



STEPPING STONES CHILDREN'S CENTER: MAIN CENTER FAMILY HANDBOOK

2025-2026 ACADEMIC SCHOOL YEAR

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Introduction

Welcome to Stepping Stones Children’s Center child development program! This handbook outlines program policies for our Main Center location, located at 712 Warrendale Road, Gibsonia, PA 15044. Policies are aligned and in compliance with state and local regulations. Health and safety policies are outlined based on the most up-to-date standards as outlined in Caring for Our Children, 4th Edition. Stepping Stones maintains compliance with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services regulations and participates in the Keystone Stars Program.

Stepping Stones Children’s Center (SSCC) is a private, non-profit, corporation established in 1979 to provide care and education for children and their families in Allegheny and Butler counties. We have been providing high quality child development programs at our Main Center as well as school age programming in the Pine Richland school district since 1993 and in the Seneca Valley school district since 2012. The Main Center is staffed with a Director, Assistant Director and a Lead Teacher/Group Supervisor in each of the classrooms. Assistant Group Supervisors round out the classroom as daily support to the Lead Teacher/Group Supervisor. The school age programs are staffed with trained early childhood professionals. Each school location has a Site Director who is responsible for management of everyday operations, planning, and implementing program activities as well as maintaining open parent-teacher communication. Group Supervisors plan and implement program activities. Assistant Group Supervisors assist the leads in each classroom.

Philosophy

We believe in educating the whole child in an environment in which children feel safe and can strive. Our childcare programs help children achieve developmental goals that are critical in the early years and foster those goals throughout their adolescent years. Stepping Stones provides a hands-on learning environment that helps children learn through play and experiences, while also meeting the goals of state standards. Our qualified teachers are responsive to the needs and development milestones of each child.

Mission Statement

Stepping Stones is committed to providing high quality education and childcare in an environment that fosters positive relationships among our children, staff, families, and the community we serve. We establish a continuity of care by providing meaningful childcare experiences from infancy to early adolescents. Our students, parents, and staff will work together to build an atmosphere where each and every child can learn and respect one another in an academic, physical, and social environment.

Vision Statement

Stepping Stones Children's Center will strive to be an organization that exemplifies growth and opportunity for children, their families, and our community at large, by providing the following:

- Implementing research-based curriculum that supports the academic, physical, and social learning needs of every child
- A future that is brighter, safer, and more productive for children
- Wider understanding of the needs of children and families
- Early identification, intervention, and programming for children with special needs
- More effective networking with childhood programs to incorporate meaningful, learning experiences

Program Goals

Stepping Stones Children's Center strives to achieve the following goals in our Main Center Programs:

- Provide children with opportunities to explore, discover and learn through hands-on activities in a safe and supportive environment
- Stay current with ongoing trends in early childhood education to provide high quality programs and services in emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development.
- To provide a balance of independent, small, and large group activities that includes creative play, educational centers, and physical/motor development
- Maintain a safe, comfortable, clean, aesthetically pleasing and fun environment to promote health/social development
- To teach, value, and respect the diversity of children, families, and staff to create a positive environment that fosters emotional growth
- Staff programs with trained and knowledgeable educators who provide developmentally appropriate experiences in accordance with PA Learning Standards and DHS regulations
- Maintain high standards of ethical conduct, professionalism, and confidentiality

Program Information

Program

Address: 712 Warrendale Road, Gibsonia, PA 15044

Phone: 724-625-2199

Center Hours: 7:00 am – 6:00 pm

Website: www.stepstonescc.org

Tax ID#: 25-1370951

United Way Contributor Choice #: 285

Administration

Director of Main Center Programs

Lauren Zierenberg
Email: laurenz@stepstonescc.org
Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 223

Assistant Director of Main Center Programs

Dana Kinder
Email: Dana@stepstonescc.org
Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 228

Director of Operations

Christine Macedonia
Email: cmacedonia@stepstonescc.org
Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 225

Accountant

Kerri Rudolph
Email: familyaccounts@stepstonescc.org
Phone: 724-625-2199 ext. 228

Classroom

Yellow Room

724-625-2199 ext. 227
yellowroom@stepstonescc.org

Orange Room

724-625-2199 ext 226
orangeroom@stepstonescc.org

Pink Room

724-625-2199 ext 224
pinkroom@stepstonescc.org

Green Room

724-625-2199 ext 237
greenroom@stepstonescc.org

Blue Room

724-625-2199 ext 232
blueroom@stepstonescc.org

Purple Room

724-625-2199 ext 230
purpleroom@stepstonescc.org

Red Room

724-625-2199 ext 231
redroom@stepstonescc.org

ADMISSION POLICIES

Non-Discrimination Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center early childhood program admits children 6 weeks through 5 years old. The school age programs admits children in grades kindergarten through sixth grade. Admissions, the provisions of services, and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including Limited English Proficiency), age, or sex.

Program services shall be made accessible to eligible persons with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aids and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.

Any individual/client/student (and/or their guardian) who believes they have been discriminated against, may file a complaint of discrimination with:

Stepping Stones Children’s Center

712 Warrendale Rd
Gibsonia, PA 15044
724-625-2199
maura@stepstonescc.org

Office for Civil Rights

U.S Department of Health and Human Services
Centralized Case Management Operations
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Room 509F HHH Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20201
Customer Response Center: (800) 368-1019
TDD: (800) 537-7697
<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints>
Email: ocrmail@hhs.gov

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Department of Human Services
Bureau of Equal Opportunity
Room 225, Health & Welfare Building
P.O. Box 2675 Harrisburg, PA 17120
Inquiries: 717-787-1127
Email: RA-PWBEOAO@pa.gov

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission

333 Market Street, 8th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
<http://www.phrc.pa.gov/File-a-complaint>
Inquiries: 717-787-4410
TTY users only: 717-787-7279

Special Needs

Stepping Stones does not discriminate or limit the enrollment of children with special needs as long as a safe environment can be provided, and the admission of the student does not pose a direct threat to the health and safety of other staff and children in the program. Stepping Stones will make reasonable accommodations, modifications and provide supports, unless this presents a fundamental alteration to the program.

