



PARENT HANDBOOK

Thank you for choosing the Dick Howser Center for Childhood Services, Inc. Children have been our business for over three decades and we continue to learn and grow with them! The years from birth to five are without a doubt the most important years in your child's life. The foundation for all growth in cognition, language, and social/emotional development are established in these few early years.

We believe that all children benefit when they are able to play and learn with their friends in a positive, nurturing, and caring environment that emphasizes each child's unique gifts and capabilities. Our agency provides a variety of services for young children in inclusive infant, toddler, and preschool programs. By this we mean, children who have developmental disabilities or delays share the same play and learning environment as their typically developing friends. All of our children will be involved in developmentally appropriate activities that are designed to maximize each child's growth. Special education and physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy services are available on-site for those children who need some extra help.

Please take time to read this handbook. It contains important information that will help make your child's early school experience a positive one. The program director and other staff members will be happy to answer any questions that you have. We welcome family involvement and encourage you to visit your child's classroom at any time. Thanks again for giving us the opportunity to be part of this very important time in your child's life.

“Our Mission is to improve the quality of life and acceptance of children with special needs and their families.”

(Excerpted from corporate bylaws)

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The Dick Howser Center uses a play-based curriculum that emphasizes self worth, capability, and school readiness. We focus on assisting children to develop the social and communication skills needed to work and play cooperatively. Our staff members encourage children to be self-directing and to make decisions for themselves. We want each child to realize his or her greatest potential and to gain confidence, skills, and independence that will last a lifetime!

For various reasons, many early childhood programs are placing emphasis on formal academic instruction. Parents have a fear that their children will not be “ready” for school. Many people feel that if children only “play” in the first 5 years, they will not be able to learn in kindergarten and beyond. Early emphasis on academic skills simply ignores what research has shown time and time again about how young children learn. Young children learn best through active, concrete, hands-on, child-directed activities...play! Play that is thoughtfully set up, monitored, and supported by teachers trained in the principles of child development will set children up for much academic success in the future.

Before children can master formal academic skills in a way that is meaningful to them, they have to have a good understanding of the physical world and how it works. Children need to see, touch, smell, hear, taste and experience the world by interacting directly with it. We believe what this research says,... “Children learn *best* through play!” Please, don’t feel guilty about letting your child play...insist on it!

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

To fulfill our philosophy, The Dick Howser Center has adopted the Creative Curriculum. This curriculum embraces sound research and theory, and is based on the premise that young children learn through relationships. The Creative Curriculum emphasizes the role of the child, the teacher (or caregiver), the family and the community. No one piece is more important than the other. It is evident in the centers by primary care giving (limiting the number of teachers your child has during his/her stay with us), high teacher to child ratios (please see the section below for specifics), our open visitation policies, and fundraising activities that involve families and the community.

We use screening/testing tools to monitor each child’s development. These tools include the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (given at specific ages), the Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum (given three times a year), and the Early Learning Accomplishments Profile (ELAP) or Learning Accomplishments Profile-Revised (LAP-R). Please see the Program Director for the specific tool that will be used for your child. Families are welcome to participate in these evaluations and results will be shared with you.

The staff uses this information to help plan activities and individualize for your child. Again, you are welcome to participate in this planning process and make recommendations that you would like your child to be working on in the center. Lesson plans that reflect developmentally

appropriate practice will be posted in each classroom area. Daily schedules are also prepared and show approximate times for free play, circle time (large group activities, if appropriate) snack times, center time (small group/individual activities), nap time, and outside play.

Some children attend our centers for childcare and educational services through private tuition, subsidized childcare assistance, Early Head Start, or Head Start. Others attend through sponsorship by a public school system or Children’s Home Society for education and therapy services related to a special need. If your child is receiving special education or therapy services, you will be consulted regarding his or her developmental assessment, therapy assessments, and individualized goals and objectives during a family support plan or individualized education plan meeting.

Our staff members will be happy to assist you with any questions or concerns. In general, questions regarding routine daily activities should be addressed to the classroom teacher. Therapists should be consulted directly about any concerns relating to physical, occupational, or speech-language therapy services. Any issues of particular concern or importance should be brought to the attention of the Center Coordinator, who is responsible for the overall operation of the center.

