



SANDCASTLE PRESCHOOL PROGRAM FOUNDATION

FAMILY HANDBOOK

I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation. We are pleased that you have decided to join our Program and strive to ensure that you and your family will be happy with your experiences at Sandcastle. This Handbook is designed to provide you with an understanding of Sandcastle's policies and procedures. Please sign the "Receipt and Acknowledgement" at the end of this book and return it to our Office Manager; it will be kept in your child's file. We also ask that you keep this handbook in a convenient place and use it as a reference during the school year.

In order to meet your family's needs, it is important that we hear from you. Please let us know how you and your child are enjoying your time at Sandcastle. Also, please let us know what we can do to better accommodate your child's developmental needs. We encourage you to come to a board meeting, volunteer in the classroom, or find another way to enrich your children's experience at Sandcastle. Welcome!

The Board of Directors

II. HISTORY & DEVELOPMENT

Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation is a private, nonprofit early childhood program serving children ages birth to five years. Sandcastle, located in the heart of Lewiston, was founded in 1996. In 2001, Sandcastle became an independently operated 501(c)3 nonprofit program. Within the community Sandcastle maintains a positive and supportive relationship.

When Sandcastle Preschool Program was first founded, it served just a few children, always maintaining a split ratio of typically developing children and children with special needs. Over the years, as the community's needs and demographics changed, so did our Program. The organization grew in size and new programs, such as the Toddler Program. In addition, Sandcastle adopted flexible enrollment options to meet the varying preschool needs of families. Today, Sandcastle serves more than 100 families each week, and is well established and respected as part of the Lewiston/Auburn community.

III. THE ORGANIZATION

Mission

The mission of Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation is unique in our state. It reads:

The mission of Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation is to provide early childhood education and clinical services to children with special needs, to typically developing children, and to provide support services to their families.

We do so by providing educational services to heterogeneous classroom groups by providing the family-centered clinical services of speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists and developmental therapists.

The vision of Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation reads:

We want our graduates to be ready to learn and grow to the best of their ability, to be aware and proud of who they are, and to be respectful of their peers. Our legacy should be to provide our children and their families with the skills to function optimally in the outside world.

Statement of Professionalism

We recognize the following as our ethical responsibility to the profession of Early Childhood Education and to Sandcastle Preschool Program as an institution and a business. We acknowledge our obligation to adhere to the following ideals and principles to the best of our abilities.

We are committed to serving, protecting and fostering the development of all children. We acknowledge the following to be our ethical responsibility to children:

- To acknowledge each child as an individual, and treat them as such
- To create and maintain a safe, healthy, developmentally appropriate environment
- To plan curriculum for each child, and the group as a whole, using our knowledge of child development.

We are committed to creating a partnership with the families of all children we serve. We acknowledge the following to be our ethical responsibilities to families:

- To maintain confidentiality in all matters at all times
- To respect and support the diversity and individuality of each family
- To become a resource for parents in the areas of child development and Program policies and philosophy
- To respect each family's right to make decisions concerning their child based on their own values
- To create a bond of mutual trust with each family
- To involve parents in Sandcastle activities as much as possible.

We recognize staff to be the greatest resource of our Program. We acknowledge the following to be our ethical responsibilities to each other and Sandcastle:

- To respect and support the learning process of each staff member
- To contribute to team cohesiveness
- To respect diversity among staff
- To maintain confidentiality at all times in all matters
- To make communication as effective as possible
- To maintain principles of personal hygiene and appropriate dress
- To adhere to our general philosophy at all times
- To be reliable and consistent
- To foster growth and awareness, of self and Sandcastle
- To listen to, be open and flexible with the ideas of others
- To demonstrate honesty and trustworthiness
- To observe the hierarchy and proper protocol



- To have a willingness to work on goals, for self and Sandcastle.

We desire to foster a sense of community with others involved in the development of young children. We acknowledge the following to be our ethical responsibilities to our community:

- To connect with other agencies and professions, with the goal of furthering awareness of the issues of young children
- To become advocates for the field of Early Childhood Education as far as we are able
- To be a model Program, setting an example for others to follow
- To send our message out as much as possible, to as many people as possible.

Philosophy

We believe that children are our future. We value their thoughts, feelings and beliefs as well as their uniqueness. We recognize the individual needs that each child has and the gifts of communication they offer others early on. Our goal is to highlight each child's strengths and to promote their development in an inviting, supportive and most importantly, fun way during their very exciting preschool years. Acknowledging that each child is part of a family unit, we strive to establish partnerships with family members and collaboratively join them in providing enriching and stimulating opportunities during their child's early years.

Goals for the Children

- Children will develop a positive sense of self.
- Children will develop respect for others and for differences among people.
- Children will learn to be cooperative and positive members of the school community.
- Children will develop a love for learning.
- Children will develop basic skills, which will prepare them for school.

Members of Our Team

The Board of Directors

A Board of Directors oversees Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation. The positions on the Board are filled by local community residents, business people and parents. The Board is primarily responsible for setting policies and providing for the well-being and success of Sandcastle. Our monthly Board meetings are open to the public and families interested in attending a board meeting are welcomed to contact the current Board Chair or Sandcastle's Directors. Meetings are held monthly and elections for Board Officers are held in September. Bylaws, agendas and meeting minutes are available in the Director's office.

The Administration

The administration is composed of co-directors: one Program Director and Administrative Director, one Office Manager and an Educational Director. The Directors manage the daily operations of Sandcastle, supervise all Sandcastle staff, oversee the preschool's curriculum and serve as a liaison to the Board and its committees. The administrative staff is also responsible for coordinating staff training, facilitating communication between families and Sandcastle and handling all financial matters. The Directors work full time and are at the preschool daily.