Request for IEP

If your child has an IEP/IFSP/504 Plan, we ask that you provide Stepping Stones with a copy. Stepping Stones staff will work with families to provide support within our means to do so. Stepping Stones is not able to provide one-on-one support but will provide the family with resources to outside agencies.

Registration and Enrollment

Prior to your child’s enrollment, a tour of Stepping Stones is encouraged to acquaint each new family with the environment, staff, and schedules. A registration link will be sent to you once availability has been determined. Fully completed registrations are required before a child can attend a Stepping Stones’s program. All registrations will be reviewed and processed by the Director of Main Center Programs. Upon acceptance into the early childhood program, families will receive a confirmation email with a start date.

The following registration information is required, in entirety, before the first day of attendance:

- A completed enrollment form through the School Care Works registration portal

- A completed emergency contact form sent through Adobe and signed
- Health Assessment and Immunization Records
 - (Health Assessments are to be updated at 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, and 18 months. Once a child turns 2 years old, Health Assessments are to be updated annually.)
 - Please return Health Assessments as soon as possible when they are due as failure to do so will result in non-compliance with the Department of Health and Human Services' regulations. This could result in your child not attending Stepping Stones.
- An agreement will be sent from Adobe Sign to be electronically signed. This will need to be completed prior to the first day of attendance.
- Registration Fee

Tuition Policies

Tuition

The tuition rates for Stepping Stones Children's Center Main Center Programs vary based on the number of days enrolled. A complete breakdown of pricing for the 2025-2026 school year can be located on our website at stepstonescc.org under *Registration and Forms*. Tuition rates are updated annually to stay in line with the increased cost of childcare programming.

All families must have automatic payments set up through their Parent Portal account. Approved payment methods are ACH bank accounts, Visa, and Mastercard. Cash and checks will not be accepted and should not be given to classroom teachers or sent into school with your child. Tuition will be charged to the payment method on your Parent Connect Portal account on the 1st of every month. If the 1st of the month falls on a weekend or holiday, tuition will be charged on the next business day that Stepping Stones is open.

Program expenses are consistent, even when a child misses due to illness, vacation, etc.. ***Therefore, we cannot extend and/or reimburse tuition or reschedule missed days.*** To compensate for this fact, monthly tuition is based on a 20 day average.

Tuition includes breakfast and afternoon snack for children one (1) years old and above.

Fees and Late Payments

A \$100 non-refundable registration fee will be charged at the time a registration is submitted. For families with multiple children, a \$50 non-refundable registration fee will apply for each additional child. If a registration fee is not paid within 14 days of enrollment, your spot in the program may be forfeited.

A 3% credit card fee is added for each processed credit card payment.

A \$45 charge will be added for any returned payments.

A late payment of \$35 will be charged if a full payment has not been received in five (5) business days.

A holding fee of 50% of tuition, per child, will be required to hold your child's spot in a program. A holding fee can only be used to hold a spot for a maximum of three months.

After 14 days, if tuition has not been paid, childcare services may be withheld until payment is received. If there is a waitlist, your child will be unenrolled until another spot becomes available.

Discounts

A 10% older sibling discount will be applied to the older siblings enrolled. Discounts do not apply for *Extra Day* charges.

Schedules and Changes

There is a two-day minimum required for enrollment.

Extra days of care are available, space permitting, with prior notification.

Tuition rates are based on consistent weekly schedules. For families whose days of care vary week to week, they will be billed the variable tuition rate of one day higher. If you need a variable schedule, please contact the Director of Main Center Programs.

SSCC requires a 15 day notice of cancellation or reduction of care prior to the 1st of the month. No tuition reimbursements will be given on/after the first of the month. Requests must be made directly to the Director of Main Center Programs and/or Accountant. To make changes to your schedule or add days, please email the Director of Main Center Programs at Laurenz@stepstonescc.org or Accountant at Familyaccounts@stepstonescc.org

A calendar of dates the program is closed will be sent out upon registration and at the beginning of each fiscal year.

Please note if you withdraw from the program a new registration will need to be completed to re-enroll. Registration fee will apply.

ELRC

Stepping Stones Children's Center accepts subsidy payments through the ELRC. For more information about applying for subsidy through the ELRC, please contact the numbers below:

- Allegheny County- 412-350-3577
- Butler County- 724-285-9431

Families who are receiving subsidy through ELRC, may have a weekly copay. Applications through the ELRC will need to be updated annually.

If you are receiving subsidy through ELRC and need to make a schedule changes, you must contact ELRC directly, as well as Stepping Stones, to make them aware of the change.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICIES

Illness Policy and Medical Exclusion

Stepping Stones Children's Center prioritizes the safety and health of the children in our care. When your child becomes ill at the Early Childhood Program, we will remove your child from the group and create a comfortable space for your child to rest. Stepping Stones teachers will first contact the parents and/or guardians to pick up your child. If we are unable to reach the parent and/or guardian, we will contact the next emergency contact on your child's emergency contact form.

A child may not be sent into the program and may be sent home if the following conditions are displayed:

- A temperature of 100.4 °
- One or more episode of vomiting, regardless of cause
- One or more episodes of diarrhea
- Contagious illness and diseases including, but not limited to flu, COVID, measles, chicken pox, mumps, roseola, fifth disease, hand foot and mouth, conjunctivitis (pink eye), head lice, strep throat
- Behavior indicating distress or pain
- Severe cold, excessive coughing, sneezing, and/or excessive nose drainage causing inability to participate in the daily routine

A child may also be excluded from the program if:

- The child's illness prevents the child from participating in activities that the facility routinely offers
- The illness requires more care than the staff can provide without compromising the needs of the other children in the group
- Keeping the child in care poses an increased risk to the child or to the children and adults with whom the child will come in contact

Stepping Stones Children's Center will follow the recommendations of *Caring for our Children* for exclusions practices. In most cases, children will need to be symptom free for 24 hours without the use of medication.

Notification of Infectious and Communicable Diseases

Stepping Stones Children's Center is required to report certain illnesses and diseases to the Department of Human Services and Health Department. Parents should notify their child's program teacher within 24 hours if their child has developed a known or suspected communicable illness.

