively enrolled children with two or more tuition charges for the week the discount is granted. The child with the lowest tuition charge for the week will receive a discount of 10% off their gross tuition.

MILITARY DISCOUNT



Active military families will receive a 10% discount on their oldest child. Only one discount applies per family.

VACATION CREDIT



After your child has been enrolled in school for a year or more, you will earn one free week of tuition. After your child has been enrolled in school for three years, you will earn two free weeks of tuition. You must submit a request in writing a month before your selected week.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMING

CLASSROOM SCHEDULE

Each classroom follows a slightly different schedule that is customized for their students. The primary school day is from 6:30 am-6:30 pm, with a nap or quiet time from 12:30-3:30. While all parts of the school day are important, if you need to make appointments during the school day, we generally recommend your child not miss the primary educational time of 7:45-3:30. During this time, we heavily focus on working in large and small groups, completing centers, and circle time.

Staff is sensitive to the attention spans of young children and plan, accordingly, making activities extensive enough to be challenging and fun but short enough to avoid overwhelming a child. Each classroom has a schedule posted that lists approximate times of activities. Routine provides security, but flexibility is also important in meeting the varying needs of young children.

CLASSROOM

The individual developmental needs of each child are considered when placement decisions are made. For a child to develop a positive self-image and appropriate social skills, they need to be grouped with peers whose developmental age is similar to their own. In all groups of children, there will be varying ability levels. We will consider all considerations and group children together who may best complement one another.



CURRICULUM



At the Ark Schools, we focus on child-centered teaching, developmentally appropriate practices. Our goal is to develop each child's confidence, creativity, Leadership, and life-long learning skills in our program. Our curriculum is a comprehensive, research-based early childhood education program designed to foster growth and development in young learners. Frog Street integrates the latest early brain research to create developmentally appropriate activities that nurture children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth from infancy to pre-kindergarten.

ASSESSMENT



Child assessment is a vital component of all high-quality early childhood programs. The Ark Schools will utilize the CLI engage Milestone Checklist to assess student development three times per year—at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year, which runs from August to May.

To ensure families are informed about their child's progress, The Ark Schools will host two Parent-Teacher Conferences each year—one in the fall and one in the spring—following the beginning-of-year and end-of-year developmental milestone assessments.

Teachers will complete developmental milestone checklists for all infants, toddlers, and preschool children. Assessments will be:

- Conducted in familiar spaces to ensure children feel comfortable.
- Led by adults the child is familiar with to encourage natural interactions.
- Based on observations during the child's daily routine, including one-on-one, small-group, and large-group activities.

During conferences, teachers will:

- Share assessment results with parents/guardians.
- Provide child development resources.
- Offer referrals for Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) or Child Find services if needed.

For families unable to attend a conference, assessment results and relevant resources will be sent home.

BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

BEHAVIOR PHILOSOPHY

Our foundational goal at The Ark Schools is to help our students develop strong social and emotional skills. Instead of discipline, we use guidance. Guidance is about building an encouraging setting for every person in the group. It means helping young children understand they can learn from their mistakes, and it starts with showing them how (NAEYC). Research indicates that children with strong social-emotional skills tend to be happier, show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than students who exhibit social and emotional difficulties (Hyson 2004; Kostelnik et al. 2015).

Additionally, socially emotionally healthy children are better able to establish and maintain positive relationships with adults and peers. To support our students in developing these skills, we take a proactive and preventive approach to guidance that reinforces appropriate behaviors rather than focusing on inappropriate behaviors.

- **Our Environment:** We provide children with exciting materials and engage them in activities that are appropriate for their age to keep them focused and attentive. We develop schedules that meet the needs of young children by avoiding long periods of wait time without activity. Yet, our schedule is flexible enough to follow the children's interests as well as their cognitive, physical, and biological needs.
- **Our Teachers:** We work to develop a strong rapport with each child, speaking to children calmly, especially during redirections. We help children put words to their emotions. We use social stories to help teach our students healthy social skills. We strive to serve each child's needs while ensuring young children's safety.
- **Our Families:** We communicate regularly with families to ensure consistency in guidance between home and school. We partner with families to offer support guidance and, if necessary, connect them with experts to help give their children the best academic and life success foundation.

Hyson, M. 2004. *The Emotional Development of Young Children: Building an Emotion-Centered Curriculum*, 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press

Kostelnik, M.J., A.K. Soderman, A.P. Whiren, M.L. Rupiper, & K.M. Gregory. 2015. *Guiding Children's Social Development and Learning: Theory and Skills*, 8th ed. Stamford, CT: Cengage.

GUIDANCE PROCEDURES

When any student at The Ark Schools presents with challenging behavior, teaching staff shall follow the standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC):

- Observe the children to identify events, activities, interactions, and other factors that predict and may contribute to challenging behavior.
- Teaching staff shall focus on teaching the child social, communication, and emotional regulation skills and using environmental modifications, activity modifications, adult or peer support, and other teaching strategies to support the child's appropriate behavior.
- Teaching staff shall respond to challenging behavior, including physical aggression, in a manner that provides for the child's safety and the safety of others in the classroom. Our response will be calm and respectful, giving the child information on acceptable behavior and what is not.
- We will document the challenging behaviors and the intervention methods that were attempted in a log. Documentation may include incident reports, ABC charts, or Behavior Plans.
- Teacher-parent discussions regarding a child's behavior shall be held in private. They shall focus on working as a team to develop and
- implement an individualized plan that supports the child's inclusion and success.
- If necessary, intervention shall ensure each child has access to professional services, such as referrals to community agencies offering early intervention services, community mental health centers, and/or a private therapist.
- All discipline decisions will always be individualized, consistent, and appropriate to each child's understanding level.

The Ark Schools does not condone or tolerate the use of physical punishment of any kind on The Ark Schools' property. This policy restricts parents and staff from using physical punishment on their children while on The Ark School's property. Also, The Ark Schools will not tolerate psychological abuse, coercion, threats, derogatory remarks, withholding, or threatening to withhold food as a form of discipline.



CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

Despite these efforts, some children may continue to exhibit significant, challenging behaviors. The following steps will be completed if a child must be removed for challenging behaviors that constitute an imminent danger to the child or others:

- Make a referral to an early childhood mental health specialist or Healthy Social Behavioral Initiative specialist through the Childcare Resource & Referral and refer to the agency responsible for early childhood special education services. If a child's behavior is such that it necessitates temporary removal on a repeated basis, there should be sufficient documentation for consideration of special education services.
- Maintain documentation on file of the incident's outcomes, subsequent parent conferences, and the plan developed that includes appropriate intervention strategies. The parent conference's purpose is to create a plan jointly with the family and available resources to address the specific behaviors that constitute an imminent danger (recurring violence, behavior, or aggression)
- If a child continues to exhibit persistent, severe, challenging behavior unsafe to themselves, other children, or the teachers, The Ark Schools may recommend and/or require alternative placement.
- Suppose a child with an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or an Individualized Education Program (IEP) exhibits persistent challenging behaviors. In that case, special considerations are enacted due to procedural safeguards and due process rights ensured under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Parts C and B. The Ark Schools will follow all state special education rules and regulations governing suspension/expulsion.



BITING

Biting is a normal part of child development. Young children bite for various reasons, such as teething or exploring a new toy or object with their mouth. Biting can also be a way for toddlers to get attention or express how they're feeling. Frustration, anger, and fear are strong emotions, and toddlers lack the language skills to deal with them. They may resort to biting if they can't find the words they need quickly enough or can't articulate how they're feeling.

