



7401 Winkler Rd Fort Myers, FL 33919

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Dear Parents (Guardians),

Welcome to Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center. We are a ministry committed to reaching out through Jesus to give families hope and support. Zion Lutheran Church and Early Childhood Center value children and believe in families. Our program exists for you and your child. We will strive to provide the loving care and guidance that your child needs as he/she grows and develops.

As parents you play a vital role in our ministry to your child. This handbook is designed to help you understand our program, its mission, and the guidelines under which we operate. We hope this handbook will be a great help to you. Please take the time to read the information, policies, and procedures we have outlined; they are important. **After reading it, please sign the Handbook Verification Form stating that you have read, and understand this information.** This verification form will be kept in your child's file and must be completed before your child will be fully enrolled.

We appreciate your choosing Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center. Please know that you are always welcome to visit, ask questions, make suggestions, or come to us with any problems you may have. It is our mission to serve and support your family. Cooperation between parents and staff will greatly contribute to a successful experience for your child.

In His Service,
The Early Childhood Center
Director and Staff

Philosophy of Education

Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center is committed to reaching out through Jesus to give families hope and support and help their young children to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and to develop a personal relationship with Him.

Our Heavenly Father created each of His children in His image and for a unique purpose (Ephesians 2:10). He has equipped each child with special gifts and talents according to that purpose. Our objective is to work with parents to cultivate these unique gifts and equip the child to share his or her gifts with the body of Christ to build His Kingdom (Mark 16:15).

For this reason, we offer a Christ-centered, Biblically-directed approach to education (Proverbs 22:6). Our program is designed to foster your child's individual, spiritual, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. This is achieved in part through a developmentally appropriate, play-based curriculum. Our Christian teaching staff strives to create a loving and nurturing environment where children can feel safe to express themselves and learn at their own pace. Our goal is to develop an atmosphere that encourages a love for Jesus Christ and a love for learning.

Mission Statement

Knowing, Growing, and Going!

The mission of Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center is to help young children to **know** Jesus as their friend and Savior, **grow** in His love and grace, and **go** forth to share His gospel.

This mission carried out by supporting families and helping young children grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) by nurturing their spiritual, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development (Proverbs 22:6) and equipping them to share the love of Christ with others (Mark 16:15).

About Our Logo

Our professionally designed logo incorporates a great deal of symbolism in relation to both our mission and educational philosophy. The multi-colored hand of the child represents the diversity of all children and the green thumb represents growth. Our mission is to help all children experience growth regardless of their background.

The white hand of Christ represents his purity, while the red wound portrays his sacrifice. The black background represents the darkness of the world and sin. Christ's white hand against the black also represents Him as the light of the world shining through the darkness.

Available Resources

Should you have questions about faith, family, or child development, Zion has many resources available to assist you. Our pastors, family life minister, ECC director, and teachers are willing to assist you and help answer your questions in these and other areas. Zion also has a lending library with books and resources that are available for check out located in the church office across the hall. Please let us know how we can best serve you.

WEMB (Weekly Education Ministry Board)

The members of the **WEMB** board meet every third Monday of the month to oversee the ECC ministry. If you are interested in attending a **WEMB** meeting please contact the ECC Director in advance of the meeting that you are interested in attending.

Jr. Preschool Program

Within the Jr. Preschool program, children spend much of their time in free choice play where they choose what they would like to do. The teachers provide a wide variety of activities to promote learning academic concepts such as counting, colors, and shapes while at the same time offering the children time to develop socially and emotionally through interactions with their friends. There are also short group settings where the teachers provide opportunities for Jesus time and circle time (reading, singing and the like). The children are provided a morning snack and we provide an afternoon snack for those children who are enrolled in extended care. Parents must provide their child's lunch. During snack and lunch, the children are learning table manners and social interaction. Time is spent during the day on the playground, and occasionally in indoor large motor activities. During this time, these younger children learn to use their quickly developing bodies in new and different ways. Finally, children in extended care are provided with cots on which to nap each day, a real necessity after such an active morning.

Toilet Training

The Jr. Preschool program is designed to help children transition into the Sr. Preschool classes. Therefore, toilet training is a regular part of the everyday routine. Children in the midst of toilet training should have 2-3 changes of clothes and extra underwear, as well as a spare pair of shoes.

Since each child's toilet training experience is different, it is important for parents and teachers to work together in this process. Parents will be responsible for supplying all diapering and training needs (diapers, pull-ups, wipes, plastic pants, etc.) as determined and agreed upon by both teachers and parents.

Biting

Because younger children do not know how to express themselves fully with words, they resort to using physical actions to communicate their frustrations. Some children cry, some hit, and others bite. When a child does bite, the following procedures will occur:

The staff will separate the children involved. The child receiving the bite will be comforted and the bite area cleaned to prevent infection. The child who bit will be redirected to appropriate activities. An accident report will be completed and placed in both children's files and parents will be notified of the situation. We will not identify the biter to the parents of the child who was bitten.

The staff will take time to identify patterns in the biter's environment and emotional state at each episode and work to identify and minimize any triggers. We will also work to teach the child more appropriate ways to express their frustration. The child will be closely supervised.