The Director of Main Center Programs will report the illness to the appropriate agencies. The program's Director will post outside the classroom signs and symptoms of the disease, incubation period and any other information that would be helpful to preventing the spread of disease.

Illness Prevention

Stepping Stones Children's Center tries diligently to minimize illness and infections and to control the spread of disease with the following measures:

- Disinfecting high touch and play areas daily
- Cleaning and sanitizing the eating areas thoroughly before and after each meal or snack.
- Washing hands repeatedly
- Deep cleaning areas after reported illness

Handwashing

All staff and children are required to wash their hands at a minimum at the following times:

- Upon entering the program
- Before and after handling food
- Before giving medication
- After using the restroom
- After diapering
- After handling bodily fluids
- After playing outside
- After using sand and art materials

Hand sanitizer is not permitted to be used as a substitution for soap and water. Hand sanitizer should not be kept on a child or in their backpack.

Administration of Medication

Stepping Stones Children's Center will administer medication only if the parent or legal guardian has provided the appropriate documentation. Medication will be kept in a locked box out of the reach of children with a signed medication log. Medication will be administered in accordance with DHS regulation 055 Pa. Code 3270.133.

Medication and the administration of medication must meet the following guidelines:

- Be in the original container. If a prescription medication, the container must include the prescription label.
- Prescription and nonprescription medications must identify the name of the medication and name of the child receiving medication.
- Medication should only be given in the manner as described on the label and only given to the intended child.

A medication log is required for medication stored in the program. The medication log should be kept with the medication and include the following information:

- The name of the medication
- The name of the child receiving the medication
- If the medication needs refrigeration
- Amount of medication to be administered
- Date of administration
- Time of administration
- The initials of the staff person who administered the medication
- Parent or guardian signature

Severe Allergies and Medical Conditions

When enrolling a child who has severe allergies or medical conditions in the program, special preparations and extra documents are required to ensure the safety of the child. Parents are responsible to ensure that their child's program teacher is aware of the allergy and/or medical condition. Any medication will need to be given directly to Stepping Stones and be in accordance with the Administration of Medication policy listed above.

Families with children with extreme allergies will be asked to complete an Allergy Care Plan provided by Stepping Stones Children's Center. Parents and/or guardians are responsible for ensuring that the allergy is listed on the child's emergency contact form, all medications are properly labeled and provided to their program's teacher.

Injuries and Accidents

In the event that your child has a non-life threatening injury during program hours, SSCC staff will administer basic first aid procedures and complete an incident report via paper which will be given to you at pick up. For incidents/injuries involving injuries to the head, ticks, excessive falls or inappropriate behavior, a phone call will be made immediately to the parent as well. The incident report will include the date, time, location of injury, and how injury was obtained.

In the event that your child is severely injured in the Stepping Stones program, the staff will take the appropriate steps to obtain emergency medical care. Depending on the nature of the injury or the child's reaction to the injury, a parent may be called and asked to pick up their child. We will make every attempt to contact you, however; if we cannot reach a parent or guardian or the child needs immediate emergency services, we will have the child transported by ambulance to an emergency room. A teacher will accompany your child to hospital until a parent or guardian arrives. Staff will provide the hospital with the insurance information provided on the emergency contact form.

Biting

Biting is unfortunately not unexpected behaviors for children during the ages of 1 to 3 years old. Some children and many toddlers communicate through this behavior. However, this behavior can be harmful to other children and to staff. This biting policy has been developed with expected behaviors and safety of other child in mind. Our goal is to identify what is causing the biting and to find a resolution to phase out this behavior.

Preventative Measures

The following preventative strategies are used to prevent biting in the classroom:

- Age appropriate room arrangement to ensure children have enough space to move and play freely in the classroom
- Multiples of the same toy to discourage biting
- Close supervision of children
- Curriculum that encourages the development of language and how to appropriately express needs, wants and frustrations

When Biting Occurs

Names about the child who was bit and the child who did the biting are kept confidential. Names are not permitted to be shared with parents/guardians.

For the child that bit

The following steps will take place when a child has bit another child:

- The teacher will explain in a developmentally appropriate way to the child who did the biting that biting is not allowed and hurts our friends. The child will be redirected to another area.
- An incident report will be completed. The parents will be asked to sign the incident report at pick up. One copy will be sent home with the parents and another copy will be kept in the child's file

For the child who was bitten:

The following steps will take place when a child has been bit:

- First aid is given to the bite. The area is washed with soap and water. An ice pack will be offered to the child. If the skin is broken, it will be covered with a bandage.
- The parents will be notified.
- An injury report will be completed. The parents will be asked to sign the injury report at pick up. One copy will be sent home with the parents and another copy will be kept in the child's file

Steps Forward

- When frequent biting occurs, our goal is to find the purpose for the behavior and to provide solutions to decrease the behavior. If biting becomes a prominent behavior, a conference will be held with the parents, classroom teacher and Director to determine an intervention plan. Stepping Stones will connect parents and request partnerships from outside agencies including, but not limited to: IECMH, AIU, ELRC Region 5 Rapid Response, and Trying Together. If biting occurs multiple times in a short span of time, the parents may be asked to pick up their child until the behavior plan has been put into place

Infants

Breastfeeding

Stepping Stones Children's Center will encourage and support breastfeeding mothers to continue breastfeeding.

- Breastfeeding mothers shall be provided a clean, welcoming place to breastfeed or express their milk.
- A refrigerator will be made available for the storage of expressed breast milk.
- Stored breast milk will need to be labeled with the child's name, date milk was expressed, and ounces.
- No infant shall be fed the expressed human milk of another infant's mother
- Infant formula is not fed to a breastfed infant without the mother's written permission to do so

Infant Feeding Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center will adhere to the following guidelines for promotion and encouragement of health infant feeding practices:

- Formula-fed infants drink the formula recommended for them by their health care professionals and parents, not cow's milk
- Teachers shall consult with the parents upon initial enrollment to determine a feeding schedule for the child. The feeding schedule shall be posted in the classroom. Parents are responsible for notifying the teachers of changes in their child's feeding schedule and updating the feeding schedule form.
- Formulas mixed with cereal, fruit juice, or any other foods will not be served unless written instructions are provided by the child's parent/guardians.
- Guidelines show best practice is to hold infants while feeding. However, we will accommodate parent requests for alternative feeding practices. (I.e.- boppy, bouncer, etc.)
- Infants are not permitted to have bottles in the crib and will not be allowed to carry a bottle while standing, walking, or running around.
- A plan to introduce age-appropriate solid foods to infants will be made in consultation with the child's parent/guardian and primary care provider.

