**PARENT HANDBOOK**



**308 Lock St. Tarentum, PA 15084 724-224-2834 growinggardenchildcare@outlook.com**

**www.growinggardenchildcarecenter.com**







2022 Pennsylvania Equity in Early Childhood Education Champion Award - Honorable Mention Recipient

Licensed Facility



**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to The Growing Garden!

We are excited you have chosen to join our little family. Your child’s health and safety are of utmost importance to our staff. We strive to provide them with a fun and interesting environment where they will learn new skills, experiment with ideas, and use their imagination to further their growth and learning. A balance of academic subjects and imaginative play are integrated into our curriculum so that the children are enriching their lives one giggle at a time.

Communication with the staff is extremely important. We want to partner with you to help your child be an honest, respectful, and responsible person. This requires that we work together to make sure that staff is informed of any issues that may be affecting your child’s daily life.

At The Growing Garden, we believe in leading by example, so please take the time to read through this handbook carefully. It is important that you are familiar with all of our policies and procedures. While life brings its little surprises that interfere with the best intentions, we do our best to abide closely by the information outlined in this book and given to us through other participating agencies and programs (ie. DHS and Keystone Stars). This handbook is designed to inform you of our policies and procedures. If you have any questions or concerns after reading this booklet, please feel free to contact the Director.

Sincerely,

Ms. Heather Wells, M.Ed.

**ADMISSIONS POLICY**

All forms must be returned to The Growing Garden ONE WEEK PRIOR to the wanted beginning date. The one week time period does not begin until the ENTIRE ENROLLMENT PACKAGE is returned to the facility, which includes: Child Service Agreement, Child Health Report including immunizations, Introductory Packet, and Immunization Exemption Letter (if applicable) . For CCW clients, a confirmation from the Family Specialist is required to begin services.

The Growing Garden is required by the PA Department of Human Services to have specific information on site at all times. This includes parental information, emergency contact information, medical information, physical examination records, special needs, and permissions for services. The information is reviewed every 6 months, and families will be required to update their health reports and other information every 6 months for those in the Toddler Learning Program and every 12 months in the Kindergarten Prep and School Aged Programs. Failure to update your child’s file could lead to a suspension of services until the updates are completed.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY AND HOLIDAYS**

Please be sure to inform staff of any schedule changes so that all children are accounted for daily. We expect that we know of any attendance changes the Friday before the week of service. The only exception is an emergency.

Subsidy rules pertaining to payments and attendance are adhered to strictly.

At the time of withdrawal from the program all children’s items will be stored for 10 days to return to the parents. Should the parents not request a pick up of those items within 10 days, The Growing Garden will dispose of the items as we determine to be appropriate or as required by law (medications).

The Growing Garden tries to remain open as regularly as possible, but staff take a few holidays during the year:

Highlands School District’s Christmas through New Year’s Break, Good Friday and the following Monday, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Black Friday, and 4th of July (if on a weekday). Weather, loss of utilities, or staff shortages may cause unexpected days off, but we are generally open the remainder of the year.

**THINGS TO REMEMBER**

ITEMS TO BRING:

Summer:

* Towel
* Sunscreen
* Bathing Suit
* Sneakers

Winter:

* + Hoodie
	+ Slippers/socks
	+ Gloves
	+ Hats

**\*Full and ½ days of service REQUIRE children to bring a lunch! If you do NOT bring lunch, parents will be contacted to provide something for their child. Lunchtime deliveries ARE NOT an acceptable regular lunch! Refrigeration is available. NO HOT FOODS!**

We have a general policy that NOTHING is allowed to be brought from outside the facility. This includes…

Craft materials, Electronics of any type (phones are to be turned off and out of sight), Cards (sports, Pokémon, etc.), Small toys (fidget spinners, etc), Medications (unless provided directly to staff for distribution), Tobacco paraphernalia, Weapons, Lotion/Hand Sanitizer, Gum/Snack for Snack Time (This is not a comprehensive list).

We are NOT responsible for any lost, stolen, or damaged items.

If the staff sees any items that are not permitted, the child will be given one warning to put it away. A second occurrence will end in confiscation of the item which will be returned ONLY to a parent upon pick up.