The Educational Staff

Sandcastle employs a qualified and highly dedicated staff. The educational team is comprised of an Educational Director, developmental therapists and teachers. As determined by an Individualized Educational



Plan, Sandcastle will employ educational technicians to assist a specific child as needed. All staff are certified by the State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Licensing Division. Sandcastle encourages the continued training of staff by organizing workshops, providing opportunities for training, and offering flexible work options to enable teachers to pursue their education. All teachers have thorough reference and criminal background checks and each employee undergoes a mandatory 90 day probationary period. In addition to our teaching staff, Sandcastle relies on the hard work of support staff, volunteers, substitutes and student aides.

The Clinical Staff

As part of a complete early childhood team, Sandcastle employs a group of interventionists. The clinical staff is comprised of Speech-Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapy Practitioners, Physical Therapists, Psychologists, Health Care Consultant, and Developmental Therapists. All clinicians hold licenses through the State of Maine and maintain licensure through completion of continuing education expectations outlined by the respective state licensing division.

State Licensing

Sandcastle Preschool Program is licensed by the State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Licensing Division. Sandcastle follows all policies and procedures mandated by the Department. Licensing regulations are available in the office. Sandcastle undergoes inspection and re-licensing bi-annually.

NAEYC Accreditation:

Sandcastle is committed to maintaining accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC administers a national, voluntary, professionally sponsored accreditation system for programs serving children, birth through 8 years of age.

NAEYC-accredited programs have demonstrated a commitment to providing a high quality program for young children and their families. While the NAEYC accreditation process examines the total program, greatest emphasis is placed on the quality of interaction among staff and children and the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum. Health and safety, staffing, staff qualifications, physical environment, and administration are all reviewed during accreditation, but primary consideration is given to the nature of the child's experience.

The process consists of three steps. The first step is a self-study program, which includes input from the parents, staff and administration of Sandcastle. Next, a trained volunteer validator is sent by NAEYC to verify the self-study results and program. Finally, the results are sent to a 3 member national commission composed of recognized experts in early childhood education. This team judges Sandcastle's compliance with criteria and grants accreditation for a period of five years.

In order to maintain this status, Sandcastle is actively engaged in an extensive self-study process based on the Criteria for High Quality Early Childhood Programs. We are committed to following all guidelines and criteria as set out by NAEYC. A copy of the criteria can be found in the Director's office. Please feel free to look at them.



IV. THE PROGRAMS

Sandcastle Preschool Program offers three programs for children: a Toddler Program and Preschool Programs for three and four year olds. Each program is designed to meet the developmental needs of children.

The Toddler Program

Children 18 months to 3 years old

The Toddler Program is open to children 18 months to 3 years of age. This class is staffed by a teacher and developmental therapist and generally accommodates ten children per class. The group size is intentionally small to encourage the development of close relationships between the staff and the children.

The Toddler Program is unique and separate from the Preschool Program because the developmental needs of the children in this group are very different. Children in this group are experiencing many firsts including first separation from parents and first time in a social setting. Teachers are trained to handle these milestones and other issues which are relevant to children of this age.

Children in this room have access to toys, materials and experiences which are appropriate to the developmental needs of toddlers. Sturdy toys with minimal pieces enable children to "dump" and "destroy," two developmentally appropriate behaviors. Books are sturdy and plenty of toys are available to lessen opportunities for conflict. The Toddler Program provides a positive first experience away from the primary care giver, the family.

Daily Reports are provided to each family, including pertinent information about your child's experiences at Sandcastle.

The Preschool Program

Children 3 to 4 years old and 4 to 5 years old

The Preschool classrooms can accommodate about 12 children each. Each classroom is staffed by a teacher and developmental therapist, for an average 1:6 teacher/student ratio. Sandcastle offers a play-based preschool program. The class is divided into free play periods, structured group activities, outside play, and snack time.

Each day children have the opportunity to explore areas of the classroom, play with peers, interact with adults, listen to stories, share, and learn. Children regularly participate in special activities such as, art activities, field trips, community outreach projects, music and movement activities.

Teachers work with the children to help them develop a sense of community, cooperation and respect for others. Getting along in a group and being a member of the classroom community are important areas of focus for this age group. Teachers also help foster basic school readiness skills. Most important, teachers help children feel secure and positive about themselves and their abilities.

Placement in Classrooms

Children are most often placed in a classroom with children their age. However, several factors other than age are considered when placing children and moving children to a new classroom. Other considerations include the child's level of development, group dynamics and the attendance schedule. Children are typically moved



from one classroom to another when transitions take place in the summer or fall. Each decision is made on an individual basis. Children may be moved at other times during the year if parents and staff agree that this is in the child's best interest.

If the best placement is not readily apparent, a decision will be made with the child's parents and a trial period will be set. If at any time you feel your child is not in the most appropriate classroom please talk to your child's teacher.

Daily Schedule

Each class has a set daily schedule and routine, which helps the children to understand classroom time as a predictable series of events. Since we do serve different age groups, the daily routine in each class differs slightly to serve the developmental needs of that group of children. The daily schedule offers a balance between the following types of activities:

- active and quiet times;
- large group activities, small group activities, and time to play alone or with others;
- indoor and outdoor play times;
- time for children to select their own activities and time for teacher-directed activities.

Within the scope of our curriculum, children learn to articulate their needs, and develop an awareness of their feelings and their personal rights to express them. Children enrolled in this program will have experiences in a variety of activities such as the following: arts and crafts, music and movement, science experiences, math, language, nature, sensory, manipulative play, and cooking.

Separating

For some parents, leaving your child may be a new experience. Saying good-bye can be the hardest part of a parent or child's day. However, it is important to remember that both parents and children benefit from time apart. Children get to explore an environment created for their needs and they also get to learn their parents do come back. They learn to trust and enjoy other adults, which encourages their independence and self-reliance.