It is important that both parents and caregivers work together to prevent the children from biting. If children are permitted to demonstrate such behavior at home, there will be no chance of eliminating the problem at school. Most children soon stop biting after these

actions have been taken. For those children who continue to bite, it may become necessary to remove them from the center, either for a short period or permanently.

Sr. Preschool and VPK Programs

The Preschool program is fashioned for three, four, and five-year-old children in classrooms meeting a maximum ratio of 1 teacher to 12 children. The ratio in Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) classroom is 1 teacher to 11 children the VPK program meets from 8:30am to 11:30am. The Sr. preschool sessions meet from 8:30am to 12:30am Monday through Friday. Extended Care is offered for those children in the program desiring before and after school care. Several options are also available for Preschool during the summer.

There are several major goals for the Preschool programs. Primarily, we want the children to learn to know Jesus. Academically, the program prepares the children socially and emotionally for Kindergarten, sets a solid foundation for self-discipline, and lays the groundwork for a life-long interest in academic learning and problem solving.

The Preschool program is driven by the interests and needs of our children. After the first few weeks of acclimating the children to school with teachers, friends, schedule, rules, and the like, the teachers poll the children to determine what the children are interested in learning. Topics may include dinosaurs, space, forest, food, sports, and camping, just to name a few. Once the group has decided what to study, the teachers work with the children to find out exactly what they know about the topic. This is done as a group, as well as individually with each child. Next, the teachers query the children about what they would like to learn. This lays the foundation for several weeks of study and research.

This study and research are done first through free choice play and discovery centers in which the children pick what they would like to do from materials provided by the teacher. For these free choice and discovery center times the teachers provide a wide variety of activities such as sensory materials, art projects, manipulatives, books, and writing materials. These exploration opportunities are designed to promote academic learning in the area being studied as well as in the standard areas such as letter, shape, and color recognition; storytelling; pre-reading skills; and early math skills. This time also offers the children the opportunity to develop socially and emotionally through interactions with other children.

Study and research continues in two short group settings, which last about fifteen minutes. The first group setting provides the teachers with a circle time designed to develop concepts in the current topic of study. The second group time provides a special opportunity to learn about Jesus. The teachers use these circle times to direct the group with reading, graphing, singing, story writing, questioning, research, mini skits, and the like. Circle time also offers teachers a chance to introduce new materials in the room as well as to review classroom rules and expectations. As a part of a larger group, the children will attend chapel each week.

The Preschool program provides for the physical development of the children through nutritious snacks, large muscle activities, and rest time. The Preschool program provides a daily morning snack. Those who are in extended care must provide their own lunch; and we provide an afternoon snack. During these meal times, the children are learning table manners and social interaction skills. Children learn to use and manage their quickly developing bodies through free choice and guided activities on the playground or in indoor large muscle activities. Children who are with us after school hours are provided with cots for a rest each day for a couple of hours, a real necessity after such an active morning. After a rest and a snack, the children are again presented with opportunities for free choice play, large muscle activities, and story time.

Daily Schedule of Activities

The following schedule is a guideline for our daily routines. While we desire to stay within our daily scheduled routine, that is not always practical when working with children. We designed our schedule to be flexible and allow for change as teachable moments or other special needs arise. Snack menus, individual classroom schedules, and activity plans are posted for each room. Classroom schedules may vary slightly to accommodate shared spaces or equipment.

Each day during the preschool session the children will experience:

Daily Meeting (15 min.): Preschool session begins. All children should be present by this time and parents should have completed their goodbyes so that class may begin. Children gather for morning welcome activities which may include; overview of the day's activities, calendar, literacy instruction/story time, or other group activities.

Free Choice Discovery Centers (60 min.): Children will be able to choose from several discovery centers designed for exploratory play-based learning. Discovery center curriculum areas include, but are not limited to, spiritual nurturing, expressive arts, manipulatives, dramatic play, sensory experiences, blocks, music/movement, science/world discovery, writing/coloring activities, and quiet reading/listening opportunities. During this time, snack is served.

Outdoor Play (30 min.): Time for running, jumping, climbing, riding, and more. When the weather is uncooperative, we will conduct large motor activities indoors.

Small Group & Free choice (30 min.): Teacher directed group instruction/activities geared to help further investigate and explore the current area of interest (i.e. bugs, dinosaurs, farms, etc.). Activities include, but are not limited to, stories, songs, finger plays, hands on experiments, and nature walks.

Jesus Time (15-min.): This group time is set aside for spiritual nurturing to develop each child's relationship with Jesus. Each week a specific Bible story will be highlighted for study and discussion. Activities include but are not limited to, scripture reading, praise and worship songs, finger plays, dramatic play, and expressive arts. Children also attend chapel once a week.

Lunch (30 min.): We practice proper table manners and conversational skills at this time. A variety of meal time prayers are also taught.

Those children enrolled in the Extended Care options will also experience:

Rest Time: Children are encouraged to rest their bodies and try to sleep. Those who are beginning to outgrow naps are encouraged to rest quietly for a while and then are given a quiet activity to work on at their cot. A story and quiet music are often used to help the children relax.