RATIOS

We believe in high teacher-to-child ratios throughout all of our centers. This means that we try to limit the number of children each caregiver is responsible for. Unless different ratios are dictated by contractual obligations we will strive for the following ratios. We have also included the state of Florida’s required ratios for your information. While we will make every effort to maintain our Dick Howser ratios, there may be times when this will not be possible. We will not, however, be out of state required ratios.

| <u>Age Group</u> | <u>Dick Howser Ratios</u> | <u>State Required Ratios</u> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Infants | 1 adult to 4 infants | 1 adult to 4 infants |
| 1 year olds | 1 adult to 6 children | 1 adult to 6 children |
| 2 year olds | 1 adult to 6 children | 1 adult to 11 children |
| 3 year olds | 1 adult to 8 children | 1 adult to 15 children |
| 4 year olds | 1 adult to 8 children | 1 adult to 20 children |
| 5 year olds | 1 adult to 8 children | 1 adult to 25 children |

Once children are over 36 months of age, the teacher-to-child ratio is based on the age of the majority of the children in the group. If you have specific questions about the ratios being used in your child’s center, the Program Director will be happy to answer them.

AGENCY POLICIES

ADMISSIONS POLICY

The Dick Howser Center enrolls children in its child development centers beginning at age six weeks, based on available space and specific program eligibility requirements. Equal access is provided to agency services without discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, sex,

national origin, veteran status, religious practice, age, disability or other categories protected by law.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

The intent of this policy is to prevent misbehavior, rather than simply “react” to it. Instead of punishing children after they have misbehaved, the environment should be set up so that children will be less likely to misbehave. This means that certain conditions should be kept in mind: enough toys, enough space, enough activities, enough time, etc. When young children are involved in activities that they enjoy and can pursue at their own rate, they are less likely to misbehave out of frustration. When they are praised and encouraged for their efforts, they are less likely to misbehave to get attention. When children are taught to play cooperatively, they are less likely to fight among themselves. In these ways, some potential problems may be anticipated and eliminated.

Nevertheless, misbehavior will sometimes occur. At these times, Dick Howser employees WILL USE appropriate responses:

- Calm, positive, and developmentally appropriate language will be used to redirect children’s behavior when necessary to other activities, toys, or play spaces.
- Children may be reminded of the rules through a restating of the limits that we place on their behavior.
- If misbehavior continues, older children (preschool) may be asked to sit apart from their peers until they are ready to rejoin the group.

Dick Howser employees WILL NEVER USE the following inappropriate responses to misbehavior:

- Children under one year of age will not be disciplined in any manner.
- Children shall not be subjected to discipline that is severe, humiliating, or frightening. This includes harsh language, verbal threats of corporal or excessive punishment, name-calling, derogatory remarks, or any action that could lower the pride, dignity, or self-respect of a child.
- Children shall not be subjected to discipline that is associated with food. A child may not be denied meals, dessert, snacks, treats, party food, etc.
- Children may not be denied rest as a form of discipline, nor subjected to discipline because they fail to rest at designated times.
- Children may not be subjected to discipline that is related to toileting.
- Children will not be subjected to discipline involving total isolation (i.e., “time-out”) or that denies them participation in special activities (i.e., field trips, parties).

- Children will not be subjected to spanking or any other form of corporal punishment. This includes paddling a child, slapping a child on the hand or any other body part, pulling a child's hair, arm, or other extremity, pinching a child or any other action that is painful or might cause a child bodily harm.

SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT POLICY

All parents and guardians should be aware that Florida Statutes require all childcare personnel to receive training on child abuse and neglect. The law also requires childcare personnel to immediately report suspected abuse or neglect of a child to the appropriate authorities. **If you suspect the abuse or neglect of a child, please call the Department of Children and Families Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE.**

BACK-TO-SLEEP POLICY

Since the Back to Sleep campaign was initiated in 1994, infant deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) have decreased by 40 percent. **It is our policy that all infants, even those who have the ability to roll over, will be placed to sleep on their backs.** The only way that an exception to this policy will be made is if written documentation is provided from a physician indicating that the child must be placed on his or her stomach for sleep due to medical necessity.

VEHICLE RESTRAINT FOR CHILDREN POLICY

Florida law requires that children be placed in appropriate vehicle restraints (car seats, etc.) when transported in an automobile. We strongly encourage all parents to abide by this law for the safety of their children. Our staff members have often been placed in an awkward position when witnessing children arriving or departing unrestrained in a private vehicle. To avoid unpleasant confrontations and ensure the safety of all children, our staff members have been instructed to telephone the Florida Highway Patrol Buckle Up Hotline when they see a child arriving at or departing from a center not restrained as required by law.

OUTSIDE PLAY POLICY

We firmly believe in the importance of outside play. It is agency policy that children have outside playtime daily. Outside time is important to every child's development and licensing regulations and program standards require us to offer children this opportunity. Our classroom schedules reflect the times when each classroom will be outside. Children will not be outside for longer than 1 hour at a time. You will need to dress your children appropriately for outside play-jackets, hats, etc. Children will not play outside in inclement weather i.e. rain, thunder, when the National Weather Service has issued a heat advisory or other health alerts, or if it is under 40 degrees. In order to provide adequate staff supervision for all the children, we are not able to keep some children inside while the rest go out. If a child is too ill to go outside, he or she is probably too ill to be at the center. Exceptions will be made only for children who have a note from an appropriate health care provider stating that the child has a medical condition that prevents him or her from being outside.