Each child responds differently to good-byes. Here are some guidelines that may help your transition:

- Connect with a staff member. Make sure they are able to give your child full attention. Exchange important information about your child and establish this as part of your routine.
- Acknowledge your emotions. If there are sad feelings, accept them whether they are yours or your child's. It's ok to say, "I'm sad to leave you too." By modeling how we express our emotions, we can help children learn to deal with theirs.
- Avoid distracting your child before you leave. Be clear that you are leaving and say good-bye. Children can be frightened when you sneak away. Your child needs to know that they can trust you to leave when you say you are going to leave and return when you are going to return.
- A staff member will help you say good-bye. When you are ready to leave, let your child know that you are leaving, say good-bye, and really leave. Prolonged, lingering good-byes are hard on everyone. Make the good-bye short. It's okay to be sad, but if you stay around and are upset, your child may think something is wrong and get more upset. Show your child your confidence and trust in the program that you have chosen.



It has been our experience that eventually children will stop crying and be ready to start their day. Primary care teachers are available to help children transition and work with their feelings. Please feel free to call anytime during the day if you are feeling uneasy and want to know how your child is doing.

V. CURRICULUM

Curriculum Goals

Our curriculum is based on flexibility and choices for the children. We respect and accommodate the developmental stages of the child and our curriculum reflects individual needs. Activities are planned to both challenge and encourage learning by incorporating the various learning styles and creating meaningful connections.

Our staff become familiar with the children's interests and development through extensive observation. Through observation, they are able to develop profiles for each individual child and create individual activity profiles to incorporate into their lesson plans. Staff create lesson plans that stress personal experience and therefore encourage many open - ended learning situations where the children can learn and create at their own developmental rate. Lesson plans consist of clearly marked goals and objectives, as well as activities.

The areas of development around which our curriculum is organized are as follows:

- Social/Emotional Competency
- Thinking, Reasoning & Problem-Solving
- Fine Motor Development
- Gross Motor Development
- Language and Communication
- Reading and Writing Development
- Creative Development

Since children learn through play, we plan our indoor and outdoor time to encourage this activity. Through play children re-enact experiences, try out different roles, express ideas, develop vocabulary, process information, widen their world view and relate to each other. Children learn by doing, so we provide first hand experience as a basis for expanding knowledge about our physical world. We believe that adults need to facilitate learning by discussing with the children what they see, hear, smell, touch, and feel, helping them to increase their understanding. To this end, there are times during each day, when teachers direct group discussions and introduce concepts and learning experiences. Knowing that all children learn from what adults do, we model the behavior we want to encourage. We strive to show understanding and respect for each person and use words to express needs and feelings. We try to learn from our mistakes instead of labeling them failures. We believe that growth and development happens best in supportive, safe, orderly environments where rules, limits, expectations and plans are known. We strive to be clear, consistent and firm in these areas.

Sandcastle uses focused portfolios to document children's growth and development and to form the curriculum goals we set in working with the children in our care. "A focused portfolio is a complete assessment process – careful, yet naturalistic observational anecdotes, combined with photos and work



samples, inform both family members and teachers about the growth and development of children.” (Gronlund & Engel, 1998)

Teachers collect artwork, record language; capture motor skills on film, and record observations as they occur, naturally and spontaneously, in the classroom. In this way, the portfolio system offers a unique opportunity to assess children’s learning in an authentic way as we watch children in a familiar, predictable environment. The information gathered in this manner portrays a more genuine picture of a child’s strengths, as well as points out those areas where a child needs some support and guidance.

Twice a year, during Family-Teacher Conferences, teachers will share your child’s portfolio with you and invite your contributions to the portfolio as well. When your child moves on, either to another program, or different classroom, your family will be given the complete portfolio which documents your child’s growth over the time that she/he has spent with us. If you need to schedule a meeting with your child’s teacher at any time of the year, you are encouraged to do so.

Birthdays & Holidays

Sandcastle recognizes that families have different traditions and practices and believes that diversity enriches our program. We feel that it is important to learn about many cultural traditions and customs, and welcome families to share their holiday traditions with us. If you have a project you would like to share, please discuss it with your child’s teacher to make sure it is appropriate for young children. We do believe that religious practices are best taught at home and thus do not initiate projects or activities which are religious in nature. Finally, Sandcastle tries to avoid commercialization of holidays and welcomes your ideas and assistance.

Visiting Sandcastle for Special Events

Parents, other family members and friends are welcome to enrich our program by sharing their interests, talents or hobbies. In the past visitors have told stories, played instruments, led art projects and danced with our children. Please prearrange visits with your child’s teachers. Parents are also welcome to observe class at any time. This makes the child feel very special and facilitates communication between school and home.

VI. GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

Young children in large groups encounter difficulties with sharing, cooperating and with following the classroom rules which underpin any center-based program. At Sandcastle Preschool Program we begin by reinforcing very basic, simple rules with toddlers. Preschoolers are encouraged to follow more complex and specific rules. As children mature, so does their ability to internalize and independently follow rules. While the children develop, some management techniques must be utilized by staff to maintain a harmonious environment. The tools most frequently employed at our Program are as listed below.

- **Environmental manipulation.** By setting up equipment and materials thoughtfully, certain conflicts can be avoided or minimized.
- **Diversion.** Staff attempts to divert the child’s focus from another child, toy or area causing the conflict.
- **Refocusing.** When other tools are ineffective or inappropriate, staff suggests or requires a child to take a few minutes away from the group, child or activity generating the disturbance. The child is given a few minutes to think about the reasons for the discipline and is also encouraged to compose him/herself before rejoining the group. Staff supports the child’s efforts to refocus and become re-involved in the classroom by setting limits and encouraging



the child to recognize and talk about feelings. Thus the child is better able to understand the consequences of inappropriate behavior and, as a result, more likely to demonstrate positive behavior changes.

At no time do we use shaming, withholding food, verbal abuse or corporal punishment as a means of managing behavior or as disciplinary measures.

Discipline for Toddlers and Preschool Children

Caring deeply about children means that we want to provide many opportunities for children to develop self-discipline. A trusting relationship must be established between staff and child. Discipline is built on mutual respect and trust. We do not permit any discipline to be related to food, toileting or naps. Any use of corporal punishment is strictly prohibited. An employee who uses corporal punishment will be terminated immediately. The process of helping children learn to solve their own problems is time consuming but should be the goal of guidance for children.