Free choice: Children choose from a variety of areas in which to explore, including, but not limited to, manipulatives, dramatic play, sensory experiences, writing/coloring activities, and quiet reading/listening opportunities.

Outdoor Play: Time for running, jumping, climbing, riding, and more. When the weather is uncooperative, we will conduct large motor activities indoors.

Curriculum and Assessment

Curriculum

The early childhood curriculum can be easily divided into broad categories which reflect a more holistic or interdisciplinary curriculum. Narrow subject labels which have been used for older children, such as hand writing, spelling, reading, social studies, etc., are not always accurate or appropriate in describing early childhood activities. The State of Florida has in place a set of Developmental Standards for children from birth to age five which incorporate eight areas of development, including:

- Physical Health
- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language Development
- Emergent Literacy
- Mathematics and Scientific Thinking
- Social Studies and The Arts
- Motor Development

We at Zion ECC think it is very important to also add a Spiritual Living component to our curriculum. We have a specific curriculum designed to help us teach the Christian faith from the Lutheran perspective.

In order to meet these developmental standards, we use two specific developmentally appropriate play-based curriculum models. The first, The Creative Curriculum, is a research based curriculum approved by the State of Florida for use in VPK and School Readiness classrooms. The Creative Curriculum gives each classroom teacher a foundation or framework to incorporate their individual teaching styles and interests into the classroom environment and planned activities. The goal is to help each child develop their skills to successfully reach the developmental standard benchmarks for their age group.

The second curriculum model is The Project Approach, designed by Lillian Katz and Sylvia Chard. The Project Approach emphasizes the teachers' role in encouraging children to interact with people, objects, and the environment in ways that have a personal meaning to them. It invites children to take an active role in what they are learning. An overview of how the project approach is used can be found in the Sr. Preschool and VPK program description.

Please note that curriculum activities listed in lesson plans are most often of an overlapping nature. Therefore, activities cannot be listed in a planning schedule according to curriculum areas and lesson plans are organized according to types of activities (e.g., center time, story time, group discussion, etc.).

Assessment & Screening

The first five years of life are very important to your child because this time sets the stage for success in school and later in life. During early childhood, many experiences should be gained and many skills learned. It is important for a child to be screened and assessed throughout the school year because different delays can become evident at different stages of development. Our goal is to ensure that each child's development is proceeding without problems.

We screen our children using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, or ASQ, twice a year. The ASQ is used to get an overall snapshot of your child's development and help spot any delays or concerns. If completed questionnaires indicate there are concerns about your child they will be discussed with you along with suggestions for addressing those concerns. These

screenings will assist parents and teachers to make more informed decisions about ways to support each child's success as a lifelong learner.

Assessment is an ongoing process that looks at a child's strengths and progress over time. We use several methods of assessment to measure children's progress and skill development throughout the year. These methods include, but are not limited to; developmental milestone checklists, planned observation and analysis of specific developmental areas, and portfolios. Regular assessment of children in our programs allows us to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of our program and curriculum.

Admission and Enrollment

We believe that each child is a special and unique gift from God. We understand that it is a special privilege to participate with families in the development of their child. We desire to form a partnership that will assist the child to develop in a safe, loving, and stimulating environment.

Non-discriminatory policy

Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center admits children of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to the children of the center. We do not discriminate based on race, color, national or ethnic origin in the administration of our educational policies.

Enrollment

Sr. Preschool enrollment is open to any child 3-5 years of age who is fully toilet trained. Children are not to be sent to class in pull-ups or other such diapers. *Fully toilet trained means that children should be able to manage all aspects of bathroom use including clean up of their person and dressing by the start of the school year.* Jr. Preschool is open to children ages 2-3 years who may or may not be toilet trained.

Zion is pleased to be a part of Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program. The VPK program is open to children who will be 4 years of age by September 1st of the new school year. Official documentation of enrollment in the program is mandatory. An official certificate of enrollment in the state program can be obtained from Community Coordinated Care for Children Inc. (4C).

Parent(s) and/or guardian(s) interested in our programs are encouraged to visit and tour the center prior to admission. Tours are available by appointment with the director. The director will explain the preschool program and policies of the center and answer any questions you may have. Enrollment information (forms, space availability, waiting list procedures) will also be made available at this time. All enrollment forms and registration fees should be returned promptly to assure your child's acceptance into our program.

Active members of Zion Lutheran Church will be given first priority for enrollment. Thereafter, preference will be given to families currently enrolled who support and meet all Zion ECC financial obligations in a timely manner. Enrollment is then open to those needing full time care (7am-6pm), and those needing an extended care option, respectively. The remaining spots will be filled as space allows on a first come first serve basis. All families currently enrolled will be given consideration before any spaces are opened to the general public.

Registration

In order to determine class sizes, pre-registration of children currently enrolled in the center will begin in February with a nonrefundable fee required. After March 15 enrollment is open to those on the waiting list. Public registration will begin after March 15. Formal registration occurs later in the summer months. All fees and the first tuition payment are due at this time. These dates are published with the pre-registration materials.

