



Classroom of Discovery

Parent Handbook

INTRODUCTION

The Classroom of Discovery (CoD) is a not-for-profit corporation operating at St. Matthew's Church, 201 East Frederick Road Sterling, Virginia 20165. Our mailing address is: Classroom of Discovery P.O. Box 650955 Sterling, Virginia 20165

We offer the following preschool programs: A 2-day program (Thur/Fri) for ages 2 1/2 to 5, and a 3-day (Mon/Tue/Wed), and 5-day (Mon-Fri) program for ages 3 to 5. All classes run from 9am-12pm. We also offer an Adult/Tot Class (Bridge to Discovery) for children between 1 1/2 to 3 years of age (days and times TBD).

A Board of Directors oversees the CoD¹ and day-to-day operations are handled by the Program Director².

MISSION STATEMENT

Our goal is to offer a learning program for preschool children that provides a rich and open environment for children to engage in imaginative play and to bring out their creative genius.

CLASSROOM OVERVIEW

A teacher and teaching assistant supervise a classroom of ten children. Hours are from 9am–12am. A healthy and organic snack is served daily.

CURRICULUM

The Classroom of Discovery is fully accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org). Our curriculum standards are based on the NAEYC guidelines and criteria for developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood. We offer a child-centered program of learning through creative expression and imaginative play. This translates to teachers planning an emergent curriculum based on the interests and developmental stages of the children in each class. Activities reflect the four essential areas of early childhood learning: **Social & emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development**. In addition, the curriculum borrows freely from Reggio Emilia, Montessori, High Scope, and the constructivist theories of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. To guide us in our curriculum planning and assessment we use:

- *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age Eight*
- *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning*
- *Working in the Reggio Way: A Beginner's Guide for American Teachers*
- *Reaching Potentials: Transforming Early Childhood Curriculum and Assessment*
- *The Creative Curriculum For Preschool*
- *The Creative Curriculum: Connecting Content, Teaching, and Learning*
- *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool Developmental Continuum Assessment Toolkit*
- *Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds*
- *The PALS (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening) PreK*

¹ For the year 2008-2009, the Board of Directors consists of: Cindy Sample, clinical psychologist; Rob Merola, Rector of St. Matthew's Church; and Sheri Brown, Program Director for Congregation Sha'are Shalom.

² For the year 2008-2009, the Program Director is Jackie Baker, also a teacher for the school.

ADMISSIONS

The Classroom of Discovery accepts children who are between 2 1/2 and 5 years of age by September 30. An electronic application is required for each applicant. Upon confirmation of an available space, a **non-refundable**, non-interest bearing tuition deposit of \$300 will be required. The tuition deposit is applied to the second semester tuition payment.

Children currently enrolled have first priority. Every effort will be made to assign the child to the preferred days indicated on the application form.

The Classroom of Discovery admits children without regard to race, religion, cultural heritage, political beliefs, disability, marital status of family, family life style or national origin.

MEDICAL

The Commonwealth of Virginia requires that a completed medical form be on file for all children before they begin attending class. These forms are available at doctors' offices or at: http://www.dss.state.va.us/form/pdf/cdc_medical.pdf.

HEALTH

Please keep your child home if he or she has had the following in the past 24 hours: temperature over 100°, a nasal discharge not due to allergies, vomiting or diarrhea, a rash of unknown origin or if, in general, you wouldn't want your child exposed to a child displaying your child's symptoms.

If we note a change in your child's health during the morning, we will remove your child from the group and call you so you can come evaluate your child.

No medications of any type (over-the-counter or prescription) will be administered to a child by the staff at the school. This includes ointments, sunscreen and insect repellent.

[Exception to this rule is use of any **epipen** for which a special medication form must be completed.] As children are outside most days, please be sure to apply needed sunscreen or insect repellent before leaving your child at school.

ABSENCES

Please call to report your child's absence. Under new licensing regulations effective July, 2005, please inform us if any member of your family was found to have had a communicable disease so that we may inform other parents of possible exposure.

PROCEDURES

Class runs from 9 AM – 12 PM. When you drop your child off or pick your child up, please be sure to make personal contact with someone on the staff. It is important to your child for us to acknowledge his/her arrival each class. Sign your child in on the sign in log. The Classroom is not responsible for children dropped off prior to arrival of teaching staff.

Please be reasonably prompt when dropping off and picking up your child. Many activities begin as soon as children arrive and it is undesirable for students to miss activities. Children also become distracted by late arrivals. In addition, children become anxious if they are picked up late. Please sign your child out of the classroom each day when you pick them up.

If someone other than a person authorized on the registration form is to pick up your child, the school must receive authorization. We will ask for photo identification from the adult designated to pick up your child.

TUITION

Tuition is payable as specified in the contract. Credit cannot be given for absences.

COMMUNICATION

Daily communication will be through email. If this is a problem for your family, please contact the school. Email will be our prime information medium as we feel this is the most direct way to stay in touch.