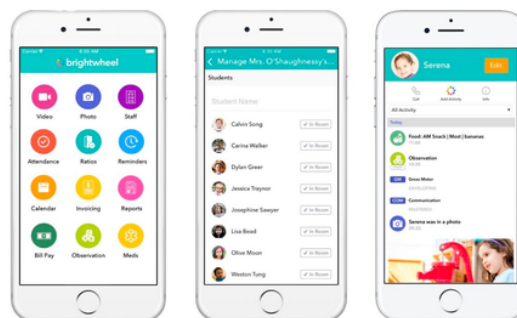
Biting tends to occur most often between 12-24 months of age. Biting past the age of two and a half to three is less common. We may request a parent/teacher conference for repeated biting instances with preschoolers. The purpose of the parent-teacher conference is to discuss what may be causing the child to be upset, frustrated, confused, or afraid and, therefore, lead to biting. Additionally, we would develop a joint action plan following the behavior guidance procedures listed in this handbook. If your child bites or is bitten, you and the other child's family will receive an Incident/Accident Report that keeps the identity of both children confidential.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

BRIGHTWHEEL APP

Upon enrollment, you will receive an invite via email or text to set up your Brightwheel account. Through the app, you can communicate with your child's teacher or administration via messaging, as well as pay tuition and receive your child's daily report.

- Create a free Brightwheel account. When you receive an invitation via email or text, please create a free parent account using either the website or mobile app. Make sure to use the same email address or cell phone number that the invitation was sent to.
- Confirm your child's profile. You will see your child's profile after you create an account - you can confirm information such as birthdays, allergies, and additional contacts. If you do not see your child's profile, please contact us with the email address or phone number you used to sign up. You will not see updates within Brightwheel until we start to use it regularly.
- Set your account preferences. You can adjust your notification preferences within your profile settings on the app.
- Add your payment information. Brightwheel offers secure, automated online payments that save time and give you advanced tools and reporting.



FAMILY & APPROVED CONTACTS

We ask that you add and edit Family Members, Approved Pickups, and Emergency Contacts on your child's profile. When adding contacts, you are given four options: Parent, Family, Approved Pickup, and Emergency Contact. Each one has slightly different functions and privileges, as listed in the chart. We do not recommend listing anyone as an Emergency Contact as emergency contacts do NOT have pick-up privileges. Only parents, family, and approved pickups may check a child out. For more information on how to add contacts to your child's profile, [click here](#). You may also send a message to the director through brightwheel, email to (Director@thearkschools.com) or a signed not updating information.

Contact	Parent	Family	Approved Pickup	Emergency Contact
Able to create an account	✓	✓	✓	✗
Able to see child's feed	✓	✓	✗	✗
Able to see child's profile	✓	✗	✗	✗
Access to billing, invoices/payment info	✓	✗	✗	✗
Can send and receive messages	✓	Send only	✗	✗
Has Check-in/out Permissions	✓	✓	✓	✗



CHECK-IN CODES



You must use your check-in code to ensure proper record-keeping! To make this easier, Brightwheel allows you to customize your check-in code at any time. Here's how to do this from your profile in the app.

1. Tap the Edit icon next to your check-in code
2. You will see a red-orange screen with your current code displayed
3. Enter a new 4-digit code
4. A warning message will be shown if your code matches that of another staff or parent. You can still save and use that code, but it is not recommended.
5. Once you enter a unique code, tap the Save button.

*Please Note: If your check-in code is not unique, you will be required to take a second step and enter the last four digits of your phone number to verify your account before completing a check-in.



FAMILY SUPPORT

While The Ark Schools specializes in providing high-quality early childhood education, we recognize that our students and families may have needs outside early education. We have a variety of ways that we can support our families. These include:

- Assist families with locating community resources.
- Help families obtain emergency assistance in areas such as food, clothing, utilities, housing, and counseling.
- Assist families with a successful transition to school.
- Access to a Family Resource Lending Library

Please reach out to the school's Director if you need support.



CONFERENCES



Family participation is encouraged and welcomed. The Ark Schools uses Family Conferences to offer family support and communication. Family Conferences are designed:

- To guide families and teachers to share valuable information about their children.
- To individualize the planning process for each child in the context of their family, culture, and community.
- To explore ways to use a child's family's strengths to promote growth and development.
- To create an ongoing process for recording the growth and development of the child.

We schedule two formal conferences each school year, but we encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher at any time if you have questions or concerns or want an update on your child's progress. While conferences are not mandatory, they are encouraged, even for our youngest students, as they allow parents the opportunity to follow the progress that their child is making. During these conferences, you will be provided with a written report about your child's strengths and areas for growth.

HOME LANGUAGE



It is important to The Ark Schools that all families are given the opportunity to fully understand, interpret, and become involved in their child's education. The Ark Schools will work with the family to provide information in the language they are most comfortable with for any family that makes a request.



FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

The Ark Schools believe that children thrive when the relationship between the family and the center is a partnership. We have an open-door policy—parents and guardians are always welcome at the center, so just let us know when you'd like to come to say hello! We strongly believe in positive two-way communication. Families are encouraged to communicate with teachers and administration in whatever way is most convenient for them. This may include by phone, notes, email, or in person. Information is shared with families through verbal conversations, the Brightwheel app, newsletters, flyers, family bulletin boards, notes, phone calls, posters, conferences, and e-mail. The Ark Schools has an open-door policy and offers many opportunities to be part of your child's early learning experience and connect with other families.

- Volunteering is always welcome. We would love to have you share your time and talents with the class. We encourage you to read a book, play an instrument, or share a hobby with the children. Ask your child's teacher about the many ways you can help.
- Class parties
- School family engagement activities
- Parent/teacher conferences (2x a year)
- Quarterly parent meeting
- Holidays (see monthly calendar)
- Annual fundraisers
- Graduation

All The Ark Schools employees are expected to treat all children and families with respect and dignity. In return, we expect the same from all of our families. If difficulties arise, we encourage families to share their concerns with the director by email. Inappropriate language directed toward staff and/or in front of children will not be tolerated. Through communication, we will work to resolve the issue. If you are not satisfied with the solution, we encourage you to email cooperate at Concerns@thearkschools.com. Please do not confront children or other parents in our program. When any member of The Ark Schools community shows behavior that threatens the safety of others or shows repeated disrespect towards other members of our community, The Ark Schools reserves the right to ask the family in question to leave the school immediately and terminate that child's enrollment at The Ark Schools.



ACCOMMODATING FAMILIES

This document outlines our program’s policy and process in supporting families and children who may need additional accommodation, including home language, differing abilities and cultural backgrounds. Parents have the right to be informed of all procedural safeguards and rights of appeal in a language easily understood by the general public and in the parent’s primary language. Please notify the Director if you or your child require accommodation and we will ensure that we do our part in making sure your needs are met.

Below are ways that our program will partner with families:

- 1.If specific therapies are needed during the day while the child is in our care, we will provide space to accommodate sessions.
- 2.Participation in all comprehensive care meetings if needed.
- 3.Complete supporting documentation from an authorized medical professional for any accommodations related to the child’s physical or developmental needs.
- 4.Provide materials and resources in the parent’s/child’s primary language.
- 5.Provide opportunities for cultural inclusiveness by hosting cultural events throughout the year



ANNUAL FEEDBACK SURVEY

At The Ark Schools, we are committed to providing high-quality early childhood education while fostering a strong sense of community. We believe that families play a vital role in shaping our programs, and we value your input on how we can continue to improve.

In our ongoing effort to be the premier childcare provider and enhance the quality of our early learning program, we will distribute an annual anonymous feedback survey via Brightwheel. This survey allows families to share their experiences, suggestions, and insights, helping us refine our practices and better serve our children and community.

Your voice matters, and we encourage all families to participate so that together, we can continue creating the best possible learning environment for our students.