ENTRANCE INFORMATION

ENROLLMENT APPLICATION

An information packet must be filled out when a child is enrolled at the Dick Howser Center and is kept in each child's central file folder. Parents who pay full tuition (private pay) are charged a registration fee. Please see the Program Director for specific amounts.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Included in the enrollment application is an Emergency Information form. This form lists your contact information, as well as contact information for others authorized to pick up your children. **It is very important that this information remain current.** Please be sure to let your child's teacher or the Program Director know when any information (phone numbers, addresses, etc.) needs to be updated. If this information is not kept current, your child may not be allowed to attend until this information is updated.

HEALTH RECORD

Before a child may begin attending a center, we must have a current Shot Record (HRS form 680—blue form) and a current Physical Record (HRS form 3040—yellow form) on file. The physical must be updated every two years.

HOURS OF OPERATION

The hours of operation vary for the several different early intervention, education, and childcare programs offered by our centers. Some examples are:

- Full day childcare, through private tuition and subsidized care, is offered from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM.
- Hours for Voluntary Pre- Kindergarten are from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM

TRANSPORTATION

The Dick Howser Center does **NOT** provide any transportation to or from our centers. Children enrolled in some of our programs may be eligible for transportation services provided by the school system or Medicaid. Program Directors may help coordinate and setup this transportation for you, but we do not provide it. Parents/guardians will be responsible for any equipment needed for this transportation, as well as arranging the pick-up and drop-off destinations. Any changes to the arrangements will be solely the responsibility of the parent. Parents will need to notify these agencies directly with changes. Should a child be returned to a center by transportation, late fees will be assessed. Please refer any questions you have about specific transportation available in your area to the Program Director.

PARENT/GUARDIAN DAILY DUTIES

SIGN IN / OUT SHEET

The Department of Children and Families requires that parents sign their children in and out each day. This also helps us keep track of the number of children who are on our premises. The Program Director will show you where the sign-out sheet for your child's class is located. We appreciate your taking a little extra time to sign your child in and out each day.

BULLETIN / PARENT BOARD AREAS

Please take a few minutes to read the bulletin board(s) or visit the parent areas at the centers. You will find important information about fund-raisers, special events, and other activities. You will also find helpful parenting information and resources. Center staff can help you locate the specific areas in each center.

PICK-UP OF CHILDREN

Parents, guardians or other authorized persons (over 18 years of age) must come into the building to pick up the child. They are responsible for ensuring that the child is escorted to the vehicle and safely secured within the vehicle. When a child is picked up by a transportation service (i.e., van or bus), either the bus aide or a teacher will escort the child to the vehicle and ensure that he or she is safely secured within the vehicle. Families must notify the center if someone *other than* a parent or legal guardian needs to pick a child up. **Children will not be released into the custody of unauthorized individuals. Photo ID will be required when individuals who are not personally known to the staff are picking up children.** You may add and delete authorized persons to your emergency contact form at any time.

CLOTHING

Please dress your child appropriately for the season. You should send a complete change of clothes with your child in a labeled bag each day---shorts/pants, shirt, socks, and underwear. With regard to footwear, tennis shoes are great! However, ***sandals and flip-flops are discouraged for matters of safety.*** Remember, your child will PLAY! This means they will get messy! We will make every effort to minimize stains, but they do happen. We will not reimburse or replace stained clothes, so please keep the best clothes at home.

DIAPERS

Centers do not provide diapers! If your child needs diapers or pull-ups, you should send an adequate supply each day. An adequate supply is usually 3 to 5 diapers or pull-ups per day. Extras will be stored or sent home daily. You will be contacted, and asked to bring more diapers/pull-ups into the center right away, if your child does not have enough to get through the day. So we ask that you please check your child's supply regularly so this doesn't happen.

TOYS FROM HOME

Please do not let your child bring toys from home unless it is at the request of the teacher for a special occasion. It often causes problems when other children want to play with them! It is also very hard for us to keep track of personal toys and we will not be held responsible for lost or broken items.

LATE PICK-UP AND FEES

Our staff scheduling is based on the hours of operation of the program *or* childcare option in which a child is enrolled. It is very difficult for us to provide unexpected staff coverage when children are not picked up on time. We also have to pay overtime to our staff members who must stay later than their scheduled work shift. For these reasons, **late fees of \$1 per minute will be charged.** (Please remember that this fee goes into effect when your child's program hours are over, not necessarily when the center closes.)