**STAFF**

All staff are hired into their positions based on their level of education and experience. Site Directors and Group Supervisors have at least an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in elementary, special, early childhood education or child development. Assistant Group Supervisors have a high school Diploma and at least 2 years’ experience with children. All staff on duty have CPR/AED/First Aid Training and are Mandated Reporters. All staff have criminal background, child abuse, NSOR, and FBI clearances; a health assessment; and TB test. Staff attends a lengthy interview process and complete reference checks before being hired. Staff are NOT permitted to provide paid services to children enrolled at our facility or babysit as a favor to clients. It is a conflict of interest! These are grounds for immediate termination of both the employee’s position and the services to a family.

**SIGN IN/OUT POLICY**

Please leave 5 minutes for each pick up/drop off to sign your child in and out and give staff time to reach the front desk and speak with you about any issues. DO NOT contact the facility and ask that your child start getting ready to leave before your arrival. This disrupts services and children cannot leave their room until a parent has arrived in the lobby.

Each child MUST be escorted into/out of the building and signed in/out by an adult (MUST BE 18 YEARS OLD OR OLDER).

Children are to arrive/depart the facility only from the Lobby - NOT THE PARK!

Attendance time for full day services is 9AM – 3PM. ALL children are expected to be at the facility during these times unless an emergency occurs or there is a doctor’s excuse. Please remember, in order to keep prices down, we don’t have extra staff….our care providers in each group do it all!

If there is a custody issue where a parent is NOT permitted to pick up a child, a copy of the court order must be attached to the enrollment form upon registration or immediately upon receiving the documentation. Otherwise, we must release the child to either parent under Pennsylvania law.

A photo ID containing the first and last name and current address must be shown by anyone who is picking up a child. This MUST match the information contained in the child’s file!

You may update your forms at any time by asking the staff or through the ChildPilot program. Parents/Guardians are REQUIRED to complete reviews and updates every 6 months.

In case of emergency, you may call the site to notify us of who will be picking up your child, and it will be documented on a Verbal Release Form.

Children will NOT be released to a person deemed “impaired” by the staff. Should an adult be deemed “impaired”, they will be asked to find alternative transportation…..or we will do it for them. Should an adult become belligerent, we will contact local authorities.

**PAYMENT INFORMATION**

Payments are due every Monday on the week of service.

Regular payments, in accordance with your Agreement Form, are REQUIRED! Checks, cash, or money orders should be made to The Growing Garden and given to the Welcome Desk. You may also pay by credit or debit through the ChildPilot System.

If any payment is late (meaning, not received by midnight on the last day of the month payment deadline), then we will charge the credit card listed in your Credit Card Authorization Form as a courtesy to ensure your child’s continued enrollment.

If payments have NOT been received for four weeks, or if payment to the card listed on your Credit Card Authorization Form is declined, returned, or charged-back, your child will be suspended from the program until payment is received in full. There are absolutely NO CREDITS. Please note that ALL seats are 5 days per week. We charge for the enrollment, not attendance, and **FULL PAYMENT IS DUE EVERY WEEK FOR YOUR SELECTED SCHEDULE, REGARDLESS OF THE CHILD’S ACTUAL ATTENDANCE.**

Upon suspension, the child’s placement in our program is no longer guaranteed. If a child is suspended and we have children on our waiting list, the enrollment will be offered to another child. Once payment is brought current, we will be happy to restore your child’s enrollment if space is available, and if space is no longer available, we will be happy to add your child onto our current waitlist.

The registration fee is applied to each child at specific times in their enrollment and annually thereafter. The payment time period is between August 1 and September 30 of the year. A child who leaves and returns to the facility, such as a Summer Session only enrollment, would pay the $75 fee at each re enrollment.

Fees: (per child)

* Registration Fee: $75/child/year
* Returned Check: $30/check
* Late Pick up: $2/minute past 6pm
* No Show: $10/incident with no contact
* Drop In: $10/incident with no contact or schedule
* Late Payment/Schedule: $10/incident

Title 20 Clients: If payments are late, you may lose your funding. Any child missing 5 consecutive days will be reported to the CCW Office. Parents should contact their County Assistance Office for financial assistance for child care expenses. The ELRC for Allegheny County is ELRC 5.