DEVELOPMENTAL CONCERNS

If at any point you have developmental concerns for your child, please reach out to your child's teacher to discuss. We are happy to provide strategies, resources, or community programs that may be of support.

NUTRITION PROGRAM

The Ark Schools will offer breakfast, lunch, and snacks. Healthy, balanced meals are just what growing bodies need! Crafted by nutritionists (and tested by kids), our menu is planned well in advance, so you can always see what we're serving up for the day. We serve food you can enjoy with healthy fruits and veggies, lean proteins, and whole grains. Weekly menus and mealtimes are sent via Brightwheel and posted on the school's information board.

FAMILY-STYLE DINING

After washing their hands, your child's classroom will sit for a family-style meal. This builds community, teaches table manners, and includes everyone! Serving their food and drinks and cleaning up helps your child build independence and fine motor skills. Additionally, all meals are served and prepared following the Child and Adult Care Food Program/USDA requirements for children ages twelve months to six years. This includes one protein, one grain, two fruits and/or vegetables, and milk at lunch. Breakfast and snacks include one grain and a fruit or vegetable.

It has been the experience at The Ark Schools that children will eventually try foods at school that they may not consume at home simply because the other children are eating them. During mealtimes, students and staff are sitting together and engaging in conversations. Staff uses positive reinforcement to encourage children to try new foods.



SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS



We can provide allergy-friendly alternatives with documentation from a doctor for students with food allergies or intolerances. We encourage all students to eat the meals provided at school; however, we understand that may not be the best option for all students. If you would like to provide your child meals from home, please reach out to the school director to discuss. We ask that you not send snack foods, candy, or gum with your child, as this can cause difficulties within the classroom. For children with disabilities who have special feeding needs, program staff keeps a daily record documenting the type and quantity of food a child consumes and provides families with that information.

FORMULA & BOTTLES



Center staff cannot mix formula bottles and cannot add cereal to bottles. If a child is drinking formula, it must come to school premixed and labeled with the child's name and date every day. Please do not leave bottles at the center overnight; their contents will be discarded. Due to the potential risk, children will not be laid down to rest with a bottle/sippy cup, nor will the bottle/sippy cup be propped. Children cannot walk around the classroom with their bottle/sippy cup. We will work with our families to ensure our students are offered fluids from an open cup as soon as the families and teachers decide together that a child is developmentally ready to use a cup.

BREASTFEEDING



We're here to support you! We'll provide a comfortable and nurturing environment while you're nursing. We also support your decision to breastfeed past infancy. Weaning your child is not required to move into the next classroom or age level. In addition, our schools are equipped to handle your expressed breast milk. Milk must be bottled in liquid form, not frozen. Please discuss your needs with your school's Director so they can ensure we provide the proper support for you and your child.

HEALTH & SAFETY

CELEBRATIONS & BIRTHDAYS

Celebrations and birthdays are special days for kids, and we want to share in the fun! Suppose you'd like to provide food for the celebration. In that case, we ask that all items be nut-free and commercially packaged with ingredient statements to ensure we're accommodating any allergies or dietary restrictions. Healthy snack options such as whole-grain items, vegetables with dip, or fresh fruit platters are always great. Please be sure to provide enough for everyone in your child's classroom and check in with your child's teacher and the school Director before the special day so they can share any tips and plans.

ALLERGIES

If your child has allergies, please inform your school Director and list the allergen information on your Enrollment Agreement so we can take the proper precautions to protect your child's health. Your school Director, in partnership with our Registered Dietitian, will gladly work with you and your child's doctor to accommodate your child's dietary needs.

Due to severe nut allergies, we ask that you refrain from bringing items containing nuts to the school. If your child has severe allergies that may require a medical response (such as the use of an EpiPen), please let your school Director know so we can take care of any paperwork and training that might be needed.

CLEANING & SANITATION

Cleaning and disinfecting are part of our broad approach to preventing infectious diseases at The Ark Schools. Each classroom has a "yucky bucket" for toys that have been contaminated with bodily fluids. Contaminated toys are specifically washed, sanitized, and air-dried. All surfaces and toys are sanitized and air-dried daily upon arrival and departure. For more specifics about the frequency and type of cleaning that occurs for each surface at The Ark Schools, please reference the [NAEYC Cleaning, Sanitizing, and Disinfecting Frequency Table](#).



ILLNESS & CARING FOR SICK CHILDREN

Children may become sick during the day or show signs or symptoms before arriving at school. If you keep your child at home, please notify your school Director by 9 a.m.

Should your child become ill at school, the child will be removed from the classroom upon notice and kept in an area where there will be no direct contact between them and other children. You will be contacted for the pick-up and removal of the ill child from the school within one hour of notification. Children cannot return to school until either a doctor's note approves readmittance or the child has been symptom-free for up to 48 hours.

In the event of a severe accident or illness, an ambulance will be called. To ensure your child's safety, your Enrollment Agreement provides a record of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of persons you have authorized to pick up your child. We ask you to keep this information current and supply names and phone numbers for your child's doctor and preferred hospital.



MEDICAL REPORT & IMMUNIZATION RECORD

A record of immunizations and a children's medical report must be completed and on file at school Prior to the student's first day. Records should also include results of any screenings, prescribed medications, descriptions of any allergies, and current or chronic health conditions.

As the child receives new immunizations, the date and type of shot or immunization should be reported to the administration to be added to the child's record. Immunizations may be obtained either through the pediatrician or the local health department. A schedule of immunizations can be acquired through the school's office. See <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/> for the current national immunization schedule.



HANDWASHING



Hand washing has long been established as one of the most important things to prevent the spread of illness.

In our school, hand washing requirements for staff are as follows:

- Upon arrival at the school/center
- Before and after setting up snacks/food for student consumption
- Before and after helping students use the bathroom
- After handling items soiled with body fluids such as blood, drool, urine, stool, or discharge from the nose or eyes.
- After handling an ill child
- After using the bathroom or taking care of other personal needs (i.e., nose-wiping) and eating

In our school, hand-washing requirements for students are as follows:

- Upon arrival in the morning
- After using the bathroom
- Before and after eating food
- Before and after sensory play
- After they have touched a child who may be sick or who has handled soiled items
- After blowing/wiping their nose

The required method for handwashing is as follows:

- Rub hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds using warm water and soap.
- Wash between fingers and back of hands and wrists.
- Rinse hands well under running water and dry thoroughly with a clean paper towel.
- Turn off water using a paper towel instead of bare hands. This helps prevent acquiring new germs on already clean hands.



TEMPORARY EXCLUSION

To reduce the spread of illness and maintain the health of all children at the school, we may temporarily exclude your child from attending the school. In general, an individual must be fever-free for up to 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medication to return. Please refer to the following section for more information on the types of illnesses that we cannot support at the school and the criteria required for return to the school. Please ask your school director if you have any questions or need more information on a specific illness or criteria for return.

We will ask that your child remain away from the school if they have an illness or symptom that prevents participation in routine daily program activities, including outdoor activities—or if your child has an illness that requires more individual care than our school staff members can provide without compromising the health, safety, and activities of the other children. For their protection, children who have not been immunized against certain childhood illnesses may be subject to more extended periods of temporary exclusion from school.

We may also ask you to keep your child at home if they have any other illness that local regulations require us to exclude from a group care setting. In addition to the illnesses and procedures referenced in this handbook, we reserve the right to require healthcare provider clearance or make other updates to these policies to help keep everyone in our schools safe.

HEARING & VISION SCREENING

Hearing and Vision Screening for possible vision and hearing problems are required by the Special Senses and Communication Disorders Act, Texas Health & Safety Code, Chapter 36, for children who are four years old.