Sleeping Policy

A safe sleep policy has been implemented to reduce the risk of sudden unexpected infants' death (SUIDs) as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

- Infants up to twelve (12) months of age should be placed for sleep on their backs unless a health care provider has provided written documentation of alternative sleep positions
- Infants shall be placed in a crib with a firm crib mattress covered by a tight-fitting sheet (provided by the center).
- Infants should not nap or sleep in a car seat, bouncy seat, swing, jumping chair, height chair, or any other type of furniture/equipment that is not a safety-approved crib.

- If an infant arrives at the center in a car safety seat, the parent/guardian should immediately remove the sleeping infant from this seat and place them in their crib on their back to continue sleeping.
- If an infant falls asleep in any place that is not a safe sleep environment, teachers should immediately move the infant and place them in the supine position in their crib.
- Parents are to provide a sleep sack to use for safe sleep. Your child's sleep sack will be sent home at the end of each week to be washed.
- Infants will not be permitted to have toys, blankets, stuffed animals, monitors, sound machines, bumper pads, bibs, or any other loose item in their crib.
- Infants shall be directly observed by sight and sound at all times.
- Bedding will be changed on a weekly basis. A crib shall be sanitized and bedding changed before a different child uses a crib.

Emergency Operation Procedures

Stepping Stones Children's Main Center has a site specific Emergency Operation Plan (EOP) that staff are trained in upon hire and annually thereafter. The Emergency Operation Plan is reviewed annually by the Director of Main Center Programs and updated if necessary. The Emergency Operation Plan is sent to county and local Emergency Management Association. Parents are provided with a letter regarding the EOP at the time of enrollment. Part 1 of this plan is posted in the Family Bulletin Board at each entrance of the building.

Site Safety

All entrances to Extended Day Programs shall be locked during program hours. When arriving at the Main Center, use the keypad with the code given to you at the time of registration. It is not permitted to share this code with any other persons.

A Health and Safety Checklist is completed twice a year to assess and address safety concerns. Outdoor play spaces are assessed before use to check for signs of damage, dangerous items, or unstable items. No smoking, vaping, lethal weapons and/or guns are permitted on site.

Stepping Stones teachers are provided with photo identification badges.

Emergency Drills

Stepping Stones Children's Center takes the safety of our children very seriously by preparing for all types of emergencies. Each program participates in the following drills:

- Fire Drills- Fire drills are conducted on a monthly basis. Children practice locating emergency exits and safely exiting the building to a safe location. Teachers will take attendance before and after leaving the building.
- Lockdown Drills- Lockdown drills are conducted to prepare students if there is an intruder in the building.
- Extreme Weather- Students practice sheltering in place in the event of severe weather such as tornado or flood.

Supervision and Staff Requirements

Staff to Child Ratios

Stepping Stones Children's Center adheres to the DHS child to teacher ratio listed in 055 Pa. Code 3270.51 which are as follows

Infant (6 weeks- 12 months)	1:4
Young Toddlers (12 months- 24 months)	1:5
Older Toddlers (25 months- 36 months)	1:6
Preschool (3 years – 5 years)	1:10

When two age groups are mixed, the age of the youngest child will determine the child to teacher ratio.

Clearances and Training

All Stepping Stones Children's Center employees working directly with children are required to obtain and have on file the following:

- Child Abuse Clearance
- State Police Clearance
- National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR)
- FBI Clearance
- CPR
- Fire Safety Training
- Emergency Operation Training
- Mandated Reporter Training

Mandated Reported and Suspected Abuse

Under the Child Protective Service Act, mandated Reporters are required to report any suspicion of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities. The employees of Stepping Stones Children's Center are considered mandated reporters under this law. The employees of Stepping Stones Children's Center are not required to discuss their suspicions with parents prior to reporting the matter to the appropriate authorities, nor are they required to investigate the cause of suspicious marks, behaviors, or conditions prior to making the report. Under the Child Protective Service Act, mandated reporters can be held criminally responsible if they fail to report suspected abuse or neglect. The Child Protective Service Act is designed to protect the welfare and best interest of all children.

Child Maltreatment

Stepping Stones Children's Center employees will receive training on child maltreatment, recognizing the potential signs, including but not limited to: unexplained burns, bruises, bites; frequent absence from school; lacking sufficient clothing; lack of proper hygiene; inappropriate behavior; extreme aggression, etc. Staff are trained to be able to identify signs of stress in families and assist by providing support and resources.

Shaken Baby Syndrome and Abusive Head Trauma

Stepping Stones Children's Center will receive training upon their initial hire to prevent and recognize potential signs of shaken baby syndrome/abusive head trauma, child maltreatment, neglect. These can be but not limited to: irritability, trouble staying awake, trouble breathing, vomiting, and inability to be woken up. SSCC employees will also learn strategies to cope with crying children, such as but not limited to, checking the child's needs, checking the child's environment, nurturing, soft music, taking a walk, asking for assistance; understanding the development of the brain in infancy and early childhood.

DROP OFF AND PICK UP PROCEDURES

Release of Child

Children will only be released to their parent, guardian or a person who is indicated as an emergency contact on a child's registration form. Any person picking up a child will need to have a picture ID available. Stepping Stones staff are required to ask for ID for any person who the staff do not recognize before releasing the child.

In the event you need to have a person who is not listed on your child's emergency contact form pick up your child; notify your child's program teacher through email by listing the full name and address of the person picking up your child.

Stepping Stones teachers will notify the police and the parent/guardian if an unauthorized person seeks custody of a child.

Drop Off Procedures

Families are welcomed to enter our program at the appropriate opening time. We ask that families refrain from arriving prior to opening, as our teachers use this time to prepare for the day. Children must be accompanied to the door by an adult. Please make sure your child's teacher is aware that your child has arrived.