We try to change behavior by using space, time and materials creatively and by stressing positive social reinforcers. In terms of space we should be aware that too little space or congested traffic patterns may cause conflict as children interfere with each other's activities. Too little time to complete activities in a relaxed way, or too much time devoted to an activity so that the children are bored or have to wait can also cause behavior difficulties. There also needs to be enough experience with any one activity to develop it fully. We also need to be sure activities and expectations are age-appropriate. Discipline means helping children learn to control their own behavior and solve their own problems. It does not mean punishment. Sandcastle firmly believes discipline includes guidance, modeling and redirection.

Often children's behavior at school is affected by what is happening to them at home. It is very important that parents inform us about any changes at home including the following: new family members, moving to a new house, parents separating, new stepparent, etc. Any of these can have significant psychological effects on a child. Sometimes when children are hurt or frustrated with something at home, they express their feelings in their interactions with their peers.

Consistent and Serious Behavioral Concerns

Serious behavioral difficulties are discussed through parent conferences or as they become an issue. Children who are excessively disruptive in the classroom and/or harmful to themselves, the staff or the other children, may be removed from the classroom. If a child's behavior threatens his/her own safety or the safety of other children or staff, a teacher will securely and gently hold that child until he or she is able to feel calm and safe again.

If a child's behavior is consistently challenging, the teachers, Educational Director and parent(s)/guardian(s) will work together to understand possible causes for the negative behavior and to establish a behavior management plan. If it is determined that Sandcastle is unable to meet a child's needs, Sandcastle reserves the right to ask that the family remove the child from Sandcastle. All efforts will be made to work with families. Dismissal from the Program is only a last resort.



Behavior Plan

Sandcastle's Discipline Policy is outlined on pages 18-19 in the Staff Handbook. When the strategies of environmental manipulation, diversion and refocusing are not effective as a means for managing challenging behaviours, the following guidelines are to be employed:

- Staff complete an Incident Report Form
- The family is notified and their signature obtained
- The Incident Report Form is filed in the child's permanent file
- The Educational Director is notified of the incident by providing a copy of the Form and verbal report

Once these steps have been completed, a Support Team Meeting will be scheduled and facilitated by the Educational Director. The composition of the support team will vary depending on whether the child is involved with any other agencies (e.g. Child Development Services and Department of Human Services). Parent involvement during this process will be the emphasis.

- The scheduling of a support team meeting will occur within 1 week of the completion of *three incident report forms*
- At the support team meeting, a Behavior Plan will be developed to address the needs of the child in his/her placement at Sandcastle.
- Following a 2-week period, the support team will reconvene at a meeting to determine if the Behavior Plan was an effective means of managing the identified behaviors.
- A decision will be made as to whether or not Sandcastle remains an appropriate setting for the child.
- The Educational Director at this meeting will delegate follow-up assignments regarding the decision (including contacts with involved agencies).
- Minutes of the initial Support Team Meeting as well as the 2-week follow-up will be completed by the Educational Director and filed appropriately.

Children with Special Needs

A primary mission of Sandcastle is to integrate children with differing abilities into our program, in accordance with the 1992 Americans with Disabilities Act. Our staff will assess each child on an individual basis, working closely with his/her family and other professionals. We are prepared to make reasonable accommodations and carry out adaptations that are readily achievable.

Parent Concerns about Other Children's Behavior

If you have a concern about the behavior of a child (other than your own) you are encouraged to express your concerns to a teacher or talk with a Director. Parents should not confront a child without permission from that child's parents.

Biting

Biting is, unfortunately, a behavior that is common in some young children. Despite teachers' best efforts to reduce instances where biting may occur, a child may occasionally bite another. If this happens, the bite will immediately be washed with antiseptic soap and both the biter and child who has been bitten will be cared for. If your child is bitten, you will be informed of the incident and an Incident Report Form will be filled out.



The name of the biter will only be revealed to the biter's parent(s)/guardian(s). If your child bites someone else, you will be notified of the incident.

VII. OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Hours of Operation

Sandcastle offers families flexible enrollment options. Children may attend in the morning, afternoon, for full days or for any combination of these three options. However, you must contract for your child's enrollment schedule and adhere to the schedule and payment agreements for this schedule.

Class Schedule :

Monday, Wednesday & Friday
8:30-11:00 AM
12:00-2:30 PM

Tuesday & Thursday
8:30-11:00 AM
12:00-2:30 PM

Calendar

Sandcastle is open 12 months per year, daily from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., with the exception of the following holidays, teacher workshops and school vacations:

Sandcastle Is Closed:

New Years Day (January), Presidents Day (February), School Vacation and teacher workshops (third week of April), Memorial Day (May), Independence Day (July), School Break (first week in July), two teacher workshops in August before the new school year starts, Labor Day (September), Thanksgiving and the day after (November), Christmas Vacation (Week in-between Christmas and New Years).

**During some of these days, therapy sessions may be scheduled. If a child is receiving any therapeutic services, the family should check with the treating clinician about scheduling these sessions.

Inclement Weather and Emergency Closing Policies

It is often difficult to predict whether precipitation will fall as rain, sleet, snow, or ice in our area. Conditions sometimes appear safe in the morning, and then worsen during the work day, requiring Sandcastle to close early. If weather turns severe during the day, please make every effort to pick up your child early from Sandcastle. Listen to the radio to keep informed about the weather, on days when snow is forecasted. The decision to close Sandcastle is at the Director's discretion.

Days of closure will not change the monthly amount you are billed. Sandcastle averages the cost of tuition throughout the entire year, including days Sandcastle is closed. This method of calculation allows Sandcastle to charge a lower, stable monthly parent fee. If you would like more information about billing or the method of calculation, please see the Administrative Director.



Delayed openings and closings will be listed on television stations 6, 8, and 13 as well as broadcasted on the majority of local radio stations.