CONTAGIOUS DISEASES & CLEARANCE

We value your child's health and recognize that preventing the spread of infectious diseases is an essential part of quality childcare. We actively monitor the health and well-being of all children in our care. If a child has certain communicable diseases, it may be that individual state law, your state's childcare licensing regulations, and/or our health and safety policies could require:

- I am sending the child home.
- We documented the evaluation and treatment by the child's healthcare provider.
- Notification of the families of other children in our school and staff members.
- Notification of local health authorities (e.g., Health Department).

Parents will inform the school within 24 hours or the next business day after a child or any immediate household member has developed any reportable communicable disease, as defined by the State Board of health, except for life-threatening diseases, which must be reported immediately. We will inform you of any contagious diseases affecting children who may have had direct exposure at the school and immediately report such diseases to the local health authorities where required. Written healthcare provider clearance is required, as noted in the table above. Additionally, we may require provider clearance for illnesses at our discretion. From time to time, we'll also distribute educational literature about children's health issues.

CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

ILLNESS	CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL
Diphtheria	Health Care Provider clearance required
E-coli (O157:H7)	Health Care Provider and Public Health Authority clearance required
Fever $\geq 100^{\circ}\text{F}$ (armpit or ear) accompanied by signs or symptoms of illness or behavior change (We will follow state licensing and health department requirements if fever is defined differently.)	When fever is below 100°F (armpit or ear) for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medicines
Fifth Disease (Human Parvovirus) accompanied by fever or behavior change or the child has an underlying blood disorder, such as sickle cell disease, or compromised immune system. Children with these conditions may shed large amounts of virus and may appear ill.	When symptoms are no longer present
Hand-Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Coxsackievirus) accompanied by mouth ulcers or blisters and no control of drooling or fever or behavior change	When the child has stopped drooling and does not have exposed open sores

CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

ILLNESS	CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL
Head Lice/Nits or other infestation	When all signs of lice/nits or other infestations are absent
Hepatitis A virus	Health Care Provider clearance required
Hepatitis B virus	Health Care Provider clearance required and skin lesions, if any, are dry or able to be completely covered by a bandage
Herpes Simplex accompanied by mouth ulcers or blisters and no control of drooling or fever or behavior change	When the child has stopped drooling and does not have exposed open sores
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV/AIDS)	Health Care Provider clearance required and skin lesions, if any, are dry or able to be completely covered by a bandage
Impetigo	When 24 hours have passed since topical, oral, or other systemic antibiotics were started, if the sores can be kept clean and dry and if they can be completely covered

CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL



ILLNESS	CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL
Influenza/Flu (including H1N1 and H5N1) accompanied with fever	Child's fever and signs of fever must be resolved for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medications
Lyme Disease (or other tick-borne diseases) accompanied by fever	When fever is no longer present
Measles	Health Care Provider clearance required
Meningitis (bacterial or viral)	Health Care Provider clearance required
Mononucleosis accompanied by fever and/or behavior change	When fever is no longer present
MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)	Health Care Provider clearance required
Mumps	Health Care Provider clearance required
Pertussis (whooping cough)	Health Care Provider clearance required
Vomiting more than two times in a 24-hour period or accompanied by fever, green or bloody vomit	When symptoms are no longer present

CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL

ILLNESS	CRITERIA TO RETURN TO SCHOOL
Pneumonia if accompanied by fever, severe coughing, rapid breathing, or behavior change	When symptoms are no longer present
Ringworm (Tinea)	After treatment has been started
Roseola (Human Herpesvirus 6) accompanied by fever	When fever is no longer present
Rubella	Health Care Provider clearance required
Salmonella	Health Care Provider clearance required
Scabies	After treatment has been completed
Shigella	Health Care Provider clearance required
Strep Throat or other streptococcal infection	24 hours after initial antibiotic treatment and when fever is no longer present
Tuberculosis	Health Care Provider clearance required



MEDICATIONS



Whenever possible, we recommend that you administer medications at home. To help with medication schedules, consider asking your healthcare provider for prescriptions with 12-hour dosages. Medications will be administered at 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. At any time, we can refuse to administer medication to children.

EMERGENCY MEDICATION



If your child requires the use of emergency medications (i.e., inhalers, Epi-pen, Diastat, etc.), you will need to complete the corresponding medical action plan. Blank medical action plans may be found in the school's information space, and these plans **MUST** have a doctor or healthcare professional's signature. Emergency medicines will be kept unlocked and easily accessible to adults but out of children's reach (at least 5 feet off the ground). This is to ensure easy access in the case of an emergency. All staff members are trained on emergency medication administration annually. We work with a county nurse to ensure our staff is appropriately trained for your child's specific medical needs.

GENERAL MEDICATION POLICIES

No prescription or over-the-counter medication and no topical, non-medical ointment, repellent, lotion, cream, or powder shall be administered to any child:

1. without written authorization from the child's parent
2. without written instructions from the child's parent, physician, or another health professional.
3. in any manner not authorized by the child's parent, physician, or another health professional.
4. after its expiration date or with a known allergy to the medication.
5. non-medical reasons, such as to induce sleep

- All medications will be given following the doctor's written instructions.
- Medication will be stored separately for each child.
- Medications will be stored in a locked cabinet in the classroom or locked box in the Center refrigerator, depending on the medication.
- Do not store medication in diaper bags, lunch bags, backpacks, or any other personal belongings.
- We do not mix the medication with food, formula, or juice, nor will we dispense any medication in a bottle or cup.
- Medications will be administered by regular classroom staff who have been trained in medication administration in the presence of another staff person. All staff follow the Six Rights of Safe Medication Administration: right child, right medicine, right date/time, right dose, right route & right documentation. Staff will document each dosage on the medication form, listing time, amount given, and initial. If any side effects are noticed, they will be noted on the form, and the child's parent will be notified.
- Medication forms will be added to the child's file after the medication request is completed. Forms for long-term medication will be considered confidential and treated as such.
- It is the responsibility of the parent to remove or dispose of any medication after the duration of the request has ended. The classroom staff will dispose of any medicine at the Center after the medication form has expired or after a child has left The Ark School.
- Alternative medications, such as herbal or homeopathic medications that are not tested by the US Food and Drug Administration for safety or effectiveness, cannot be administered at The Ark Schools.
- The Ark Schools reserves the right to refuse the administration of medications if we feel that it is in the best interest of the staff.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION

- For a staff member to administer any medication to your child, you must complete the Medication Administration Permission Form in its entirety.
- The medication must be brought to school and stored in the original, tamper-resistant container in which they were dispensed with the pharmacy labels. The pharmacy label must specify:
 - The child's name.
 - The names of the medication
 - The amount and frequency of dosage
 - The date the prescription was filled and the expiration date.
- If the medication is provided via pharmaceutical samples, they must be stored in the manufacturer's original packaging, shall be labeled with the child's name, and shall be accompanied by written instructions specifying:
 - The child's name.
 - The names of the medication
 - The amount and frequency of dosage
 - The signature of the prescribing physician or other health professional. The date the instructions were signed by the physician or other health professional.
 - Medication expiration date
- The medication shall be administered only to the child for whom they were prescribed. It shall be administered according to the prescription, using the amount and frequency of dosage specified on the label.
- A parent's written authorization for administering a prescription medication shall be valid for the length of time the medication is prescribed to be taken or up to 6 months when needed for a chronic medical condition, whichever is less.