Pick up Procedures

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are required to come to the classroom and/or playground to pick up their child. Once you arrive, you are responsible for the supervision and safety of your child. For your child's safety, please make sure your child does not run in the hallways, rooms and/or parking lot.

Parking Lot

All children **MUST** be supervised in the parking lot. Please do not leave your vehicle running or leave a child unattended in your vehicle. If this occurs, all staff are mandated reporters under the

state, and the parent/guardian will be reported to Childline. *The speed limit in the parking lot is 5 mph.* Please drive safely and slowly for the safety of all our children.

DHS regulation § 3270.177. Supervision:

- (a) Children may not be left unattended in a vehicle
- (b) Children shall be supervised during boarding and exiting vehicles by an adult who remains outside the vehicle

Absences

Please notify the Stepping Stones program teacher directly if your child will be absent for the day. If your child is missing due to illness, please notify the teachers of the illness so that proper illness prevention and documentation can take place.

Late Pick Up Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center closes promptly at 6:00 pm. Teachers are only scheduled until 6:00 PM and it is the expectation that all children be picked up by that time. We recognize that on occasion an emergency may arise which causes you to be late picking up your child. In such an event, **please call**, so that we may plan accordingly. To avoid additional programming fees, we must impose the following late policy whenever lateness is the routine rather than exception:

A late fee, as outlined in your agreement, will be charged at a rate of \$30 per half hour or fraction thereof.

If you are running late for any reason, please make every attempt to contact the program teacher and provide an estimated time of arrival. If a parent is late and no contact has been made, the child's program teacher will attempt to contact the parent, and the other emergency contacts listed on the child's form.

A parent who is late 3 times will receive a written notice requiring the family to submit a plan for picking up their child on time. If the parent is late again, they will receive a final written warning. With the next lateness, the child will be dismissed from the program.

Impaired or Intoxicated Individual

If a parent or guardian arrives to pick up a child who appears to be under the influence of medication, alcohol, drugs or other substances, the Stepping Stones staff will ask the parent or guardian to arrange alternate transportation. The Stepping Stones staff will make the following attempts to delay the individual from taking the child:

- Every attempt will be made to contact another guardian or emergency contact to pick up the child.
- Explain to the individual that arrangements have been made for another guardian or emergency contact to pick up the child and they shall remain in our care until that time.

- If the individual becomes threatening or violent, they will be asked to leave the premise, and the police will be contacted if they refuse.
- If the individual forcefully takes the child and leaves, the police will be contacted immediately and notified that an impaired/intoxicated individual is leaving the center.
- Stepping Stones teachers cannot legally deny release to any parent, without a court order, to pick up their child, but we will make every attempt to keep the child safe.

Custody Agreements and Court Orders

In cases where a court order is put into place, a copy of the most recent order should be submitted to the Director of Main Center Programs. This is especially important if there is an order that would deny or limit the natural parents right to pick up the child. All situations and orders shared with the Director of Main Center Programs will only be discussed or distributed on a need to know basis to other Stepping Stones employees. If a parent tried to pick up a child against a court order, Stepping Stones staff will notify the proper authorities and guardian.

Stepping Stones Children’s Center cannot, without a court order or PFA, limit the access of one parent by the request of another, regardless of reason.

CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMMING

Curriculum Statement

Quality programs reflect children’s developmental needs, interests and experiences. Providing a variety of learning experiences helps children learn and grow in numerous ways. Teachers who are aware of children’s interests have a basis for building a relationship and motivating children to learn. Stepping Stones Children’s Center is dedicated to creating a high quality programming for the development of young children. SSCC utilizes the STARS approved curriculum FunnyDaffers. FunnyDaffers provides a framework of developmentally appropriate lesson plans that are customizable to meet the needs of the center and children. FunnyDaffers incorporates Literacy, STEM, Creative Art, Movement, Science, Math and Technology. These fundamentals then are linked to the PA Learning Standards.

Learning Standards

All Stepping Stones programs utilize the *Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood* as a framework for curriculum and lesson plan development. Weekly thematic lesson plans for each program are posted in the program space. The core components of the *Pennsylvania Learning Standards for Early Childhood* are:

- Approaches to Play and Learning- Constructing, Organizing and Applying Knowledge
- Language and Literacy Development- English Language Arts
- Mathematical Thinking and Expression- Exploring, Processing, and Problem-Solving
- Scientific Thinking and Technology- Exploring, Scientific Inquiry and Discovery
- Social Studies Thinking- Connecting to Communities

- Creative Thinking and Expression- Communicating through the Arts
- Health, Wellness, and Physical Development- Learning About My Body
- Social and Emotional Development- Student Interpersonal Skills
- Partnerships for Learning- Families, Schools, and Communities

Conferences and Assessments

All children will be observed during their first 45 days of enrollment and as needed. Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers will be evaluated using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. These screenings will help the SSCC staff be able to pinpoint children's strengths and help identify children with developmental or social-emotional concerns. Results are shared with families and support for referrals is offered as needed.

Conferences are offered to families at certain developmental milestones (4, 8, 12, 18, 24, 30, and 36 months- Ounce), twice per year in Preschool Fall and Spring- Work Sampling, and as needed, to discuss children's progress, accomplishments, and any difficulties you may have at home or at the program. Staff will use daily observations of children to complete child evaluations. Staff will use these observations and evaluations to inform Parents/Guardians about their children's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual developmental progress. The written evaluations will become a part of the child's file at Stepping Stones.

Personal Items

Your child will need to have some personal items on hand when he or she enrolls. Please be sure to label all items with your child's name! Some of the items your child will need are:

- Water bottle filled for daily use.
- Sunscreen: expired sunscreen will be discarded, and new sunscreen will be requested as needed.
- Bedding: Crib sheet, small blanket and/or small pillow (toddler and preschool only). Bedding will be sent home to be washed at the end of the week.
- Diapers, wipes, diaper cream, etc. for children in diapers. Reminders will be sent home when these supplies need replenished.
- Weather appropriate outdoor clothing: hats, gloves, boots, rain jackets, etc. so that children are prepared to go outside every day.
- Comfortable, appropriate footwear.
- Extra clothing: At least one full set- children in the process of potty training should have more than one set. Please be sure to check your child's extra clothes supply often and replace as needed.