Arrival and Departure Procedures

These rules ensure the safety and security of all children at Sandcastle:

- Please escort your child to his or her classroom, arriving no earlier than 5 minutes before the start of class.
- Help your child get settled.
- Greet your child's teachers and let them know when you have arrived and when you leave.
- Inform teachers of any pertinent news such as changes in eating or sleeping habits or changes in the home situation.

As parents, you are welcome to spend time in your child's classroom. However, please do not disrupt the classroom activities.

If your child is going to be picked up by someone other than an authorized person, you must fill out a Pick-Up Authorization Form. Please inform that person that he/she must bring a photo ID. The teacher in your child's classroom will require a photo ID in order to allow him/her to pick up your child. No child will be released to an unauthorized person.

Late Pick Up Policy

Children anxiously anticipate the expected arrival of a parent, and we appreciate your promptness in picking your child(ren) up from the school. Additionally, our staff frequently has meetings, classes, and families waiting for them immediately after operating hours. The late pick-up charge is \$15.00 for every 15-minute segment of time after the finish of a class. If you know you will be late, please call Sandcastle to let your child's teacher know. However, the late fee policy still applies.

The Director will be notified of families who are consistently late and the Director will meet with the family to work out a solution.

Absences

If your child does not come to school on any day, either because of illness, vacation, or just to take a break with you, please advise us as early as possible so the teaching staff knows how many children to expect for the day. When your child is absent due to illness requiring a visit to the doctor please bring a note from your Primary Care Physician stating child's return date.

Attendance

Children may only attend Sandcastle on days for which you have contracted. You may not switch your child's schedule without prior approval from the Educational Director. If you need to switch your child's contracted days, a written request must be submitted to the Educational Director.



VIII. ENROLLMENT

Eligibility for Enrollment

Sandcastle Preschool Program offers enrollment for preschool children (ages 18 months to 5). Sandcastle Preschool admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to children at the school.

Enrollment Procedures

- Make an appointment with Sandcastle's Educational Director for a tour and orientation.
- Visit Sandcastle with your child at least once.
- Fill out all necessary paperwork.
- Once all enrollment forms are returned and fees have been paid, you will be notified of your child's placement and start date.
- If a slot is not available immediately, your child's name will be placed on a waiting list.
- A slot can only be reserved for your child once payment for enrollment has been made.
- Visit Sandcastle before your child begins to enable him or her to get to know our program. This also gives the staff a chance to get to know you and your child. Please limit these visits to one half hour in order to minimize disruption in the classroom. If for some reason you would like to stay longer, please make special arrangements with the Director.

The Waiting List

If a space is not available for your child, your child's name will be placed on our waiting list. You will be notified as soon as a slot opens up. Siblings and alumni of Sandcastle are given priority on the waiting list. If you are not prepared to take the slot when it opens, you will be given the option of beginning payment and thus holding the slot. If you choose not to begin payment, your slot may be given away to another family. Once you have paid the registration fee and the deposit fee, Sandcastle can "hold" a slot for your child for only seven days if there are other children waiting to enroll and you have not yet paid tuition for your child.

Enrollment Forms

The following forms should be completed and returned to Sandcastle **PRIOR** to your child's first day.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Immunization Record | 5. Receipt and Acknowledgement of Family Handbook |
| 2. Well Child Form | 6. Enrollment Contract |
| 3. Child & Family Profile | 7. Special Care Plan |
| 4. Emergency Information | 8. Release of Information Form |

The Contract

All families who enroll at Sandcastle must sign a contract indicating the days they intend their child to attend Sandcastle. This contract also states tuition payment policies. Families are required to pay for contracted days, regardless of a child's actual attendance. Any days or hours the child attends beyond the contracted time must be pre-approved and are subject to a Supplemental Hours charge.



Withdrawal or Reduction of Schedule

Families must give a member of the Administrative team two weeks written notice of withdrawal or reduction in scheduled hours. A new contract must be completed if you adjust your child's schedule. Families who do not give two weeks' notice will be charged for the two weeks.

Dismissal from Sandcastle

The primary goal of Sandcastle Preschool Program is to provide a nurturing, learning environment for children between the ages of 18 months to five years old. To insure the program is beneficial to all involved at Sandcastle Preschool Program, we reserve the right to determine whether continued use of our services is in the best interest of all concerned.

The following are situations where Sandcastle may determine that continued placement might be inappropriate. Grounds for termination of childcare/preschool services include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Children who are overwhelmed and cannot function in the group size and who would do better in a smaller group.
- Children who have outgrown our program and need one geared for older children.
- Children whose behavior is extreme and disruptive to the program, endangers the child or others, or who requires one-to-one attention or intervention by someone other than an assigned educational technician on a continuous long-term basis.
- Families who fail to comply with the Sandcastle Preschool Program's policies as described in the Parent Handbook. An example is continued late pick-ups or failure to pay fees.
- Parents whose behavior causes disruption, distress or endangerment. An example is verbal or physical abuse, intoxication, threats toward children or adults, or boisterous actions which reflect insensitivity to classroom conditions. Such behavior may result in termination of services as well as formal action with the appropriate authorities.

An attempt at documentation of any situation determined by the administration to be causing problems may occur, and a conference may be scheduled to discuss the situation and set up a course of action with a timetable for resolution. However, an emergency situation may create the need for immediate action, with or without documentation and conference. An appeal of the decision may be made to the Directors. Sandcastle Preschool Program Board of Directors and staff are committed to evaluating each situation and working out an appropriate plan of action to resolve the situation. However, if reasonable attempts fail to improve the situation, a notice of termination of service could occur.

IX. TUITION & PAYMENT POLICIES

Tuition

Sandcastle Preschool Program is a nonprofit organization that operates primarily on the tuition fees from each child. Our school provides early childhood education on a yearlong basis. Therefore, it is essential that your fees be paid promptly and regularly. Tuition payments are due the first of the month as payment in advance for the current month. There is no refund or adjustment for days missed. Tuition is charged for all



weekdays each month, including holidays, whether or not your child is in attendance. It holds a place for your child in the school.