Waiting Lists

Once all classrooms/sessions reach capacity, a waiting list is developed. When space becomes available, contact occurs according to date received and enrollment priority.

Health Requirements

Florida law requires each child have certification of a health exam and current immunizations on file while enrolled at the center. Your physician must complete the appropriate forms before your child may attend the center.

Probation period

All newly enrolled families will be subject to a probation period of 120 days. If at any time during this period we find we are unable able to meet the needs of your family or center policies/procedures are not properly followed, you may be asked to withdraw your child from the program.

Withdrawal

If you must withdraw your child from our program, we require a written notice at least two weeks prior to your child's last day. If the proper notice is received, your tuition advance (see tuition and fees) will be applied to the last two full weeks your child attends. Failure to submit a written notification a full two weeks prior to withdrawal will result in forfeiture of the advance.

Orientation

Parent orientation meeting will be held at the beginning of each school year. Parents (guardians) are strongly encouraged to attend this meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to acquaint parents with the rules and routines of your child's classroom, discuss general center procedures, and make personal connections with staff and other parents.

Hours of Operation

Zion ECC programs are in operation from 7:00am - 6:00pm, Monday through Friday. Preschool is in session between 8:30am – 12:30pm **Children enrolled are expected to be present for class at 8:30.** Extended care service options provide care before and after the preschool session.

Center Closures

The Early Childhood Center is closed on the following holidays:

- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving and the Friday following
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day
- New Year's Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day

In addition to the holidays mentioned above, the center will close for a few days each August for cleaning, maintenance, and staff development. The specific dates for these weeks will be

published well before the summer session begins to provide adequate time for parents to make child care arrangements.

Should the center need to close for an emergency, a staff member will contact you as soon as possible. In the event of severe weather conditions the center will generally follow the procedure of the Lee County School System. Call the ECC office to hear the recorded message for details.

Tuition and Fees

Registration Fee

Annual registration fee per child (Non-refundable, non-transferable) \$125.00

Preschool Program

Our Preschool program runs Monday through Friday with extended care options. The core of the program is from 8:30 to 12:30pm and the payments for this portion are considered **tuition**. Therefore, it may **not be deductible as a tax write-off**. The options for extended care enable your child to attend during the indicated times. These additional costs for extended care are tax deductible as a childcare expense. The options available for the Preschool Program are:

<u>Junior Preschool (2-3 years) Base Tuition</u>	
8:30am to 12:30pm	2 days
	3 days
	5 days
<u>Senior Preschool (3-5 yrs) Base Tuition</u>	
8:30am to 12:30pm	2 days
	3 days
	5 days
<u>Additional Fees for Extended Care Options</u>	
A	7:00am to 8:30am
B	12:30pm to 3:30pm
C	7:00am to 8:20am <u>and</u> 12:30pm to 3:30pm
D	7:00am to 8:20am <u>and</u> 12:30pm to 6:00pm

The base tuition includes a morning snack. Afternoon extended care options provide an additional snack.

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten

Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) is a legislatively mandated program designed to prepare every four-year-old in Florida for his or her educational success. There is no charge for preschool base tuition if your child is enrolled in the VPK program. Official documentation of enrollment in the program is mandatory. Extended Care fees still apply if you are enrolled in one of our VPK extended care options.

VPK children are invited to stay for lunch (12:30 pickup) for an additional fee per week.

School Readiness

The School Readiness program is designed to help children at risk of school failure because of a variety of factors including, but not limited to, poverty, abuse, or health issues. It is designed to assist children in achieving educational success and becoming productive members of society. Parents with children enrolled in the School Readiness Program will be responsible for paying the assigned portion of childcare costs as determined by the School Readiness program. Failure to make payment for your assigned portion of the childcare costs will

jeopardize your enrollment in the program. Official documentation of enrollment in the program is mandatory.

Discounts

The weekly tuition amount for the Preschool program shown is for a child without any siblings. Families with additional children enrolled will receive a 20% discount on the oldest child.

Advance

Twice the weekly rate must be paid in advance of the first day of attendance. As rates change, this amount will need to be updated accordingly. This is held by the center until your child leaves the center. The total amount is applied to the last two full weeks your child attends *if* the center is notified in writing at least two weeks before your child's last day, which must correspond with a full week. Failure to submit a written notification a full two weeks in advance of a child's last day, which must correspond with a full week, will result in a forfeiture of the advance.

Should timely payments become a problem, we reserve the right to increase the amount of the advance that we hold.

Payments

Payments must be made bi-weekly and are due on alternating Mondays. You will receive a statement in your child's Friday folder and payment is due that following Monday. This will include normal charges for the coming two weeks, as well as any extra charges and/or adjustments for the previous two weeks. All payments for ECC/Extended Care fees are payable to the Zion Lutheran Early Childhood Center (ECC) at the ECC office.

Extra Fees

Materials Fee \$115.00/year

Covers consumable curriculum materials used throughout the year. Refundable only if child does not start the program, will not be prorated for early withdrawal.

Late Pick-Up Penalty

If your child is not picked up by your contracted time (11:40, 12:40, 3:40, or 6:00), there is an additional fee payable in cash within 48 hours. The fee will be \$10 for any portion of the first ten minutes and \$1 for each additional minute. There is an additional late payment charge of \$1/day after the 48 hours.