**CONFERENCES**

There are three opportunities for a formal meeting with an administrator provided by the facility.

Upon enrollment, an opportunity to request or deny a conference is available on the Introductory Packet Cover Page. An administrator will contact you to schedule an appointment if you request a conference.

The other two opportunities are during the month of August (enrollment renewal) and February (annual review). Mid-month, you will receive a Family Conference Notice where you may request or deny a conference with an administrator. At that time, we will provide you with times and dates to schedule a meeting which will occur the last week of August and February.

**INCLUSION POLICY**

We welcome children with special abilities, those from culturally diverse backgrounds, and those who use English as a second language, and will make reasonable accommodations to help them be successful in our daily program, in which all children are required to participate to the best of their ability.

Children who require individual services may bring an aide provided by parents or any devices/facilitators that are needed to communicate with staff. All outside assistants are required to provide a copy of all clearances (PA Criminal History, Child Abuse, FBI Fingerprints) to the facility BEFORE services begin. Parents must provide a release to share information with any participating outside agencies. Copies of the Americans with Disabilities Act and PA Code 3270.17 (Services to a Child with Special Needs) is available on our website. A list of resources to obtain assistance (Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation, CONNECT 1.800.692.7288, The Alliance for Infants/Toddlers, Project Dart (3 -5 years old), Child Development Unit (Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh), Rapid Response Team is also available upon request. A Family Resource Ring including available services is located in the Information Station and in each of the classrooms. If we find that a child needs some extra help, we will perform one of our assessments (DRDP, Teaching Strategies Gold, ASQ) to find areas of difficulty. We will then reach out to the parent about our findings and discuss the options for accessing services (Rapid Response). The Rapid Response team will assist with the guidance to proper services for evaluation and assistance. Upon approval by the organization, we will work with the child’s helper to make sure the child is successful in the least restrictive environment.

Staff are trained to assist with basic accommodations through professional development as needed. (www.eita-pa.org)

If a child has an IEP, IFSP, Behavior Plan…..We request that we are provided a copy and added as part of the team to assist with any implementation of needed services at our facility and share open communication about your child’s successes and struggles so that your child is happy and successful with us. You have the option on the Introductory Packet to share your needs with one of these plans.

**TRANSITION SERVICES/CONTINUITY OF CARE**

All staff rotate through the rooms at The Growing Garden in order to build relationships with all the children and families. Children’s regular groups are often combined during the morning and afternoon, outside time, and during special programming. This assists with the younger group’s transitions into new areas of programming for continuity of care.

Highlands School District provides transition services from pre-school to kindergarten through their yearly Early Childhood Fair. Highlands also provides us with information annually for transitions.

For our School Age children ready to move to self-care, we provide families with a packet of information regarding the legal implications, safety information, and tips. Please request assistance with this big life step! Our staff are happy to sit with your child and review the packet with them.

**DISCIPLINE/SUSPENSION/EXPULSION POLICY**

Children will be disciplined using redirection and self-evaluation.

We strive to implement a progressive discipline policy whenever possible. Generally, those steps would include:

1. Excuse Me: A verbal warning will be issued.
2. Zen Den: The child is removed from stimulus (in the room, within sight of staff) and given an age appropriate assignment. Staff monitors the child’s behavior, and asks “Are you ready to talk?”. Upon a “yes” response, the staff and child discuss what occurred, why it was inappropriate, and what they will do to prevent it in the future. The child is dismissed back to the group on positive terms (ex: Let’s go play, we want to have fun with you, etc).
3. Write up: This is a form that will be filled out by staff in the event that inappropriate or extreme behaviors occur or continue. Parents are required to sign these forms. Upon a third write up, if behaviors continue, a conference with the parent will be scheduled for discussion, sharing of literature and other supportive resources and guidance as to next steps. An outside referral may be necessary to request an assessment and interventions.
4. Suspension: If a child receives 3 write ups or determined to be overly disruptive, a term of 1-5 days of no service may be required by the Growing Garden.
5. Dismissal: For extreme or repeated offenses, the child will be withdrawn from the program. A return date for re-enrollment will be given, subject to space availability on the anticipated enrollment date.