OVER THE COUNTER MEDICATION

In general, The Ark Schools staff will not administer over-the-counter medication except when a health professional prescribes the over-the-counter medicines. This situation is most common for chronic health conditions (ex: Benadryl for students with allergy action plans or fever-reducing medication for students with febrile seizure action plans). The Ark Schools will not administer over-the-counter medicines such as cough syrup, Tylenol, ibuprofen, antibiotic cream for abrasions, or medication for upset stomach in cases of acute illness or pain. Children who have these symptoms may need to remain at home until they are symptom-free.

The over-the-counter medication must be brought to school and stored in the manufacturer's original packaging with the child's name written or labeled on it. It shall be accompanied by a Medication Administration Permission Form that specifies:

- The child's name
- The medical conditions or allergic reactions
- The names of the authorized over-the-counter medication
- The amount and frequency of the dosages, which shall not exceed the amount and frequency of the dosages on the manufacturer's label.
- In cases where the prescription says "as needed" (i.e., allergy exposure, etc.), the instructions need to specify criteria for the administration of the medication (be specific with what symptoms or situations are criteria for administration)
- The route in which the medication shall be administered
- Possible reactions or side effects
- The signature of the parent AND physician or another health professional
- The date the instructions were signed by the parent and physician or other health professional.



TOPICAL CREAMS AND SUNSCREEN



Parents and guardians may give The Ark Schools a standing authorization for up to 12 months to apply over-the-counter topical ointments, topical teething ointment or gel, lotions, creams, and powders, such as sunscreen diapering creams, baby lotion, and baby powder, to their child when needed.

The over-the-counter topical medications form must be completed before we can administer these medications. You can find the necessary form in the school's information space or on the school's website.

Parents must provide the sunscreen. Please apply sunscreen to your child before arriving at the center and dress them in hats/visors and tightly woven clothing to help prevent sunburn during outdoor play. The Ark Schools staff can reapply sunscreen in the afternoon before going outside if we have an up-to-date Sunscreen Permission Form on file. If you prefer your child use a different sunscreen in the afternoon, please complete the over-the-counter topical medications form.

INJURIES & ACCIDENTS



Your child's safety is of our utmost concern, but we recognize that minor bumps and scrapes are an everyday part of your child's exploring and learning through experience. Known minor injuries sustained at school are reported to parents on an Incident Report Form, of which you will receive a copy. If your child is injured in our care, our first step is to administer first aid. A first aid kit is available in the office, and each class always has a small first aid kit with them. The most common treatment is ice on bumps, soap and water cleansing, and a bandage on a minor wound. All permanent staff members are trained in First Aid and Infant/Child CPR within the first 90 days of their employment, and they must maintain their current certification every two years.

If an accident is more than minor, a parent will be called to discuss the need for possible medical treatment. If the accident is more serious, a parent will be contacted and requested to come immediately. In the event of a life-threatening illness or injury, an ambulance will be called. To ensure your child's safety, your Enrollment Agreement provides a record of names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people you have authorized to pick up your child. We ask you to keep this information current and supply names and phone numbers for your child's doctor and preferred hospital.



EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

We make every effort to be prepared for potential emergencies. The Ark Schools have an emergency response plan for fire, inclement weather, or if a lockdown becomes necessary. This plan is updated annually and submitted to the Texas Childcare licensing. These plans are reviewed annually with the staff. Additional precautions we take in the event of an emergency are:

- Emergency phone numbers are posted by all phones.
- The Ark Schools keep an emergency “To-Go” bag in every classroom with first aid supplies and emergency contact information for all students and staff.
- Fire drills are practiced once each month, and shelter-in-place drills every three months to prepare children in the case of an emergency.
- Emergency evacuation plans are posted in each room.
- Annual inspections by the Dallas County fire inspector. If an emergency requires evacuation, we’ll notify you as soon as the children have been relocated to a safe area.

SAFE SLEEP

Except for a pacifier and any required medical devices, we do not allow any items to be placed in the crib. Children will always be supervised during nap and rest times, and lighting in the room will be kept at a level that ensures teachers can always clearly see the child’s face.

Infants unable to turn over on their own must be placed in a face-up position in the infant’s own crib unless you have a completed Sleep Exception form that includes a signed statement from a health care professional stating that a different sleep position for the child is medically necessary. Infants will not be allowed to sleep in a restrictive device. If an infant falls asleep in a restrictive device, the infant will be removed from the device and placed in a crib as soon as possible. Infants may sleep in the restrictive device if you have a completed sleep exception form that includes a signed statement from a health care professional stating that the child sleeping in a restrictive device is medically necessary.

Infants May only be swaddled if you have a completed Sleep Exception form that includes a signed statement from a health care professional stating that swaddling the child for sleeping purposes is medically necessary. An infant must not have their heads, faces, or cribs by items such as blankets, linens, or clothing at any time.



CONFIDENTIALITY & STUDENT RECORDS

All information contained in your child's records, including your personal information, is confidential. Anyone who is not directly involved in the care of your child or affiliated with childcare licensing, protective services, or other government agencies will not have access to the records without your written authorization or court order. As a parent or guardian, you can request access to your child's records. We are happy to provide access at reasonable times to records kept at the center, including the Enrollment Agreement, Incident/Accident Reports, Family Communication sheets, or progress notes. For information about the process needed to access other documents that may be included in your child's records, please get in touch with your school's Director.

As a primary parent or legal guardian, you have the right to add and update information, comments, data, or other relevant materials to your child's records. If you withdraw your child from the school, we will maintain your child's records for a minimum of three months. If you want a copy of your child's records, an administrative fee may be charged to offset the costs of copying and delivery.

Lastly, out of respect for other children and families, please do not post photos or videos that contain images of children other than your own on the Internet.

Safety first! We know what it takes to keep children safe so that they can feel sound. It starts with paying attention to every detail—big and small. Every day at our school, you can be confident that your child is in the best hands.

SUPERVISION

The Ark Schools staff assume responsibility for enrolled children when they enter the classroom or are escorted by a staff member onto The Ark Schools property. All students are supervised by sight and sound. All classrooms monitor attendance by updating their attendance records throughout the day and counting and matching the numbers of children present with names on attendance records. "Name to Face" headcounts occur throughout the day, particularly when moving about the center at every threshold.



MANDATED REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

It's our mission to ensure all children in our schools are safe and well cared for, not only while they are at our school but at all times. The law requires everyone working directly with children to report suspicions or evidence of child neglect or abuse to local state childcare licensing agencies. And Enforcement agencies. Our staff is trained to look for and recognize signs of possible abuse or neglect.

Mandated reporting also applies if a staff member uses an inappropriate discipline method or behaves in a way that puts children at risk. If this happens, the school Director will communicate with parents and report to licensing and accrediting agencies as needed. Those who fail to report according to local childcare licensing regulations can be held accountable under the law. The law prohibits interference with an individual's attempt to report child abuse or neglect.

LEGAL INFORMATION

NON-DISCRIMINATION

The Ark Schools, does not discriminate based on a person's religion, color, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, Vietnam-era status, or other factors protected by law.

LICENSING STATE & FEDERAL GUIDELINES

The Ark Schools is licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). You can reach our local office at [\(214\) 951-7902](tel:(214)951-7902).

A full-text copy of the Minimum Standard Rules for Licensed Childcare Centers is available for review at www.HHSC.state.tx.us.

As a parent or guardian with a child enrolled in The Ark Schools, you have the right to review all current inspections conducted by the DFPS, the Fire Department, the Health Department, and any other inspections as may be required for the operation of the childcare. To review these documents, please contact the center director or designee. For your review, the most recent inspections will be posted on our Lobby Bulletin Board.