Our operating expenses do not change when your child is absent or on vacation and we are unable to fill your child's space for a short period. We contract with parents to provide service on a monthly basis, and the charge for that service must remain the same each month.

Tuition checks should be made payable to Sandcastle Preschool Program and given to the Administrative Director. Please note your child's name on the check. If you need a receipt other than your check, please let us know.

Late Charges & Penalties

A five-day grace period shall be allowed for payments, following which the account shall be considered delinquent, and a late payment charge of 5% payment will be added. A \$20 fee will be charged for returned checks.

Registration Fee

All families must pay a non-refundable one-time \$20.00 registration fee per child.

Payment & Billing Procedures

Families are expected to pay tuition monthly. Families who cannot pay monthly are asked to pay bimonthly, on the first and fifteenth day of the month. Tuition is due on the first day of the month that your child attends Sandcastle. Families will not receive a bill each month.

It is the policy of Sandcastle Preschool Program not to allow outstanding bills. We are financially very dependent on the timely payment of all parent fees. *Therefore, if parents have outstanding bills past one month of the date of issue and they have not made special arrangements with the Administrative Director, Sandcastle reserves the right to revoke their child's slot in the program, and turn over the bill to a collection agency.* In operating Sandcastle we wish to support and cooperate with parents in every way possible. However, we've found that in financial matters it is necessary to maintain firm policies. This is crucial in assuring the stability of the program we offer.

Payment Plans

It is not the intention of Sandcastle to deny any child services due to extreme financial hardship. If parents encounter problems paying any of the fees associated with Sandcastle, they are encouraged to contact the Director immediately to work out a payment plan. These payment plans must be in writing and families must remain current on whatever payments are agreed upon. Families are strongly encouraged to contact the Administrative Director immediately when payment problems arise and not to postpone payments and thereby incur additional penalties.

Change in Tuition Rates

Tuition fees are reviewed by the Board of Directors each year. Parents may expect modest annual increases to keep up with inflation. A 30-day notice will be given before a change in tuition rates is implemented.



X. HEALTH & SAFETY

Sick and Exclusion Policy: Sandcastle is committed to maintaining a healthy, safe environment for our children, their parents and our staff. Temporarily excluding a child from our Program protects the health of the affected child, other children and our staff.

Purpose: To provide guidelines for our families and staff to define when a child should be excluded from our Program.

1. The staff will observe the health of each child every day at the time of arrival. Changes in the health and behavior of the child will be reported to the parents or guardian.
2. A child will not remain in our care if the child's illness prevents the child from participation in activities that are routinely offered to well children or mildly ill children; or the illness requires more care than the staff is able to provide without compromising the needs of the other children in the classroom; or keeping the child is an increased risk to other children or staff.
3. If a child has had a fever or has vomited or has had diarrhea in the previous 24 hours, the child needs to remain at home until the symptoms are no longer present and the child feels well enough to participate in all the activities at Sandcastle without being medicated.
4. The following symptoms require that a child be dismissed or not return to school if they have:
 - Fever over 100 degrees
 - Diarrhea
 - Vomiting
 - Sore throat
 - Severe coughing
 - Unidentifiable rash (primary care provider diagnosis required)
 - Rash with fever,
 - Head lice (may not return until all nits are removed)
 - Communicable disease
 - Obvious skin infection
 - Eye drainage, which is white or yellow, redness in the eyes and the eyes are itchy

We will make every effort to keep children who have symptoms of illness separated from other children and until their parents or a designated person is able to come and get them.

If a child is diagnosed with a contagious illness or disease, notices will be sent home to all parents of children who have been exposed.

A child who is diagnosed with a contagious illness or disease will need written documentation from a primary care health provider before returning to Sandcastle.



This also applies to a child who has had a serious illness or accident (such as pneumonia, fractured bone, concussion, seizure or has been hospitalized). The child should be able to participate in all classroom activities.

If you are unsure or question if your child should attend school, it would be better for the child to stay home. It can be more frustrating and difficult to change your schedule in order to pick up a sick child than to make arrangements for their care before your day's activities begin.

Medication

Philosophy: Sandcastle believes that medications should be administered at home and parents should arrange a medication schedule with their primary care provider to allow this. Medications may be given for a recurring problem, emergency situations or a chronic condition.

Policy: When medication is administered to a child at Sandcastle, it will be administered in accordance with the regulation of State of Maine Rules for Licensing of Children's Day Care Facilities from the State of Maine Department of Human Service.

Medication administered at Sandcastle will be limited to situations where an arrangement outside the child care hours cannot be made. A consent form must be signed by the parent before the staff at Sandcastle can administer medication. The medication must be in a child resistant container labeled by a pharmacist or manufacturer's container that meets safety standards. In some instances a signed order may be required from the primary care provider. We will administer only medication that has been approved by the Federal Drug Administration. We do require a printout from the pharmacy to accompany the medication that describes the medication and the side effects. Over the counter medication will not be administered unless prescribed by the primary care provider.

When medication is prescribed for a child that the child has never taken before, the medication needs to be given at home 24 hours before we can administer it at Sandcastle. This is important to see if the child has a reaction to the medication.

In situations where medications are administered for chronic conditions, or when emergency situation arise, the parent will meet with program staff and, if possible, the health care consultant.

For medications that are controlled substances, such as Ritalin, we will allow only a week's supply to be kept at Sandcastle. We will count with the parent and document the number of pills received. We will count and document after each administration.

Medication will be recorded on the child's medication sheet, which will include dose given, date, time of administration, signature of staff person giving the medication and the parent consent form. It will also note if a spill occurred, refusal to take the medication or a reaction to the medication.

Staff will observe the child for any reaction to the medication. If there is a reaction, the parent will be notified immediately and the staff will encourage the parent to notify their primary care provider.



Medication will be kept at the proper temperature, in child resistant closed container, which is inaccessible to children.

Medication will not be given or used past the expiration date on the container or the primary care provider's instructions.