Parts or all of these steps may be skipped based on the level of the offense, and at The Growing Garden’s discretion. Staff will request support from OCDEL for children at risk of suspension or expulsion by calling 1-800-692-7288. Families are responsible for intentional damage to any equipment or facility caused by their child. There will be no refunds/credits for days missed due to suspensions or dismissals. All exclusion/suspension policies adhere to the OCDEL Reduction of Suspension and Expulsion Announcement in ECE programs in PA (https://s35729.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Announcement-Reduction-of-explusion-and-suspension-in-EC-programs-in-PA.pdf)

We have a zero tolerance policy for theft, bullying, assault, weapon possession, drugs, alcohol, gang activity, and sexual misconduct. These are cause for immediate dismissal. Causes for dismissal may also be caused by chronic tardiness at pick up, chronic late payments, chronic late schedules, overdue fees, chronic bowel/bladder accidents, failure to update necessary forms/paperwork, parent misconduct, and chronic unscheduled drop offs.

**SHAKEN BABY SYNDROME/ABUSIVE HEAD TRAUMA/CHILD MALTREATMENT**

Daily children are observed for signs of abusive head trauma including irritability and/or high-pitched crying, difficulty staying awake/lethargy or loss of consciousness, difficulty breathing, inability to lift the head, seizures, lack of appetite, vomiting, bruises, poor feeding/sucking, no smiling or vocalization, inability of the eyes to track and/or decreased muscle tone. Bruises may be found on the upper arms, rib cage, or head resulting from gripping or from hitting the head.

If SBS/ABT is suspected, staff will:

1. Call 911 immediately upon suspecting SBS/AHT and inform the director.
2. Call the parents/guardians.
3. If the child has stopped breathing, trained staff will begin pediatric CPR
4. Follow all necessary Mandated Reporter steps, Report to DHS, and complete Injury Report.

In coping with a crying, fussing, or distraught child, staff first determine if the child has any physical needs such as being hungry, tired, sick, or in need of a diaper change. If no physical need is identified, staff will attempt one or more of the following strategies:

1. Rock the child, hold the child close, or walk with the child.
2. Stand up, hold the child close, and repeatedly bend knees.
3. Sing or talk to the child in a soothing voice.
4. Gently rub or stroke the child's back, chest, or tummy.
5. Offer a pacifier or try to distract the child with a rattle or toy.

GGCCC allows for staff who feel they may lose control to have a short, but relatively immediate break away from the children, and provides support when parents/guardians are trying to calm a crying child and encourage parents to take a calming break if needed.

**HEALTH INFORMATION**

Pennsylvania Code requires that each child enrolled must have and age appropriate health assessment form on record with The Growing Garden. Please make sure that all vaccinations are up to date (including annual flu) or that you have signed a Vaccination Exemption Form.

Please DO NOT bring your child if he/she has any of the following symptoms:

* Fever of 100 degrees or higher (99 degrees on our thermometers as they tend to register low)
* Sore throat
* Constant runny nose due to cold/flu
* Inflamed eyes
* Persistent cough
* Rash
* Diarrhea
* Vomiting
* Too ill to go outside
* Too ill to participate in daily activities
* In need of constant attention
* Lice/Nits

Your child may be required to be picked up if symptoms or illness occurs during the day.

You are REQUIRED to notify the Welcome Desk immediately if your child has a communicable disease. A notice, in accordance with HIPPA regulations, is required to be posted by the CDC and Health Department. A DOCTOR’S note is REQUIRED for a child to return to the center following recovery from any communicable disease which MUST specify the date your child may return.

Communicable Diseases include but are NOT LIMITED to:

* Chicken Pox
* Measles
* Flu
* Whooping Cough (Pertussis)
* Coronavirus
* RSV

“Caring for our Children” is used as a reference guide to build and maintain policies for a healthy environment. (https://nrckids.org/CFOC)

**All Children:** If your child needs medication while they will be attending the program, you must complete a medication verification log. This policy is in place for ALL MEDICATIONS. All medications MUST be in their ORIGINAL CONTAINERS WITH THE CHILD’S NAME ON THE LABEL, and clear instructions for administering the medication must be provided from the child’s physician. Refrigeration is available if necessary.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY**

There may be times when the weather is too dangerous for our staff to arrive safely or due to the loss of heat, electric, or water services. All notifications will come through email and message on the ChildPilot App. Please ensure that you check your e-mail and the ChildPilot app often during inclement weather for closures or delays, and especially before driving your child to drop-off.