Please feel free to communicate with the teacher/director throughout the year. If issues cannot be resolved with the teacher/director, the Board of Directors can be contacted.

Please help us give your child the most successful experience possible by informing us of changes in your family's life such as a relative's visit, a pet's death, a remodeling, etc. We will offer meetings with other professionals to assist parents in their parenting role and we can often offer sources of information for questions parents may have about parenting issues.

It is **VITAL** that contact information be updated throughout the year as necessary. There is little more disconcerting to a child than being sick and having the school be unable to reach someone to pick him/her up. When your child will be absent, please leave a message at the school's designated phone.

CLOTHING

Please pack a complete extra change of clothing in a zip lock bag in your child's backpack. These should be labeled with your child's name. Please remember to check these as seasons change.

Children should be dressed for play each day. Open toed shoes and long dresses can interfere with the active play we encourage.

SNACKS

Food is an integral part of our curriculum. We will serve healthy and organic snacks. Please keep us advised of special dietary requirements for your child. Allergy information should be noted on the enrollment form.

CELEBRATIONS

We love parties and celebrating in the Classroom of Discovery. Birthdays are special in the classroom also. If you want to serve a special treat in school for your child's birthday, we encourage muffins, special fruit salads or similar items as appropriate for this occasion. You may even want to come to school to help the children prepare the treat themselves. Please let the teacher know at least a week in advance.

Parents who might have objections to recognition of religious or other holidays should so indicate to the teacher so that proper arrangements can be made to respect your and your child's wishes.

ITEMS FROM HOME

We encourage children to leave toys at home. If they are brought to school, they will remain in the child's backpack.

CALENDAR

You will receive a school calendar with your contract. We generally follow Loudoun County Public Schools' weather delays and closings. We will send out a confirming email by 8 AM for delays and closings. If more than a week's worth of classes (i.e. 2 classes for the two day class, 3 classes for the three day class) are missed during the year, make up days will be scheduled. There are no refunds for days missed in excess of the built-in schedule.

FACILITY

We feel fortunate to be guests in St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. Please treat all church property with respect. Please use the side door for entering and exiting the building and keep children from the office

and sanctuary areas. For more information about St. Matthew's, please call the church office at: 703.430.2121 or visit their website at www.stmatthewssterling.org.

FIELD TRIPS

Field trips other than to Briar Patch Park across the street require parental permission. All children attending field trips will need a car seat. Parent volunteers will be sought as drivers and chaperones.

ABUSE AND NEGLECT

In accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia, staff members are required to report suspected child abuse.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information about any child in the school is confidential and will not be given to anyone except the Virginia Department of Social Services' designees or other persons authorized by law unless the child's parent or guardian gives written permission.

Information about any child in the program will be given to the local Department of Social Services if the child receives a day care subsidy or if the child has been named in a report of suspected child abuse or maltreatment or as otherwise allowed by law.

ADA STATEMENT

The Classroom of Discovery will comply with the provision of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If any child enrolled now or in the future is identified as having a disability covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Classroom of Discovery will assess the ability of the program to meet the needs of the child. If CoD can meet the needs of the child without making a fundamental alteration to the program and the child will need emergency medication, the school will follow the steps required to have the program approved to administer emergency medication.

DONATIONS

As a 501.3.c (not-for-profit) corporation, the Classroom of Discovery welcomes donations. We are especially interested in toys made from natural materials that are noncommercial in nature and books.

CONTACTS/PHONE NUMBERS

Classroom of Discovery 703.927.3333

School email: director@classroomofdiscovery.org

Website: www.classroomofdiscovery.org

Jackie Baker (Program Director): (C) 703.599.3889

Email: jrbionda@yahoo.com

St. Matthew's Church: 703.430.2121 (please use for church business or for **emergencies**)

The next two sections of this handbook are reprinted from the *Congregation Ner Tamid Preschool of South Bay in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA*. Permission has been received from the author, Shelly Shapiro, and we appreciate her sharing her work with us.

Separation:

The Congregation Ner Tamid Preschool "separation policy" is undoubtedly one of the most important parts of our program. Beginning school is a significant occasion and can be a source of positive growth for everyone involved - children, parents and teachers. It is a common fallacy that a young child who "does not mind" when her parent leaves her or when she leaves them has coped well with separation. The child who really copes well allows herself to miss the absent one, to feel sad, lonely and angry and to express her feelings appropriately.

Establishing trust with the teachers as a base enables children to become comfortable with the separation from their parents. The younger the child, the more intense the feeling of fear. Some researchers conclude that until the children are around three years old, they cannot retain a stable inner mental image of their absent parents. Attachment is at the root of separation feelings. The early bonding phenomenon is different from the stable, deep and abiding attachment between parents and children that is usually formed during the first year of life.