Toys from home

Although children love to bring their favorite toys to school, it is discouraged because these items can get lost or broken. Stepping Stones promotes safe play practices, therefore, we do not allow children to bring toys that represent weapons (i.e. guns, knives, swords).

Electronics are not permitted in the program unless permission has been previously given from a staff member.

Children are responsible for their personal items and Stepping Stones Children's Center is not responsible for any items that are lost, broken and/or stolen. All children that are enrolled in Stepping Stones Children's Center programs are consistently well supervised, however, accidents do happen. By enrolling your child in Stepping Stones Children's Center, you assume all risk for any damaged, lost, or stolen belongings.

Nap/Rest Time

A nap/rest time is provided daily from 1:00 pm-3:00 pm. Each child will have his or her own cot/mat that is provided. Each cot/mat is labeled for exclusively that child only. Parents will provide a crib sheet and or/small blanket and pillow. Comfort items such as stuffed animals or binky are permitted as well. All bedding will be stored separately in the child's bin and MUST be taken home to be washed at the end of the week.

Children are encouraged to rest for a period of time. If a child does not nap, he or she will be given quiet activities to do while the other children are resting.

Screen Time

Stepping Stones Children's Center follows the recommendations of NAYEC and the Fred Rogers Center regarding screen time and technology. This position is as follows: *Technology and interactive media are tools that can promote effective learning and development when they are used intentionally by early childhood educators, within the framework of developmentally practices, to support learning goals established for individual children.*

- Above all, the use of technology and tools and interactive media should not harm children.
- Developmentally appropriate practices and professional judgement must guide decisions about whether and when to integrate technology and interactive media into early childhood programs.
- Appropriate use of technology and media depends on the age, developmental levels, needs, interests, linguistic backgrounds and abilities of each child.
- Effective uses of technology and media are active, hands-on, engaging and empowering; give the child control; provide adaptive scaffolds to ease the accomplishment of tasks and are used as one of many options to support children's learning.
- When used appropriately, technology and media can enhance children cognitive and social abilities.

- Interactions with technology and media should be playful and support creativity, exploration, pretend play, active play, and outdoor activities.
- Individual screen time use will be limited to 20 minutes per day.
- Mealtimes shall remain screen free.

Indoor/Outside Play

Taking children outdoors is a healthy integral part of our daily schedule and curriculum. The importance of fresh air and exercise as part of a child's daily routine is recommended by health experts. Children benefit from active outdoor play to release energy and develop large muscle coordination. Stepping Stones will follow the state guidelines for outdoor play. During winter months, with a wind chill of 25 degrees or below, we will not be going outside. During the summer months, with a heat index of 90 degrees or above, we will not be going outside. Gloves/mittens, hats, boots, and sunscreen are essential to provide the necessary protection. Please remember to label all clothing. All age groups play outdoors daily unless weather conditions are such that the health and/or safety of the children are jeopardized.

Inclusion

The ADA is committed to a culture of diversity and inclusion to foster a safe and equitable environment for its membership. In this environment, representation matters, and every member is provided intentional opportunities to make meaningful contributions. Diverse viewpoints and needs are heard, valued, and respected.

In compliance with federal law, Stepping Stones Children's Center does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, military service, covered veterans status, or genetic information in its administration of educational policies, programs, activities. Parents will be informed of their rights regarding inclusion upon enrollment. The Americans with Disabilities Act can be accessed through this link: [Guide to Disability Rights Laws | ADA.gov](https://www.ada.gov/)

Stepping Stones Children's Center uses developmentally appropriate practices and considers the unique needs of all children when planning. Stepping Stones will actively include young children with disabilities or special needs by utilizing the step listed below:

- When developmental concerns arise, Stepping Stones teachers will first document behaviors. Documentation may include, but is not limited to: running records, frequency checklist, ABC observations.
- The observations will be reviewed by classroom teachers to determine patterns of behavior and develop interventions for that child. Stepping Stones teachers will offer interventions, as long as the intervention or supports do not cause a safety concern or unmanageable hardship for the program. Supports may be, but are not limited to: transition reminders, visual schedules, and differentiated instruction.

- Stepping Stones teachers will reach out to parents and/or guardians through email or phone to address developmental concerns and interventions. If needed, a parent-teacher conference will be scheduled to address strengths and next steps for growth.
- Stepping Stones will connect parents and request partnerships from outside agencies including, but not limited to: IECMH, AIU, ELRC Region 5 Rapid Response, and Trying Together.

IEP/IFSP

If a child enrolled in the program has an IEP or IFSP, a copy will be requested for the child's file. With the family's permission, Stepping Stones teachers will participate in the implementation of the IEP/IFSP. We will work with the family to provide consistency within the Stepping Stones program. If an IEP requires one on one support, Stepping Stones is not responsible for providing that support, but will work with the families to find agencies to support the needs of the children.

Dual Language Learners/ ESL

Stepping Stones Children's Center strives to support children in language development. Children who do not speak English as a first language will be supported in the classroom. To support communication between home and school, teachers will use Google Translate. Every classroom is equipped with an iPad that includes a Translate app. The child's language will be represented in the classroom. The teacher will label centers and materials in the child's first language. Teachers will do their best to have books available in the child's first language or have them interpreted while reading.

Transition Policy

At Stepping Stones, we take steps to ensure a smooth transition from one setting to another.

- **Initial enrollment-** families and children are invited to tour the facility and meet the classroom teachers. During the tour, parents are encouraged to ask questions and are provided with welcome information. Children are given the opportunity for a "soft start" to explore the classroom and materials, while also having time to become comfortable with classroom routines and teachers.
- **Transition during teacher directed play to child directed play-** When it is time to transition from one activity to the next, teachers give prompts to the children using various methods to ensure the child/ren have ample time to prepare for the next transition. Some methods include: a 5–10-minute warning, using visual timers, singing a clean-up song, shutting off the lights and counting down from 10 together. These methods allow the children to have a warning to prepare for the next transition that will occur.
- **Transition with the program-** Children will transition based on age, developmental readiness, state licensing requirements and space availability. Parents are given a transition schedule and welcome material for the new classroom. Over a one-week period children will gradually spend more time in the new classroom to help them get acclimated to the new environment and routine.