Medication errors will be controlled by the five rights of medication administration:

1. Right child
2. Right medication
3. Right dose
4. Right time
5. Right route of administration

If a medication error occurs, Poison Control Center and the child's parents will be contacted immediately and the incident will be documented in the child's record.

We will review periodically with the parent the medication and how the child is reacting to it.

Staff must wash their hands before and after administering the medication.

The health care consultant will provide medication training to all staff on medication administration.

Immunizations

Your child must be up to date on all immunizations recommended by the Maine Department of Health. If you do not want your child immunized for medical or religious reason, you must fill out the appropriate exemption form.

Communicable Disease

The Health Department does not permit children to remain in Sandcastle if they have a communicable disease or symptoms of a communicable disease. Parent(s)/guardian(s) should notify Sandcastle's Director within 24 hours after the child has developed a known or suspected communicable disease. If a child is found to have signs or symptoms of a communicable disease, a notice will be posted on the family communication board indicating the disease and the nature of the illness. The names of the children will not be provided. All information about communicable diseases is confidential.

Significant Medical Needs

Parents of any child enrolled or applying to enroll at Sandcastle must notify a Director of any medical condition requiring special attention. Families should provide Sandcastle with any information that would be useful in helping to care for the child. A Plan of Care Form should be filled out by all families with children with medical needs. Sandcastle will make every effort to meet the child's medical needs.

Safety

Our staff is keenly aware of the importance of a well-supervised and safe environment. When minor accidents happen (scrapes, cuts, etc.) the staff will provide the necessary first aid. An accident report will be put in your parent pocket and in your child's file. In the event of a more serious accident, we will contact you



immediately and perform all other necessary actions. It is the parent's responsibility to have a medical release form, as well as an up to date emergency card on file at all times.

We have extra food, bottled water, bedding, lighting, and other emergency supplies. We practice monthly evacuation drills. All children and staff are active participants. Sandcastle is protected by sprinkler systems in every room.

In the event of an evacuation, the staff will leave written notice at Sandcastle as to our location, a message on the answering machines, a message with the Androscoggin chapter of the American Red Cross, and contact families if possible.

Injury at Sandcastle

If your child is injured at Sandcastle an Incident Report Form will be filled out by your child's teacher and you will be given a copy to sign. A copy will also be kept in your child's file. If your child has a serious injury, we must be able to contact you by telephone. Please make sure your telephone information is correct.

Emergency Procedures

If a child is seriously injured or in need of medical attention, a staff person will call the rescue squad and the child will be taken to the nearest hospital. Parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified immediately. Parents are required to pay for the cost of the ambulance and all medical expenses. Staff will not transport children in case of medical emergencies.

Diapering

If your child wears diapers, please make sure to check his or her supply regularly. Your child's diapers, wipes and other supplies will be stored in a designated area. If you change your child's diaper while at Sandcastle, be sure to follow Sandcastle's diaper changing procedure which is posted near diaper changing stations. Diapers are checked by staff routinely, as needed. Staff will follow diapering policy.

Toilet Learning

There is no magical age at which children will automatically start to use a toilet. Children will use a toilet when they are ready. When a child shows interest, we will support him or her by providing a safe and nurturing environment where he or she can explore the toilet and toileting procedures freely. Please be sure to talk with your child's teachers about your child's toileting needs.

Drugs, Alcohol & Cigarettes

Because we care about the safety of children, parents/guardians may not use illegal drugs or be under the influence of alcohol while transporting children to and from Sandcastle. If in our judgment a parent/guardian is impaired by drugs, or alcohol, Sandcastle's Director or a teacher (in the Director's absence) will:

1. Inform the person of the observation that he or she appears to be under the influence of drugs/alcohol
2. Ask the person to contact someone else to come pick up the child
3. Contact the police department, if the authorized person insists on transporting the child

Cigarettes may not be smoked in Sandcastle or on the grounds surrounding Sandcastle. Please dispose of cigarette butts appropriately.



Child Abuse Policy

Sandcastle Preschool Program follows Maine child abuse policy, which is kept on file in the business office.

By law, all staff members are required to report all suspected instances of abuse or neglect to the protective services unit of the local Department of Health and Human Services or to a law enforcement agency. The Director and the staff person who suspects the incident will file a confidential report together.

Court Orders & Custody

Sandcastle Preschool Program recognizes in most situations both parents have a legal right to be a part of their child's life. The school denies a parent access to their child *only* if there is a legal document, which addresses that denial.

If pursuant to court order one parent has been given the legal right to child custody or visitation, and such custody or visitation determines which parent may pick up her/his child who participates in the school program, *OR* if one parent has been restrained by court order from visiting or has been ordered to stay away from said child, Sandcastle requires the following:

1. A letter from the custodial parent stating that the non-custodial parent is not allowed to pick up the child.
2. A certified copy, with an original signature and certified seal of the current court order, and which states the right or restraints ordered, must be filed with the Office Manager.
3. If a later court order is issued changing the terms of the original court order, it will *not* be honored until it is filed as the more recent certified order, with verification that a fee was paid for filing at the County Courthouse.
4. We will not accept information regarding the validity of orders over the telephone. Only written instruction will be accepted regarding a court order.
5. Visitation with the non-custodial parent will not be permitted to take place at the school.

XI. CHILDREN'S PERSONAL BELONGINGS

Clothing

Children should wear comfortable clothes that they can remove easily. Children should not wear "dress" clothes as they are likely to get messy. Weather appropriate clothing should always be provided: hats, gloves etc. in the winter and shorts in the summer. Children must always wear shoes. Sturdy footwear is recommended.

All children should have a full set of extra clothing including socks, underwear, pants and a shirt. When the seasons change, be sure to check that your child's extra clothing is appropriate. All clothing should be labeled with your child's name.

Toys from Home

Because toys from home are often difficult to share, easy to lose, and breakable, we ask that children do not bring toys from home to Sandcastle except for show and tell. If your child has a special item he/she would like to share, please let your child's teacher know. Sandcastle does not allow toys which promote aggressive behavior such as guns, knives or swords. Please spend some time with your child and help him/her choose an



appropriate item to share. Following are some appropriate and popular items: photographs, handmade toys and games, books, objects found in nature and art work.