Excessive late pick-ups and/or failure to pay fees in a timely manner will jeopardize your child's participation in the program.

Late Payment Charges

If your child's payment is not received on the date due, or the first day your child attends for the week, the late payment charge will be \$5.00 and is payable in cash. If the balance due is not paid in full, including the late fee charge, by the following Monday, an additional \$5.00 charge will be added each week until the balance is paid in full. Should the balance go unpaid for two weeks, your child will not be allowed to attend until the balance and late payment fees are paid in full. The only exception to this policy will be vacations and illness.

Returned Check Fee \$20.00

This fee is charged each time a check is returned. This fee is payable in cash. If there are two check returns within one calendar year, all payments must be made in cash, by certified check, or by money order for one calendar year.

Tax Statement Fee \$10.00

Receipts are provided for all payments for child care and tuition received. These receipts showing the childcare portion of your payment should serve as documentation for tax purposes and should be saved for the entire year. Should you need a more formal statement for tax purposes, we can provide one for the tax statement fee. This fee is payable in cash prior to delivery of the statement.

Arrival and Departure

Upon arrival to the campus, please proceed around the building to the parking lot. You may enter the drive to the portico from the east lot. If you anticipate that drop off will take more than a few minutes please park in a parking space rather than block the portico drive for an extended length of time.

The handicapped parking spaces along the playground fence are also available for your use. They are designated Handicapped for use on Sunday mornings. Parking for staff and volunteers is located in the north or east lot.

When departing please follow the portico drive and exit to the right toward the south drive exiting onto Winkler Road.

Drop Off and Pick Up Procedures

An authorized adult (18 years or older) is required to **SIGN IN** and children must again be **SIGNED OUT** with full legal adult signature and time of arrival/departure on a daily basis. Sign In/Sign Out sheets are located in the designated areas by classroom. Please be sure to check your child's mailbox at this time as well.

All children are encouraged to arrive promptly to their preschool session. Classes begin promptly at 8:30am. Arrival after a preschool session has begun is disruptive. Children may access their classrooms no more than 15 minutes prior to their preschool session beginning. We ask that if your child will be late, that you call to let the teacher know when to expect your child. Late arrival should be the exception, not the rule. We are required to make a daily health check when each child arrives at the center and this is difficult to do effectively with late arrivals.

Upon arrival to the classroom all children will be required to wash their hands following the hand washing procedure and techniques recommended by the health department. Posters showing this procedure are posted by all bathroom and classroom sinks.

Those children enrolled in morning extended care may arrive anytime after 7:00 am. When the center first opens for the day and attendance is low, children meet in one room before they move to their respective classrooms. Classes may also be combined into one classroom for afternoon extended care.

Special Instructions

Should you need to leave special instructions or information for your child's teacher, please make an entry in the dated logbook located in or near the sign-in clipboard. You may also verbally relay these instructions, but to limit miscommunication, please make certain they are in writing.

Authorized Release

If someone other than the child's custodial parent or guardian will be picking up the child from the center, prior authorization, in writing is required. The parent or guardian is the only person who can authorize the center to release the child to another individual. The parent or

guardian should provide the names of at least two other adults who have permission to pick up your child in case of an emergency. This authorization is on the enrollment form and should be periodically updated in writing

Safety Concerns

For safety reasons, please do not use your cell phones when you are dropping off or picking up your child. **Never leave children unattended.** Please do not keep your engine running or leave your car unlocked with your purse or valuables inside, even if you are only gone for a few minutes.

It is our policy that **only adults open/close doors and gates.** Please help us train the children by observing this policy. For every child's safety, please do not permit older siblings to open/close gates or classroom doors. This will help to ensure children stay within the designated area and they do not feel free to set out on their own.

By law, every preschooler needs to be in a car seat when riding in a car. Please be sure that anyone who picks up your child from our facility has a car seat. As a convenience to the driver picking up your child, car seats can be dropped off and kept at the center.

Because your children are our responsibility while here at the center, the staff will not release a child to anyone who appears intoxicated. In such a case, the staff will attempt to secure other arrangements for transporting the child. Should a problem arise, local law enforcement will be called.

Attendance

We cannot stress the value and importance of daily attendance enough. Frequent absences and irregular attendance make it very difficult for young children to create positive social and academic experiences and acclimate to classroom routines.

School Readiness/VPK Attendance

School readiness students are allowed three (3) unexcused absences per month that are reimbursable by the state funded program. All subsequent absences require appropriate documentation for reimbursement. Children enrolled in the VPK program must attend a minimum of 80% of instruction hours. If more than 20% of instruction time is missed the state will not pay for the time unattended. **Absences that cannot be paid for through School Readiness and VPK funding become the parent's responsibility.**

Absences/Illness

If your child is going to be absent from school for either medical or personal reasons, you must notify the center. Please call the center by 9:00am or, when possible, notify your child's teacher ahead of time in writing. Voice mail is checked regularly, so feel free to leave a message at any time to report an absence.