- **Transition to Kindergarten-** Teachers attend a kindergarten prep meeting with local school districts in which the district provides skills needed to successfully transition to kindergarten and requirements for registration. Parents are notified of the registration timeline and will assist, if needed, with any documentation required. Stepping Stones also hosts a “Get to Know You” night with the school age teachers from Stepping Stones.
- **Transition from one learning program to another learning program-** When a child leaves our program to attend a different program, we will send home any items the child has created during their time here. That includes any portfolio materials, art projects and learning projects. If the new learning program requests any additional information on the child, with parent permission, the director can discuss those concepts with the new learning program.

Continuity of Care

To support transitions, Stepping Stones aims to provide consistency through the program through continuity of care. Stepping Stones teachers build rapport with the children and families through community events, family engagement opportunities, and positive interactions. By providing regular routines, smooth and consistent transition schedules, consistent staff and nurturing relationships, children will enhance long term relationships and support continuity of care.

School Delays and Cancellations

In the event of inclement weather or Pine Richland School District closure, Stepping Stones will follow the following procedures:

- District closes due to inclement weather- Stepping Stones will also close to ensure the safety of our staff and students.
- District delay due to inclement weather- Stepping Stones will operate at an 8:00 am start.
- District closures or delays due to temperature- Stepping Stones will remain open for our regular program hours.

Nutrition/ Meal Time

Breakfast is provided by Stepping Stones for children ages 1 year and older. Breakfast is served from approximately 8:30-9:00 AM.

Lunch (including a drink) is provided by the Parents/Guardians. Please place your child’s lunch in the classroom refrigerator upon arrival. Each classroom has a microwave where the childcare staff can heat up food. Please send all lunches ready to eat!

Afternoon snack is provided by Stepping Stones for children ages 1 year and older. Snack is served from approximately 3:00-3:30 PM.

Stepping Stones is licensed by the Allegheny County Health Department. In order to maintain required regulations, we ask that all infant families send their child with a spoon for each feeding, which will be sent home at the end of each day to be washed and returned. All children are encouraged to bring in a clean water bottle filled with water from home. If you would like

your child to have milk at any mealtime, please bring a separate cup. Stepping Stones will serve milk to children ages 2 and under. All cups will be sent home at the end of the day to be washed.

Stepping Stones Children's Center is committed to providing healthy foods and beverages and promoting positive mealtimes so that your child can learn good eating habits.

Foods and Beverages:

- Children are offered fruit and/or vegetable at every meal and snack.
- We try to offer high-fiber and whole grain foods throughout the week.
- We try to limit the amount of sweet and salty snacks served.
- We encourage parents to provide healthy meals and will send home ideas for healthy/different lunches periodically throughout the year.

Mealtimes:

- Teachers and children eat meals together, family style, so that children and staff can have healthy discussions on food related topics/lessons or home/school topics. Staff can accomplish this by reading books about healthy foods, conducting activities, trying new foods, etc.
- Screens are never used during mealtimes.
- Teachers never force or bribe children to eat any particular foods or to clean their plates.

All meals served to children are served at no separate charge regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. There is no discrimination in admission policy, meal service, or the use of facilities.

FAMILY AND CHILD CONDUCT

Conduct Policy

Stepping Stones Children's Center prioritizes creating a safe and welcoming environment for staff, children and families. Parents, children and teachers are required to behave in a manner consistent with decency, courtesy and respect. The following policy encompasses actions committed by a child, parent/guardian or staff to another individual. The Director may suspend or terminate care to child or family for the following types of misconduct:

- Injuring another person
- Verbal or physical threats
- Bringing in or using illegal substances
- Engaging in fighting
- Failure to consistently follow program rules and procedures
- Stealing or vandalizing another person's property
- Running from group/classroom space or running from group during outings
- Swearing, cursing and inappropriate language, whether at another person or during a Stepping Stones program
- Bullying

Discipline Policy

Stepping Stones Children’s Center expects that each individual will be respectful and responsible for their behavior. It is expected that children will need help learning the rules of the classroom and may need redirection in learning, developing, and maintaining appropriate behavior. Praise and positive reinforcement are effective methods of the behavior management of children. When children receive positive, non-violent, and understanding interactions from adults and others, they develop good self-concepts, problem solving abilities, and self-discipline.

When teachers observe that a child is having difficulties with social interactions with other children in the classroom, we use effective teaching strategies to support the children in building relationships. In some cases, children just need a play break from one another. In these cases, we encourage these children to choose play spaces that are away from one another to support the goodness of fit for every child in their classroom environment. We refer to this as “time -away”. Time-away may be used if other social interaction techniques are ineffective. This teaching strategy may be used selectively for children over 18 months of age, and especially when they pose a risk of harming themselves or others. The period of “time-away” will be just long enough to enable the child to regain self-control. As a general rule, this period will not exceed one minute per year of age. Caregivers will monitor the effectiveness of “time-away” and seek the help of additional support such as a mental health consultant when approved behavior management strategies do not seem to be effective.

Physical Punishment

Acts of physical or corporal punishment from a parent or staff are not permitted in Stepping Stones programs. While verbal reprimands can be appropriate, verbal abuse, such as threats or insults, are not appropriate in Stepping Stones programs.

Suspension and Expulsion

Stepping Stones Children’s Center will make every effort to prevent suspension and expulsion. Stepping Stones has created a policy to address the steps the organization will take to prevent suspension and/or expulsion and to develop a procedure to ensure that suspension/expulsion is only used as a last resort.

1. Stepping Stones Children’s Center utilizes positive guidance and redirection to help children develop age appropriate self-control. Our teachers take the time to reward and reinforce positive behavior and encourage sharing, kindness, expressing their negative feelings and emotions in an appropriate manner.