Our State License Number is;



AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Our policy is to accept children in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), its regulations, and any other applicable local, state, or federal laws about the provision of services to individuals with disabilities. USDA In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form (AD-3027) found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provided in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by

1. Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D. C. 20250-9410;
2. Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
3. Email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

OTHER SCHOOL POLICIES

SUSPENSION & EXPULSION



We believe children and families deserve to be full members of their communities and to experience a sense of belonging. We know suspensions and expulsions from early childhood programs can significantly negatively impact children and families. We take suspension and expulsion decisions seriously, consider the effects carefully, and keep children enrolled whenever possible. We work closely with families to set children on positive paths. To prevent suspension and expulsion, we:

- Create learning environments in which every child feels good about being there.
- Design a learning environment that promotes children's engagement.
- Focus on teaching children what to do, specifically by teaching expectations and routines, and skills children can use in place of challenging behaviors.
- Talk to families about issues as they arise.
- Provide Incident Reports, ABC Charts, and Behavior Plans when appropriate and partner with the family to identify the best ways to teach positive replacement behaviors.

Suspension and expulsion are the last resort, used only when other steps taken to resolve an issue have been unsuccessful. Even after the difficult decision to end care has been made, we will do our best to help make the transition as smooth as possible for the child and family. We do this by

- It gives families reasonable notice, generally at least one week, before ending care unless it is necessary to discontinue services immediately.
- Help families find alternate care by connecting them with community-based childcare resources and referral agencies. We reserve the right to cancel enrollment for the following reasons:
 - Non-payment of tuition
 - Failure to adhere to policies.
 - The child's needs exceed the capabilities of our school.
 - A child or family member's behavior or actions threaten or endanger the safety and well-being of other children or staff.



BABYSITTING

The Ark Schools strongly discourages families from entering employment arrangements with staff. However, we recognize that our staff members are highly trained, wonderful people and are often the people who know your child best next to you. Any arrangement between a family and a The Ark Schools employee for employment or services outside the program and services of The Ark Schools is an individual endeavor and private matter, not connected or sanctioned by The Ark Schools.



REFERRING A FRIEND

The biggest compliment you can give us is telling family and friends about The Ark Schools! When family and friends enroll, it's even more fun for your child and helps build a sense of community in our centers. Ask your Center Director about our Refer-A-Friend Program



BULLYING POLICY

The Ark Schools strives to provide a safe and caring environment for its scholars. Bullying of any kind is prohibited. Anyone with knowledge of or suspicion of bullying, including the alleged victim, should report such information to the school Director.



PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Our daily schedule provides opportunities for children to engage in physical activities. Children participate in age-appropriate outdoor and indoor activities as part of the daily curriculum.



TERMINATION OF SERVICES

We reserve the right to terminate a child for the following reasons (but not limited to):

- Failure to pay (see tuition)
- Routinely late picking up child
- Lack of parental cooperation
- Serious illness of a child
- Physical or verbal abuse to any person on the property
- Our inability to meet the child's needs.
- Lack of compliance with regulations
- Failure of a child to adjust to the school after a reasonable amount of time.

The Ark Schools administration has the right to give verbal notice of immediate termination where there are extreme circumstances that affect the well-being of the provider or other children in attendance.

NAPTIME & QUIET TIME

We are required to provide a supervised sleep or rest period after lunch each day for all preschool children 18 months of age and older. Naptime or Quiet Time will be from 12:30 to 3:30 PM each day. We will provide each child with a clean, sanitized cot, sheet, and blanket. Quiet activities will be offered in place of sleeping if needed. 6-12-year-olds may play on tablets during this time, but it is at the director's discretion that day. Blankets and pillows from home are discouraged.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Disagreements may occur, even with the best of intentions. Experience has taught us that open communication is the key to maintaining a positive relationship. The adults must demonstrate the cooperative, compassionate communication we want our children to imitate. If you have a concern, please discuss it with your child's teacher or the staff involved. If the concern is not resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, a meeting can be arranged between the persons involved and a member of the administration. At that time, a course of action can be determined.



LATE PICKUP

Please make every effort to pick your child up on time. If you know you can't arrive on schedule, please arrange to have your child picked up by another adult who has been authorized on your Enrollment Agreement. Please notify us immediately if a late pickup is unavoidable and you cannot reach your designated emergency contact.

If your child is not picked up after the standard closing time and you have not contacted the center:

- We will attempt to contact you or someone authorized to pick up your child.
- Suppose we can't reach you or another authorized person within 30 minutes after closing. In that case, the school Director or person in charge will determine whether and when Child Protective Services or the appropriate authorities should be contacted based on local childcare licensing regulations.
- If appropriate authorities are contacted, a note in a sealed envelope will be posted on the center door with specific information regarding your child's whereabouts, including the name and phone number of the agency or person to contact.

In the event of a late pickup, please note that our school Director or any other staff can never transport your child from the center under any circumstances. Also, an additional fee for late pickup will apply to children picked up after closing time. You will be charged one dollar every minute late.



WEAPONS & VIOLENCE

Family members, children, and guests are strictly prohibited from possessing firearms or other weapons on our property and at events sponsored by us. An exception may be made for sworn law-enforcement officers if required by law. If children are found to be in possession of weapons, school management will confiscate the weapon and notify proper authorities.

When a particular child or parent's behavior threatens the safety of others, or if a child or parent becomes abusive toward other children, parents, or staff in the school, we may disenroll the child immediately.



FIELD TRIPS

Field trips give your child hands-on, real-world learning experiences. Trips often include visits to nearby parks, museums, and other local educational sites. To make field trips both meaningful and safe:

- Children who are at least three years of age or older may be able to participate in field trips that involve transportation in a vehicle.
- Families are notified at least one week before each field trip of the time, schedule, location, and any extra costs involved with the field trip.
- Permission slips are required for all field trips. Each trip requires a separate form describing details of the event. We must have your written permission authorizing your child to participate. Consent via phone call or fax is not acceptable.
- Family volunteers are welcome on field trips, although we cannot allow you to transport your child or any other children in your personal vehicle. If space permits, volunteers may ride in center vehicles. All volunteers must be at least 18 years old.



SUBSTANCE-FREE ENVIRONMENT

We are committed to fostering and maintaining a healthy and safe environment for everyone. Staff, family members, and guests are prohibited from smoking or vaping in the school and on its grounds. At no time shall anyone ever use, vape, smoke, consume, sell, manufacture, or be under the influence of any alcohol, cannabis, or illegal drugs on school property.



COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

Tolerance and understanding are fostered by positive exposure to various ages, genders, lifestyles, family structures, races, cultures, religions, and physical abilities. Therefore, we emphasize an environment that welcomes diversity and challenges bias and discrimination.



SCREEN TIME POLICY

At The Ark School of Pleasant Grove, we believe in fostering a learning environment that prioritizes active engagement, hands-on exploration, and meaningful social interactions. Screen time, when used appropriately, can be a valuable tool for education and development, but it must align with our commitment to providing a well-rounded, high-quality early childhood education.

PURPOSE OF SCREEN TIME POLICY

This policy ensures that any use of screens in our center supports the healthy development and learning of children, minimizes passive viewing, and adheres to guidelines set forth by child development experts.

GUIDELINES FOR SCREEN TIME

- **Age-Appropriate Content**
 - All screen time is limited to age-appropriate, educational, and interactive programming designed to promote cognitive, social, or physical development.
 - Content is reviewed and approved by administrative staff before use.
- **Screen Time Duration**
 - **Infants (0–2 years):** No screen time is permitted, except during virtual visits with family members or for therapeutic purposes.
 - **Toddlers (2–3 years):** Screen time is limited to no more than 30 minutes per day, used for interactive, teacher-guided activities.
 - **Preschoolers (3–5 years):** Screen time is limited to no more than 40 minutes per day, used for educational purposes, such as age-appropriate science or literacy videos.
 - **School-Age Children (5+ years):** Screen time is limited to no more than 30 minutes per day and is focused on educational content aligned with homework or enrichment activities.