Should your child be absent due to illness please notify the center as soon as possible, especially for communicable diseases. The center needs to provide families with information regarding viruses or illnesses present in our center so that they can monitor their children. A release from your child's physician is required for the child to re-enter the classroom after contracting a communicable disease.

Please, **DO NOT** send your child to school if he/she is, or has within the last 24 hours been, awaiting test results for Strep Throat or another Communicable Disease or displaying any of the following symptoms:

- Fever (100 degrees or higher)
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Severe asthma or allergies
- Contagious skin or eye infection
- Colored discharge from nose indicating infection
- Not feeling well/lethargic behavior/ increased crying

For the protection of the rest of the children, we will contact you immediately if your child is displaying any of the aforementioned symptoms. You will be expected to pick up your child within 40 minutes of a call from the center. Your child will be removed from the group until you arrive.

Your child may return to the center after illness when:

- Fever has been broken for 24 hours.
- Nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea has subsided for 24 hours.
- At least four (4) doses of antibiotic have been given over a 24-hour period for any type of bacterial infection.
- Child is feeling well again and normal behavior has returned.

Medication

Should your child need to receive medication while he/she is at school, **you must fill out a medication form.** We cannot administer any medication without a form filled out. Children should not handle medication. **Parents must personally give all medication to a staff member who will store it safely out of the children's reach.**

Prescription Medication

Prescription medications will only be administered if the medication is in the original container with a label attached bearing the child's name, current date, time and dose to be given, number of days to administer medication, and pharmacy name. This constitutes the physicians written permission.

A designated staff member will administer any medication and document date, time, and dosage on the medication form. Parents may come to the center and administer medication to their child or give written permission for one of the emergency contacts listed on the enrollment form to administer medication to their child. It is required that the parent or person administering the medication sign the medication form documenting date, time, dosage, and who administered the medication.

Over the Counter Medications

Over the counter medications should be treated with the same precautions as prescription medications. Oral over the counter medications such as aspirin, ibuprofen, and cough medicine can be administered only with written permission of the child's parent and physician.

Over the counter medications, being used to reduce fever will NOT be permitted or administered at the center. Medication must be presented in its original container and have a label with the child's name, a current date, time and dose to be given, number of days to be administered, and physician's name.

Be sure to ask for written instructions during visits to the doctor for all over the counter medications prescribed. We recommend that you ask your doctor to call the pharmacist for a

prescription label with instructions for any over the counter medications that he/she recommends.

Allergies and Asthma

All allergies to medications, food, and/or other substances must be stated on the enrollment form. A signed note from your child's physician stating such allergies needs to be on file along with recommended alternate food choices.

If your child has asthma or a life-threatening allergy (e.g. bee stings, nuts) please be sure to fill out an action plan for care in emergencies. Any medications (i.e. inhalers, epi-pens, nebulizers) will be stored in a location known to all staff for quick and easy retrieval. Physician instructions for use and a completed medication form are kept with the medication.

Because of the prevalence of peanut and nut allergies in young children, Zion ECC is a **Nut Free Environment**. For the safety of our children **no peanuts or nuts of any kind will be permitted into the facility**.

Head Lice

While head lice are not a serious disease, it is a contagious and unfortunate reality in Southwest Florida. If a suspected case of head lice is found, we will routinely do classroom head-checks to keep the problem under control. If we find a child with lice or eggs, we will send the child home, and notify all the parents with children enrolled in the center. A child identified with having head lice will not be permitted to return to the center until treatment has occurred. Verification of treatment may include a product box top or empty bottle.

Accidents and Injuries

If your child is injured while at the center, first aid will be administered. If treatment by a doctor is needed, we will make every effort to contact you and/or the doctor you have chosen to treat your child. In the event of an emergency, we will make sure that your child receives the necessary emergency treatment until you can be reached. The authorization for emergency treatment on the enrollment form must be signed upon enrollment. Emergency phone numbers are necessary for administering this program. If your phone number at home, work, or any emergency number changes, notify the ECC office immediately. A written accident report is filled out for each incident and must be signed and dated by the parent. The original report will be given to the parent and a copy will be placed in the child's file.

Abuse and Neglect

The staff of Zion Lutheran ECC is required by state law to report any suspected signs of child abuse to the Department of Children and Families. This report may be made directly to DCF without first contacting the parents.

Discipline Policy

Maintaining order, safety, and discipline in our Center is very important. In order to be sure that everyone benefits from, and enjoys our Center's programs in a safe environment, it is necessary to establish the following disciplinary policy.

There are three basic areas of possible behavior problems. The following lists within each category are not intended to be complete lists, but rather examples of behaviors falling into each category. It is ultimately up to the teachers and the Director of the Center to determine if a behavior is problematic.

Disruptive Behavior

A child who is being disruptive, is disrespectful to people or property, lying, interrupting speakers, making excessive noise, or not listening.

Abusive Behavior

A child who is being abusive is hitting, kicking, punching, biting, or stealing. He or she is being abusive when destroying property, or using unkind, abusive, threatening and/or obscene language.