Should our facility close AFTER children are already in the program, we will call parents for pick up arrangements.

**PROGRAM SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

School Age (SACC) Kindergarten-15 yrs old:

**School Year:** Monday – Friday 6:30a – 8:45a and 2:45p – 6p

Full, half, 2 hr. delay days are included. Services based on the Highlands School District Calendar. We will provide services on all days not listed in this handbook as a holiday. Arrive at end of regular school day only. We do not provide services for children who should be in school (ie. Illness, suspension, etc). We do not provide transportation to and from school. The enrollment fee includes homework time, snack (provided by us only), and an activity each afternoon. Free Play in the mornings.

On 2 hour delays, SACC children who are regularly enrolled for morning sessions or both sessions will be given preference for attendance. You MUST call the facility before bringing your child to be sure that we have space.

On ½ days, SACC children who are regularly enrolled for afternoon sessions or both sessions will be given preference. You MUST call the facility before sending your child to be sure that we have space. Any child sent to us by the school who we cannot accommodate due to ratio and no phone call will be sent back to the school on the bus.

Children will be assessed on an annual basis using the DRDP (Desired Results Developmental Profile). Parents will be provided access to this assessment.

SACERS (Kindergarten-8 years)

* 5 days, AM & PM: $157.20/week or CCW Copay

**Summer Session**: Monday – Friday 6:30a – 6p (Must be here by 9am and not picked up before 3pm)

Services based on the Highlands School District Calendar. Includes all program materials, local walking trips, special guest programs, regular program activities based on academic subject areas, and afternoon snack. Water is available to children all day.

* Summer Session (5 Full Days): $228.65/week or CCW Copay

Kindergarten Prep (ECE) 3-5 yrs old potty trained:

**Time:** Monday – Friday 6:30AM – 6PM; Required 9am-3pm

**Quiet Time:** ECERS will be provided with a time per day when they may nap or perform a quiet activity (book, puzzle, etc) on their mat.

**Schedule:** Includes gym, reading, science, math, social studies, art, and much more under the direction of the McGraw Hill World of Wonders Curriculum. Afternoon snack included. Water is available to children all day.

Within the first 45 days of enrollment, all children will be screened using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. After the initial screening tool, staff will use The Creative Curriculum Gold Assessment to continue to track the child’s learning.

ECERS:

Full Time (5 days): $264.10/week or CCW Copay

Toddler Learning Program (TLP) 1-2 yrs old:

**Time:** Monday – Friday 6:30AM – 6PM; Required 9am-3pm

**Quiet Time:** TLP will be provided with a time per day when they may nap or perform a quiet activity (book, puzzle, etc) on their mat.

**Schedule:** Includes gym, reading, science, math, social studies, art, and much more under the direction of the FrogStreet Toddler Curriculum.

**Important Information:** Children may bring milk/juice with them if they are going to drink it with their breakfast in the morning or with their lunch. It is to be prepared and ready to drink. We do not provide cups/bottles for this. Each child will be provided with a cup for water that is available to them all day.

Each child is to bring with them supplies for diapering for 1 week before services begin on Monday morning. We do not have the storage area for boxes of diapers, wipes, creams, powders, etc. We estimate that each child should be bringing approximately 25 diapers and 2 packages of wipes (size dependent). We can store in each child’s bin any single cream, powder, or other diapering materials (one of each is fine). Be aware….If a child should run out of diapers or wipes, they will not be permitted to return to service until a new supply has been obtained by the parent and delivered to staff. We will contact parents to let them know if we need more before the next week.

\*\*Note: cloth diapers must come with a clean plastic bag that can be tied and returned to the parent at the end of each day. Staff are not responsible for the cleaning of the diapers…that is the sole responsibility of the parent.

Within the first 45 days of enrollment, all children will be screened using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. After the initial screening tool, staff will use The Creative Curriculum Gold Assessment to continue to track the child’s learning.

TLP:

1 yr old:

Full Time (5 days): $298.05/week or CCW Copay

2yr old:

Full Time (5 days): $287.55/week or CCW Copay