Note: Screen time will not be used all at once. Times will be differentiated throughout the day to ensure children remain engaged and avoid prolonged exposure.

UNIFORM & DRESS CODE

The Ark Schools has a uniform and dress code that requires scholars to wear the prescribed uniform dress and maintain appropriate grooming and other standards for personal appearance. The school believes that the uniform and dress code contribute to school culture and foster a spirit of teamwork in the school community. The uniform and dress code also help to establish a safe environment where outsiders are easily recognized.

Neat, clean grooming for school is always expected. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their child complies with the dress code. The specific dress and uniform requirements for the school will be provided to scholars and families before the start of the school year and will be included in the appendix to this handbook.

<p style="text-align: center;">Shoes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black tennis shoes with white or tan soles • Velcro shoes are strongly encouraged. • Tennis shoes of any color/style on Fridays • No boots or heels 	<p style="text-align: center;">Socks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White, black, or navy blue (no patterns) • No ankle socks. • Girls are encouraged to wear tights with skirts in the winter.
<p style="text-align: center;">Skirts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls may wear navy blue skirts/skort or jumpers. • Skirts must be no shorter than to the top of the kneecap. • Girls must wear shorts under skirts. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Pants/ Belt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navy blue slacks • Black belt with buckle • Belts may not be cloth or tied. • The only exception to the belt rule is if girls wear a uniform skirt or jumper that doesn't have belt loops or already has a belt attached.
<p style="text-align: center;">Shirts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School colored polo shirts with the school logo • Undershirts must be all white. • Shirts must be always tucked in • Students may untuck shirts for recess/PE, but shirts must be tucked in before students enter the building. • Only the top two buttons can be undone. • Scholars may wear school T-shirts untucked Fridays with slacks or a skirt. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Jackets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White, black, or navy-blue button-up/zip-up/pullover, sweaters, cardigans, or sweatshirts with NO HOOD and NO LOGOS/DECALS. • Other non-uniform jackets must remain in lockers or class cubbies and may only be taken out for recess. Scholars may not carry them or wrap them around their waist or shoulders.



ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT OF PARENT HANDBOOK

Today's Date: _____

• We _____

the parents of _____ have received a copy of the
The Ark Schools Parent Handbook.

• I agree and understand the policies and procedures listed in this
handbook and will comply with the school's rule and regulations.

• I understand that these policies and procedures listed in this
handbook are subject to change to reflect the needs of the program.

• I understand I will be made aware of these changes in a timely
fashion, and I will always adhere to the most up to handbook.

Parent/Guardian Signature Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature Date _____



TIE DYE CONSENT FORM

We authorize The Ark Schools consent to use dyes, and other art materials during summer camp with our child, The Ark Schools. We understand that personal items such as clothes, shoes and skin may be colored with the art and sensory items we use, and we understand the school holds no responsibility for the items that are colored. We understand the use of these items are to provide a fun and creative experience for all children in the school's care.

Parent/Guardian Signature Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature Date _____

MEDICAL LIABILITY

CHILD'S FULL NAME:	
PARENT #1 FULL NAME:	
PARENT #2 FULL NAME:	

We, _____, the parents of _____, sign and agree to the following:

We understand and agree to a full and complete waiver and liability release on the part of The Ark Schools in connection with my child's enrollment at the school. This includes my child's participation in all activities, including but not limited to, the playground, field trips, classroom activities, and walks in the neighborhood. I understand and agree that this liability release will apply to my child's entire attendance at The Ark Schools and participation in all the school's activities.

We authorize anyone working at the school to obtain medical care for my child and to transport my child to a hospital if in the workers opinion that medical care for my child is needed. We agree to pay all costs associated with the medical care including transportation, medical care, medication, and any other costs associated. We understand and agree that the school and its employees are not responsible for any costs incurred.

We acknowledge that we have carefully read this form and understand and comply with all contents.

Parent Signature Date _____

Parent Signature Date _____

Administration Signature Date _____

GUARDIAN/PARENT AND THE CHILD'S DOCTOR MUST COMPLETE THIS FORM IF THE STUDENT HAS FOOD ALLERGY AND ANAPHYLAXIS EMERGENCY CARE PLAN

FARE FOOD ALLERGY & ANAPHYLAXIS EMERGENCY CARE PLAN
Food Allergy Research & Education

Name: _____ D.O.B.: _____

Allergic to: _____

Weight: _____ lbs. Asthma: Yes (higher risk for a severe reaction) No



NOTE: Do not depend on antihistamines or inhalers (bronchodilators) to treat a severe reaction. USE EPINEPHRINE.








Extremely reactive to the following allergens: _____

THEREFORE:

- If checked, give epinephrine immediately if the allergen was LIKELY eaten, for ANY symptoms.
- If checked, give epinephrine immediately if the allergen was DEFINITELY eaten, even if no symptoms are apparent.

FOR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

SEVERE SYMPTOMS

 LUNG Shortness of breath, wheezing, repetitive cough	 HEART Pale or bluish skin, faintness, weak pulse, dizziness	 THROAT Tight or hoarse throat, trouble breathing or swallowing	 MOUTH Significant swelling of the tongue or lips
 SKIN Many hives over body, widespread redness	 GUT Repetitive vomiting, severe diarrhea	 OTHER Feeling something bad is about to happen, anxiety, confusion	OR A COMBINATION of symptoms from different body areas.

1. **INJECT EPINEPHRINE IMMEDIATELY.**
2. **Call 911.** Tell emergency dispatcher the person is having anaphylaxis and may need epinephrine when emergency responders arrive.
 - Consider giving additional medications following epinephrine:
 - × Antihistamine
 - × Inhaler (bronchodilator) if wheezing
 - Lay the person flat, raise legs and keep warm. If breathing is difficult or they are vomiting, let them sit up or lie on their side.
 - If symptoms do not improve, or symptoms return, more doses of epinephrine can be given about 5 minutes or more after the last dose.
 - Alert emergency contacts.
 - Transport patient to ER, even if symptoms resolve. Patient should remain in ER for at least 4 hours because symptoms may return.

MILD SYMPTOMS

 NOSE Itchy or runny nose, sneezing	 MOUTH Itchy mouth	 SKIN A few hives, mild itch	 GUT Mild nausea or discomfort
--	--	--	--

FOR MILD SYMPTOMS FROM MORE THAN ONE SYSTEM AREA, GIVE EPINEPHRINE.

FOR MILD SYMPTOMS FROM A SINGLE SYSTEM AREA, FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS BELOW:

1. Antihistamines may be given, if ordered by a healthcare provider.
2. Stay with the person; alert emergency contacts.
3. Watch closely for changes. If symptoms worsen, give epinephrine.

MEDICATIONS/DOSES

Epinephrine Brand or Generic: _____

Epinephrine Dose: 0.1 mg IM 0.15 mg IM 0.3 mg IM

Antihistamine Brand or Generic: _____

Antihistamine Dose: _____

Other (e.g., Inhaler/bronchodilator if wheezing): _____

PATIENT OR PARENT/GUARDIAN AUTHORIZATION SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____ PHYSICIAN/HECP AUTHORIZATION SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

APPLICATION OF NON-MEDICATED TOPICAL PRODUCTS

We, _____, parents of _____, authorize The Ark Schools staff to apply the following non-medicated topical cream/lotion to our child. We have applied this product to our child at least once before, and our child has no known allergies to it. This cream will be in its original container and labeled with our child's name. This cream will not be used or shared with other student's than the one approved on this consent form. Parent's and Guardian's will be notified when the product is close to being completely used and the school needs a refill.