Dangerous Behavior

A child who is endangering himself, herself, or others is one who is running off from the Center or group. Dangerous behavior also includes not following safety recommendations such as "no running in the hallways" or "no playing in the restrooms." Any behavior that requires a teacher to be devoted solely to one child for an extended period of time endangers the other children in the group and is therefore considered dangerous. A child is also displaying dangerous behavior when he/she is found to possess dangerous or harmful objects such as drugs, knives or batteries. Dangerous or harmful objects will be confiscated immediately.

Abusive and dangerous behavior will not and cannot be tolerated and therefore may result in immediate and strong action.

Disciplinary Plan of Action

1. The reasons the behavior is inappropriate will be explained and the child will be reminded of the appropriate behavior.
2. If the behavior does not improve, the child will need to remain in the direct company of a staff member at all times. Written notice will be given if this action is to be taken.
3. In the case of field trips, if a child still cannot control himself or herself, he/she will not be permitted on the next trip. It will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian to find alternative care for the child. Written notice will be given if this action is to be taken. There will be no reimbursement of tuition or fees should this step be necessary.
4. If the behavior continues to be a problem while at the Center or on field trips, the child will not be permitted to attend the Center and/or field trips. Written notice will be given if this action is to be taken. Parents will NOT be reimbursed for tuition or for trip fees if this type of action is taken.
5. Behavior which endangers the child or others in the Center or on trips will not and cannot be tolerated. Therefore, dangerous behavior may result in immediate dismissal from the program.

Parent and Teacher Communication

It is our desire to be available to parents' questions and concerns. Parents are encouraged to visit the school at any time. We ask that you be respectful of the teachers and students by not disrupting your child's class or distracting your child from involvement in class activities. We want to do our best to keep all our families informed about what is happening at our center. Parents need to be aware of several very important forms of communication that we use.

Newsletters

A monthly center newsletter will be sent home with your child at the beginning of each month. This may include learning goals, such as current classroom projects, activities, and concepts taught; information on upcoming church or school events, and other tips and activities for families.

In addition to the monthly center-wide newsletter, you will receive a classroom letter to provide you with information on classroom events. These newsletters will also contain reminders on up-coming special activities, as well as, requests for special classroom supplies or volunteers. We strongly encourage that you read these newsletters, the information within can benefit both you and your child.

Information boards

A parent information bulletin board containing items of information and special notes or reminders for the week is located at the entrance to each classroom and the director's office. Please routinely check the schedules, calendars, menus, and notes posted on these boards.

Information Logbooks

Should you need to leave special instructions or information for you child's teacher, please make an entry in the dated logbook located in or near the sign-in clipboard. You may also verbally relay these instructions, but to limit miscommunication, please make certain they are in writing.

Conferences

Parent/Teacher conferences occur twice a year, usually in the fall and spring. You will have an opportunity to select a time and day convenient for you by signing up about a week prior to the conference dates. This is a very valuable time for you to discuss your child's progress with his/her teacher. We strongly encourage your attendance at these conferences; the information shared is beneficial for all involved.

Clothing

We recommend that all children wear comfortable, washable, play clothes. Painting, clay, sand play, etc. is usually available to your child and some colors of paint just will not wash out. Clothing that is easy to manage encourages independence and self-help. Many toilet accidents are prevented if children can unbutton or unbuckle pants and belts without a struggle.

All children are required to keep a complete change of clothing (for the current season) at school in case of an accident. **Label each item** with your child's name and place them in a zip lock bag, also labeled with your child's name. If these clothes are used, be sure to replace them the next day. We will check periodically to be sure that children have appropriate clothing and have not out grown the items on hand.

All shoes should be in good condition to avoid injury. We strongly recommend that **sandals have a back strap for support**. Please no crocs (or croc type shoes) or thong/flip-flop type sandals. These types of foot wear have proven to be unsafe on our playground.

All jackets, sweaters, book bags, backpacks, lunch containers, and other personal belongings **must be clearly labeled** with your child's name. Many children have identical items and without names, it is very difficult to identify to whom they belong.

Lost and Found

If your child is missing anything, please notify the staff as soon as possible. It is much easier to return a lost item if it is labeled with the owner's name. **Please remember to label everything!** The center is not responsible for lost items. A lost and found box will be kept in the Director's office; unclaimed items are given to charity after a reasonable period.

Snack and Lunches

The center provides a nutritional snack and drink for all children in the preschool programs. We serve a variety of raw fruits and vegetables, pretzels, crackers, cheese, and yogurt with 100% fruit juice, water or milk to drink. Those enrolled in the Extended Care option will receive an afternoon snack.

Currently our program is unable to provide a hot lunch program. All students will have to bring a lunch from home. We do request that you send nutritious, healthy meals that are proportioned for your child, which include vegetables, fruits, bread or bread alternatives, and meat or another protein. The center will provide milk for all children at lunch. Please make sure that adequate cold packs are included in lunch containers as needed.

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To help promote healthy habits, children will brush their teeth after lunch before they rest. We will supervise and assist children in brushing their teeth.