XII. FOOD & NUTRITION

Food Provided by Sandcastle

Sandcastle Preschool Program provides children with a nutritious morning and/or afternoon snack. Typical snacks include foods such as cheese, yogurt, crackers, fruit or vegetables along with juice or milk. Menus are posted within each classroom. Parents are welcomed to contribute to some of the snack foods throughout the year to help with the preschool budget. Please talk to your classroom teacher or educational director before bringing anything in.

Food from Home

If you provide lunch for your child, please do not send foods that require a significant amount of preparation. Each class is equipped with a microwave. Young children require nutritious and wholesome foods. We believe that good eating habits last a life-time and thus prefer that you send healthy foods in your child's lunch. Children who have sweets or chips in their lunch want to eat them first, and don't have an appetite for the rest of their food. Keep the portions small. Suggested foods:

- *Proteins:* pieces of meat, yogurt, cheese (w/crackers), eggs, chicken, cottage cheese, canned tuna, peanut butter.
- *Fruit:* any fresh fruit, applesauce.
- *Vegetables:* carrots, celery, peas, cherry tomatoes, raw broccoli or cauliflower, or other fresh vegetables.
- *Carbohydrates:* whole wheat bread, whole grain crackers, popcorn.
- *Wholesome dinner left-overs* can be heated in the microwave.

If you want to include a dessert in your child's lunch, we suggest yogurt, raisins, fruit or low sugar cookies.

XIII. FAMILY/CENTER COMMUNICATION

Communication among families, teachers, and the Directors is essential in maintaining a high quality program. We encourage you to let your child's teacher know which mode of communication is best for your family. Teachers and families may communicate daily, at drop off and pick up times, via the telephone and/or through written letters.

Program Assessment Surveys

As part of our NAEYC accreditation process a survey will be distributed to obtain feedback from families on the program. Your feedback will be used to make program improvements and increase the quality of the services we offer.

School Newsletter

We distribute monthly newsletters around the 1st of each month. Your copy will be in your child's cubby, located outside their classroom each month. Since written communication is the best way to pass on school news or change of policy, parents should read the newsletter thoroughly. We also use the newsletter to communicate school news, thank parents for their special contributions, and share a little bit about ourselves and the activities at Sandcastle.



Cubby Areas

Families at Sandcastle have "cubbies" in or adjacent to their child's classroom. Before leaving make sure you check your Parent Pocket, Daily Information Board, and the Family Information Board. These all contain important information about activities at Sandcastle.

Business Office Hours

Every attempt is made to staff the office from 8:00am - 4:00pm. However, if no one is available in the office and you have an emergency, please let one of the teachers know.

Meetings with the Directors

The Directors are available to meet with you should you have questions or concerns about the Program. Please feel free to contact the Directors at any time to arrange an appointment. The Directors are also available for telephone conferences if you are unable to meet at Sandcastle.

XIV. FAMILY PARTICIPATION

Families as Partners

Parents are the most important people in their child's world; they are also their child's first and primary teacher. When parents are involved in their children's education, both children and parents are likely to benefit. Parent participation in their children's schooling frequently:

- enhances children's self-esteem
- improves children's academic achievement
- improves parent-child relationships
- helps parents develop positive attitudes towards school and a better understanding of the schooling process

Volunteer participation and assistance from parents is most welcome and may be arranged on a regular or occasional basis for those parents with the time and desire to play a significant part in their child's school environment. We can always use another pair of helping hands. We also encourage our parents to participate in our school events and be part of our school community.

Donations to Sandcastle

As a nonprofit organization, we welcome donations of almost any kind! All donations made to Sandcastle Preschool Program are tax deductible. If you would like to make a cash donation to Sandcastle, please notify a Director. If you would like to donate toys or other materials to Sandcastle, please let a Director know.

XV. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Sandcastle Preschool Program has established the following grievance procedure that is available to all parent/guardians and non-supervisory employees who have completed their introductory period. It should nevertheless be remembered that Sandcastle provides contract nursery school services that can be terminated by either party. Nothing in this grievance procedure is intended to create an express or implied agreement that alters the nursery school contract and terms.



1. **Direct Communication:** If a parent or staff member has a communication difficulty or conflict we ask the parent or staff member to first approach the person with whom they feel there is a problem. Often the matter can be clarified and mutually resolved in this matter.
2. **Direct Supervisor:** If the problem does not feel resolved, we ask that the parent or staff member speak to the direct supervisor within 10 days of the occurrence. An example is after talking to a teacher or parent; you can talk to the Educational Director.
3. **Program Director:** If the problem is still not resolved, we ask that you go directly to the Program Director and refer your grievance in writing within 3 days. The Program Director will promptly schedule a meeting to provide an opportunity for each party to present her/his case. Within 3 days after that meeting or such a period as is required under the circumstances to properly investigate the matter, the Program Director will provide each party with a verbal or written response to the grievance.
4. **Board of Directors:** If either party is not satisfied with the decision at the third step, each party will have an additional 3 days to request in writing a personal interview with the Board of Directors, who will discuss the problem and investigate the basis for the grievance. The Board of Directors will provide either a verbal or written decision within 10 working days unless it has been determined that additional time is required under the circumstances. The decision at this step shall be final and conclusive for all parties.

It is the intention of Sandcastle Preschool Program to be fair and impartial in order to establish the smoothest relationship possible. No party will be discriminated against or retaliated against, or in any way penalized for using this procedure.

It is the goal of Sandcastle Preschool Program to support all families and staff in resolving issues, while respecting individual values, goals and privacy. We hope that with this process we are able to resolve differences or conflicts with respect and concern for all parties involved.



FAMILY HANDBOOK RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I have received a copy of Sandcastle Preschool Program Foundation's Family Handbook.

The handbook contains policies and rules, which apply to me, and my child(ren).

I agree to read the handbook and abide by the school policies and procedures.

Parent

Date