If a parent or guardian would like the school to use a different brand than listed on this form, they must complete a new application of topical non-medicated product consent form.

Non-Medicated Product	Name/Brand	How Often Applied
Diaper Rash Cream		
Cream/Lotion for Dry Skin		
Lip Balm		
Sunscreen		

Parent/Guardian Signature Date _____

Parent/Guardian Signature Date _____

A GUARDIAN/PARENT AND THE CHILD'S DOCTOR MUST COMPLETE THIS FORM IF THE STUDENT HAS AN ASTHMA ACTION PLAN

Asthma Action Plan

Personal best peak flow:

IMPORTANT INFO		EXERCISE-INDUCED FLARE-UP	
Name:		Instructions for an exercise-induced asthma flare-up	
Date:		Medicine:	<input type="text"/>
Doctor name:		How much:	<input type="text"/>
Doctor phone:		When:	<input type="text"/>
Emergency contact:		Additional instructions:	<div style="border: 1px dashed black; height: 40px;"></div>
Emergency phone:			
TRIGGERS: <input type="checkbox"/> pollen <input type="checkbox"/> mold <input type="checkbox"/> dust mites <input type="checkbox"/> animals <input type="checkbox"/> smoke <input type="checkbox"/> food <input type="checkbox"/> exercise <input type="checkbox"/> cold/flu <input type="checkbox"/> weather <input type="checkbox"/> air pollution <input type="checkbox"/> other <input type="text"/>			

The GREEN Zone (also known as the safety zone)

Symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breathing is easy No cough or wheeze Can do usual activities Can sleep through the night 	Use these long-term control medicines as listed: <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Medicine</th> <th>How much</th> <th>How often / when</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Medicine	How much	How often / when									
Medicine	How much	How often / when											
Peak flow from <input type="text"/> to <input type="text"/>													

The YELLOW Zone (also known as the caution zone)

Symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some shortness of breath Cough, wheeze, or chest tightness Some difficulty doing usual activities Sleep disturbed by symptoms Symptoms of a cold or flu 	Continue with long-term control medicines as above, and add these quick-relief medicines: <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Medicine</th> <th>How much</th> <th>How often / when</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Medicine	How much	How often / when						
Medicine	How much	How often / when								
Peak flow from <input type="text"/> to <input type="text"/>	Call your doctor if: <input type="text"/>									

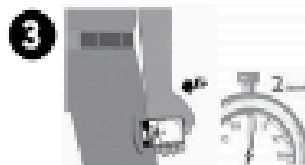
The RED Zone (also known as the danger zone)

Symptoms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Severe breathing problems Cannot do usual activities Difficulty walking and talking Rescue medicine is not helping 	Take this medicine and call the doctor now! <table border="1" style="width: 100%;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Medicine</th> <th>How much</th> <th>How often / when</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Medicine	How much	How often / when						
Medicine	How much	How often / when								
Peak flow from <input type="text"/> to <input type="text"/>	If symptoms don't improve and you can't contact the doctor, go to the hospital or call 911.									



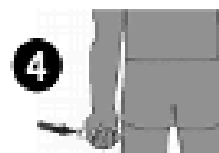
HOW TO USE AUVI-Q® (EPINEPHRINE INJECTION, USP), KALEO

1. Remove Auvi-Q from the outer case. Pull off red safety guard.
2. Place black end of Auvi-Q against the middle of the outer thigh.
3. Press firmly until you hear a click and hiss sound, and hold in place for 2 seconds.
4. Call 911 and get emergency medical help right away.



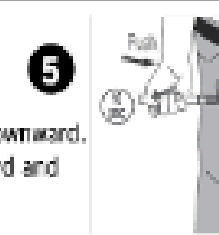
HOW TO USE EPIPEN®, EPIPEN JR® (EPINEPHRINE) AUTO-INJECTOR AND EPINEPHRINE INJECTION (AUTHORIZED GENERIC OF EPIPEN®), USP AUTO-INJECTOR, MYLAN AUTO-INJECTOR, MYLAN

1. Remove the EpiPen® or EpiPen Jr® Auto-Injector from the clear carrier tube.
2. Grasp the auto-injector in your fist with the orange tip (needle end) pointing downward. With your other hand, remove the blue safety release by pulling straight up.
3. Swing and push the auto-injector firmly into the middle of the outer thigh until it 'clicks'. Hold firmly in place for 3 seconds (count slowly 1, 2, 3).
4. Remove and massage the injection area for 10 seconds. Call 911 and get emergency medical help right away.



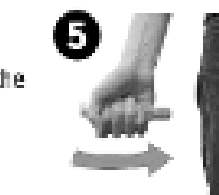
HOW TO USE IMPAX EPINEPHRINE INJECTION (AUTHORIZED GENERIC OF ADRENALICK®), USP AUTO-INJECTOR, AMNEAL PHARMACEUTICALS

1. Remove epinephrine auto-injector from its protective carrying case.
2. Pull off both blue end caps; you will now see a red tip. Grasp the auto-injector in your fist with the red tip pointing downward.
3. Put the red tip against the middle of the outer thigh at a 90-degree angle, perpendicular to the thigh. Press down hard and hold firmly against the thigh for approximately 10 seconds.
4. Remove and massage the area for 10 seconds. Call 911 and get emergency medical help right away.



HOW TO USE TEVA'S GENERIC EPIPEN® (EPINEPHRINE INJECTION, USP) AUTO-INJECTOR, TEVA PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRIES

1. Quickly twist the yellow or green cap off of the auto-injector in the direction of the "twist arrow" to remove it.
2. Grasp the auto-injector in your fist with the orange tip (needle end) pointing downward. With your other hand, pull off the blue safety release.
3. Place the orange tip against the middle of the outer thigh at a right angle to the thigh.
4. Swing and push the auto-injector firmly into the middle of the outer thigh until it 'clicks'. Hold firmly in place for 3 seconds (count slowly 1, 2, 3).
5. Remove and massage the injection area for 10 seconds. Call 911 and get emergency medical help right away.



HOW TO USE SYMJEPI™ (EPINEPHRINE INJECTION, USP)

1. When ready to inject, pull off cap to expose needle. Do not put finger on top of the device.
2. Hold SYMJEPI by finger grips only and slowly insert the needle into the thigh. SYMJEPI can be injected through clothing if necessary.
3. After needle is in thigh, push the plunger all the way down until it clicks and hold for 2 seconds.
4. Remove the syringe and massage the injection area for 10 seconds. Call 911 and get emergency medical help right away.
5. Once the injection has been administered, using one hand with fingers behind the needle slide safety guard over needle.



ADMINISTRATION AND SAFETY INFORMATION FOR ALL AUTO-INJECTORS:

1. Do not put your thumb, fingers or hand over the tip of the auto-injector or inject into any body part other than mid-outer thigh. In case of accidental injection, go immediately to the nearest emergency room.
2. If administering to a young child, hold their leg firmly in place before and during injection to prevent injuries.
3. Epinephrine can be injected through clothing if needed.
4. Call 911 immediately after injection.

OTHER DIRECTIONS/INFORMATION (may self-carry epinephrine, may self-administer epinephrine, etc.):

Treat the person before calling emergency contacts. The first signs of a reaction can be mild, but symptoms can worsen quickly.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS — CALL 911

RESOLVE SQUAD: _____

DOCTOR: _____ PHONE: _____

PARENT/GUARDIAN: _____ PHONE: _____

OTHER EMERGENCY CONTACTS

NAME/RELATIONSHIP: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME/RELATIONSHIP: _____ PHONE: _____

NAME/RELATIONSHIP: _____ PHONE: _____