Rest/Nap Time

All children enrolled in the Extended Care options will be required to rest. Depending upon their age, all children are expected to rest quietly, allowing those who need sleep the opportunity to do so. Those who are beginning to outgrow naps are encouraged to rest quietly for a while and then are given a quiet activity to work on at their cot. A story and quiet music are often used to help the children relax.

Our storage space for cots and resting items is limited. Therefore, we are asking you to help us by following these rules for your child's resting accessories:

1. Limit your child to one sleeping buddy of normal stuffed animal size. Sleeping buddies should be soft and cuddly and not a toy that will become a playmate.
2. Limit the amount of bedding provided to 1 cot/crib sheet and 1 child size blanket (please smaller than a twin and not a comforter), small nap roll, or beach towel with which to cover up .
3. If your child would like a pillow, please make sure to pack a small pillow that will fit completely in their bag.
4. **It is for sanitary reasons that we need all bedding to fit in a pillow case that can be stored easily.**
5. We will send blankets/sheets home to be washed once a week or more, especially if your child has been sick. You are welcome to take them more often if you prefer. Please return all items in the pillow case after they have been washed each week.

Special Celebrations

Birthdays

Your Child's birthday is a special day! We enjoy being a part of your child's birthday celebration and like to recognize birthdays at the center if that is your preference. Parents are welcome to provide the snack for your child's class. Please discuss this with your child's teacher a week in advance. Please keep refreshments simple. Elaborate parties should be done at home. **Private party invitations can be handed out at the center only if ALL students in THE CLASS are invited.**

Holidays

Zion Lutheran ECC respects the right of individual families to celebrate holidays as they wish. However, within the preschool programs we will not emphasize the more commercial aspects of the holidays. Instead, we will take advantage of our privilege as a Christian school to celebrate the Christian aspects of these holidays.

When a holiday is approaching, each class will offer further information as to how they will celebrate. Parents may be called upon to volunteer in the classroom or donate special treats or supplies for the celebration.

Toys and Personal Items

We realize that all children have special treasures such as stuffed toys, recent gifts and the like. These items are welcome in the classroom but must be played with only at designated times. We request that toys/items from home be limited to no more than two items that fit easily in your child's backpack or book bag. Children may not bring in any toys, games, etc. that promotes fighting or violence: Power Rangers, X-men, wrestling, and the like would not be acceptable choices. Game boys and other electronic devices will not be allowed. **Please be sure to label all your child's items.** We cannot assume responsibility for items damaged, lost, or left at the center.

Field Trips

Occasionally we will go out into the surrounding areas for field trips related to the current topic of interest in the class. Notification of such trips will be sent home one to two weeks in advance with information on location, cost, transportation, and anything else important to the trip. For each trip, a signed, written permission slip must be received along with any fees in order for your child to attend.

We will often request parent chaperones to accompany us on trips and help to provide transportation. For the benefit of our children, staff, and our chaperones, we have developed the following guidelines to help make our trips run more smoothly and to help ensure the safety of our children.

- Once it has been confirmed that you are scheduled to help chaperone a trip, please let the staff member in charge of the trip know immediately if you become unable to assist.
- When we plan field trips, we often have to give exact numbers for reservations and transportation, including those adults going along as chaperones. Therefore, we will not be able to accommodate extra adults who wish to join the group after initial plans have been made.
- For safety reasons, only children under 18 who are enrolled in the group are eligible to attend field trips.
- As there are always last minute items to pack, trips to the restroom, etc., please be sure to show up at the assigned time if not a few minutes early. The time you are asked to be here may be earlier than the announced start time of the trip so that the staff has

extra help with the children taking care of last minute details.

- Both the children and staff are looking for you to help direct and redirect the children throughout the trip. We need you to actively supervise the children around you. This includes encouraging the children to be on their best behavior and reminding them of the rules such as using kind words, respecting personal space, and using quiet voices. If you have a situation where you don't feel the children are acting appropriately and need help, please ask a staff member to reinforce your request.
- We want to make sure that the children have the undivided attention of all of our adults. Therefore, all cell phones, pagers, etc. must be placed on silent/vibrate during the entire time you are with the children. Please, only use your cell phone in case of a true emergency.
- In order that both staff and children can identify their adults, you may be asked to wear a special item of clothing such as a shirt or scarf. These will be provided at the time you arrive and need to be returned before you leave.
- Since field trips often include some running or rough terrain, we encourage our volunteers to wear shoes which make it easy for you to move quickly and safely. We recommend gym shoes. Please, no flip flops or shoes without backs/back ankle straps.
- When trips include lunches, we encourage you to take advantage of the same meal being provided to the children. We are happy to include you in our count and it makes it easier for the children if everyone on the trip is eating the same thing. Of course, if you have special dietary needs, we certainly understand. Just let the staff know you will need to bring your own lunch.
- Since children like things to be "fair" and are easily upset when things are not, please do not bring special items for your child. Likewise, please do not purchase special items for your child or the children assigned to you.

Drivers for all center field trips must have a copy of their driver's license and vehicle insurance on file in the ECC office. Driver's license and vehicle insurance must be current and vehicles must be in good repair.

Please sign and return the Handbook Verification Form (located in your enrollment packet) stating that you have read and understand the information contained in this handbook.