The term "attachment" has special meaning. It is not the same as "dependence". Although the two terms are often used interchangeably, they are significantly different. According to John Bowlby (1969), the author of a major work about separation, dependence, which refers to an infant's state of helplessness, is present at its "maximum at birth and diminishes more or less steadily until maturity is reached, (whereas) attachment is altogether absent at birth and is not strongly in evidence until after an infant is past six months". He further describes dependency in human relations as a condition to be avoided and attachment as a condition to be cherished. Frequently, young children who tightly hold their parent's body or hide in their clothing when entering an unfamiliar school setting are regarded as dependant rather than attached. However, such actions are legitimate attachment behaviors.

Translated into the language of a child, this feeling might be stated like this: I really know that you are my parents. I know that I need you to take care of me in all situations. I am afraid that if you leave me, I won't be able to take care of myself. It makes me angry that you want to go away like that and I feel sad and hurt. So, in order not to feel that way, I'm going to do what I know how to do best to keep you here. I can cry. I can hold on to you. I can follow you. I can pull you.

This is what attachment has been described to mean to very young children. As children grow into preschoolers of three and four, separation reactions take a different form from those they had at age two. For one thing, most children have completed the phase of their "psychological" birth. They have emerged from infancy and toddlerhood with a clear sense of themselves as individuals, attached to, but distinctly separate, from their parents. They are described as having attained a state of "constancy" which is the inner conviction of being me (separate, differentiated from others) and nobody else.

Another reason that three and four-year-olds may handle separation differently from two-year-olds and toddlers is that they are able to consistently mentally represent their absent parents. Being able to separate, becoming a "real school person" at three and four is most gratifying and pleasurable for many young children. Separation for these children is an adventure and a challenge. However, the ability to tolerate the stress of separation and the ability to adjust to strange new situations vary greatly from child to child.

Self-confidence arises from separations that are well achieved. Children who are supported by their teachers and parents as they separate from home have the opportunity to move into new realms of learning and growth. Coping with stress and gaining mastery over feelings are important requisites for maturing. Assuming that children will "get over it" or "grow out of it" (uncomfortable feelings) does not provide them with the opportunity to work through their feelings. In an environment of understanding and support, children become competent and self-confident. They learn not only how to leave, but how to

venture out - how to try new things. They are on their way to becoming confident, happy preschoolers, able to function successfully with their parents.

Encouraging children to participate fully in saying goodbye, hugging, kissing, crying, waving and saying, "I'll miss you", are all ways of bringing feelings out in the open. Once in the open, they are easier to deal with. Parents should never sneak out. Just as it's important to let your child know that you are leaving, it is important to let them know that you'll be back. Bringing a favorite toy or blanket to school each day, or something belonging to their parents, brings a bit of home to school and serves as a link. A picture of the family taped into a child's new lunch box brings a reminder of home and serves as a bridge from home to school.

Our belief is that separation reactions in grown children are valid and to be expected. The understanding of this and its inclusion as a significant element of our early childhood curriculum will help your child to develop a strong sense of themselves as individuals able to feel sad, angry and grieving, and develop the ability to cope with these feelings without being overwhelmed. This will help them practice the skills they will use in many different separation experiences all through their lives.

Our separation policy is flexible and individualized. Parents and teachers work as partners. Again, our view is that separation is a process, not a rigid step-by-step procedure. We regard entry and separation as an opportunity for your child's growth, rather than a problem. Our entry and separation policy supports this idea. It is our position that parent-child attachment is a basic necessity for healthy human development. Helping children achieve a successful separation (not just physical, but emotional) and adjustment to our preschool is our goal. When children are able to master their separation feelings at school entry, they have achieved a giant step in their growth.

Knowing that each child will have a different time table of adjustment depending on their age, previous experience with separation and individual reaction change, our separation policy will provide the opportunity for our children to become confident, competent and self-assured. A good beginning, as well as continuing adjustment to our preschool requires a sharing in the understanding of our children and open communication between parents and our preschool staff. The staff can learn from parents, just as our parents can learn from the staff.

Discipline:

When adults interact with children, they play and converse with them as partners. When adults manage children, they retain the upper hand by passing out instructions and warnings. While prevention of a problem is an efficient short-term approach to discipline, encouraging children to solve problems for themselves accomplishes more in the long run because of the opportunities it provides.

When dealing with conflict, we always try to keep the child's developmental characteristics in mind. Preschoolers are still quite self-centered. They are also struggling for independence and control. We acknowledge and talk about what each child is feeling and engage the children as active participants in the problem-solving process. The limits we set and expectations we have for our children respect the ages and abilities of the children.

However, there are occasions where our best efforts are not successful in resolving an issue. When this occurs, we will contact parents and ask for help. Usually, parents will understand a situation and offer alternatives which may help in the successful resolution of the issue. Sometimes, a formal parent-teacher conference will be necessary. Any discussions with staff will be strictly confidential. If it is determined that our program cannot accommodate the special needs of a child, he/she will be asked to withdraw from the school.