2. Some children may not respond to positive supports and behaviors can escalate to an area of concern. If behavior becomes consistent and concerning, staff will document the behavior and take the following steps:

- Assess the classroom environment using informal assessments and formal assessment such as but not limited to: ECERS-3, ITERS-3
- Document concerning behaviors using information and formal observations such as but not limited to: ABC observations, frequency checklist, running records

- Complete Ages and Stages (Social-Emotional) and share with parents
- Complete program assessments including but not limited to Ounce and Work Sampling

3. If deemed necessary by the program Director, the staff will be enrolled in Professional Development to further understanding of challenging behaviors and disabilities.

4. If behaviors or incidents increase in severity or frequency, the Director and Group Supervisor will meet with the family to discuss strategies used to modify behavior and identify changes needed to support success

5. If behaviors persist, Program Directors will reach out to external supports such as but not limited to: STARS Quality Coach, ELRC Region 5 Rapid Response, IECMH, behavior specialist or the students existing behavioral team. The Program Directors will meet with the family to determine if suspension is required to maintain safety while external supports are put into place. A behavior plan will be put into place.

6. The effectiveness of the behavior plan with the external supports will be evaluated in thirty (30) days unless behaviors cause a need for earlier reevaluation.

If after steps listed above have been exhausted, the child's parent or guardian will be notified in writing of the behaviors warranting a suspension/expulsion.

Suspension

A suspension is meant to be a period of time for the family to work with the child on their behavior. The length of the suspension will be determined at the discretion of the center and the parents will receive written notice of the expected behavioral changes required for the child to return to the center. Failure of the child/parent to comply with the terms of the behavior plan may result in the permanent expulsion from the center.

Expulsion

The parent/guardian will be given a specific expulsion date. At the discretion of the Director, the parents/guardians will be given time to seek alternate childcare. The expulsion may take effect immediately depending on the risk and/or safety concerns of the behavior to other children, families, or staff.

Immediate Expulsion

We will make every effort to work with families in the event that expulsion from the program is necessary. However, if a child or parent/guardian presents a direct threat to their own safety or the safety of others, the Director may impose an immediate expulsion. These threats can include, but are not limited to, physical violence and verbal or implied threats.

Parental Actions for Child's Suspension/Expulsion

The following are reasons while we may have to terminate or suspend a child from the program due to parental or guardian actions. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payments
- Failure to submit or complete required forms
- Habitual tardiness when picking up child
- Physical or verbal aggression to staff, children or other families
- Destruction of program property

Child's Actions for Suspension/Expulsion

The following are reasons why we may have to terminate or suspend a child from the program. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Uncontrollable tantrums or outburst
- Physical or verbal aggression to staff, children, or other families
- Bullying
- Repeated running from classroom or group
- One on one support that causes a supervision or safety concern for the program
- Repeated failure to follow program rules and procedures

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Communication

Parent Notification Methods

- Email- Families will receive registration information, newsletters, and program updates through the email address on your registration profile. Email will be used as the primary means of communication.
- Phone- In case of an emergency, Stepping Stones will contact guardians first from the number listed on your registration profile.
- Meetings- If you would like to set up a face-to-face meeting, please contact your child's group supervisor.
- Facebook and Instagram- Stepping Stones utilizes social media for updates and to share pictures from the program.
- School Care Works- Stepping Stones utilizes School Care Works for registration and payment information. You can access your account through the Connect Portal at <https://connect.schoolcareworks.com/login.jsp>
- Class Dojo- The App allows teachers to send communication and pictures to families.
- Daily Reports- Daily reports are sent home each night with the child. The report reviews meals, diaper changes and nap times.

- Surveys- We periodically ask for parental feedback to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the program.

Participation Opportunities

Families are encouraged to utilize our “Open Door Policy” to visit or call the center at any time, during program hours. Parent involvement creates a more positive experience for children and improves learning outcomes for children.

Open House

Families are encouraged and welcome to attend our annual Open House. The Open House is an opportunity for parents to meet staff, tour the classroom, see their children’s work, and interact with other Stepping Stones families

Parent Visitors

Parents are welcome at any time to volunteer in the child’s classroom. Parents can come be a “guest reader”, share a special custom or experience, or give a presentation about their job.

Board of Directors

Parents, guardians, and community members are invited to serve on the Stepping Stones Children’s Center Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets monthly. If you are interested in becoming a board member, please email board@stepstonescc.org

Community Resources and Referral Services

In the entry way there is a binder of Community Resources to address the needs of the community we serve. The Director may be able to assist you in finding community resources regarding health and human services, wellness, nutrition and fitness, crisis management and prevention, and/or child development. Referral Services may include but are not limited to:

- Behavior Intervention Services
- Early Learning Intervention (DART, TEIS)
- Early Learning Resource Center
- Outreach Wellness Centers
- Advocacy Programs
- Counseling

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of each child’s records, family, medical or other personal information essential. Our policies intend to respect families and their privacy.

Confidential and sensitive information about staff, children, and families will not be shared with other families, as we strive to protect everyone’s privacy. Confidential information includes, but is not limited to: names, addresses, phone numbers, disability or special needs information, and

other health-related information. Employees are strictly prohibited from discussing anything about another child.

Birthday Parties

Stepping Stones Children's Center recognizes that parents may wish to contact other families for social gatherings. Stepping Stones will not be able to give a family hosting the party the name or phone numbers of other families. Stepping Stones can pass out invitations or, with permission, share a parent's contact information who is throwing the party.

Photographs

No outside agency or individual will be given permission to photograph children without parental consent. During the registration process, parents will provide consent for the following:

- Child photograph to be released- Providing consent will give SSCC consent to use child photos on the SSCC website and/or social media
- Child photograph release for program site only- Providing consent will give SSCC consent to use photos in the classroom and on Class Dojo.

STAFF EMPLOYMENT BY FAMILIES

Stepping Stones Children's Center does not give a recommendation of any sort in the hiring of teachers for babysitting, nanny, mother's help, etc. If a client chooses to employ a SSCC employee, Stepping Stones Children's Center holds no liability or responsibility to this employment contract. A waiver must be signed by both parties prior to any outside employment arrangements. The outside of employment of a SSCC employee cannot conflict with their employment and/or scheduled hours at Stepping Stones.