If a child is not picked up, we will make every effort to locate the parents or the other individuals who are listed as emergency contacts. If the parents or other persons listed as emergency

contacts cannot be located, and when continued care by Dick Howser Center Staff members is not possible, the local Police or Sheriff's Department will be notified. If this becomes necessary, staff members will provide the responding law enforcement officer with the child's emergency and authorize pick-up information so that law enforcement officials can continue efforts to reach someone. This would be the option of *last resort* and we sincerely hope that it will never be necessary. **If a child is picked up late more than two (2) times, this will be considered grounds for termination of child care services.**

OPEN DOOR POLICY

Parents are allowed access to their children and their teachers at any time during normal hours of operation. This open door policy also applies to all individuals approved by parents.

ILLNESS AND MEDICATION POLICIES

SENDING CHILDREN HOME

Any child who is ill must be picked up from school as soon as possible (within 1 hour maximum). Parents will be called to pick-up children who exhibit signs of illness such as..... a fever of 101 degrees or higher, vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, or who have suspected untreated infectious conditions such as ringworm, pink eye, lice or impetigo.

RETURNING TO THE CENTER

Children who are sent home due to illness must be symptom free for twenty-four (24) hours before returning to school. Children whose illness requires treatment by medication must have taken the medication for 24 hours prior to returning to school. Children sent home with suspected infectious conditions must have a doctor's note of clearance before they can return to the center. Please do not put your child's teacher or the Program Director on the spot by requesting exceptions to this policy. We cannot put the other children or our staff at risk of becoming ill. Please make sure you have an alternative person(s) available to pick-up your child if you are unavailable.

MEDICATION

In *most* of our programs, we will administer medication under the following conditions: Parents must complete the necessary form for the administration of any type of medication. See your child's teacher to sign up for administration of any medications.

- Specific written instructions (regarding times, dosages, beginning and ending dates, and any other instructions) must be provided.
- All prescription medications must be sent to school in the original containers with a pharmacy label containing the child's name and clear instructions regarding dosages and times.
- Non-prescription medications such as topical ointments (Neosporin, Desitin, etc), cough syrups (Benedryl, etc.), and pain relievers (Tylenol, etc.) must also be in original containers and must have the child's name written on the container.

Medication for Early Head Start and Head Start Children: Because of the federal laws governing these programs, the following must be followed in regards to medication

administration. These procedures apply to all children enrolled in Early Head Start or Head Start programs, including those who ride a bus or van to school:

- Administration of any medication, prescription or nonprescription (e.g., Neosporin, Desitin, Tylenol, etc.), must be accompanied by authorization of a physician or other person legally authorized to prescribe medication.
- Such authorization must include instructions for the dose, frequency, and method to be used (e.g., before meals, tilting head, etc.) and the length of time the medication must be given. It must be in writing, (a signed note from a health care professional or prescription label).
- Requests for the administration of all medication must be made on approved authorization forms, available from your child’s caregiver.
- **Old Medication/Expired Medication:** Old or expired medication will not be given to a child and will be returned to the parent or guardian. We are not authorized to dispose of any medication.

CENTER CLOSURES

HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

The Dick Howser Center observes the following holidays. All centers will be closed on these days:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| New Years Day | Labor Day |
| Martin Luther King, Mr.’s Birthday | Veteran’s Day |
| Good Friday | Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday |
| Memorial Day | December 24th through December 31st |
| Independence Day | |

If a holiday falls on a Saturday, the preceding Friday will be observed. If a holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday will be observed.

SCHOOL SYSTEM SCHEDULE

At the Leon Center, Leon County Schools Exceptional Student Education services are provided in accordance with the public school system schedule. (If your child is in a Leon County Public School placement, ask his or her teacher for a schedule.) When Leon County Schools are closed, teachers who work at these centers through the school system are not present. If you do not pay before and after school tuition, your child may not attend these days.

STAFF TRAINING DAYS

Each center will have at least two (2) Teacher Training Days per year. On these days, teachers will participate in staff development, training and educational workshops. Your Program Director will provide you a 30-day written notice as these days are planned.

EMERGENCY CLOSING

At times, emergencies can disrupt operations and may require the closing of Dick Howser Center facilities, programs, offices, and/or child development centers. In the event of severe weather or other natural disasters, the Dick Howser Center follows the general policy of closing child

development centers when the local public school system closes or when recommended by local emergency management officials. However, circumstances may warrant that the agency close at a different time. The decision to close a center will be made only by the Executive Director, or another designated member of management. In the event that an emergency closing is necessary, parents or individuals designated as emergency contacts will be called and asked to pick-up children. In the event that such an emergency occurs during a time that is outside the center's normal hours of operation, every effort will be made to notify parents through broadcasts on local television stations or by any other available means.

FEES AND PAYMENTS

PAYMENTS

Payments can be mailed or dropped off to the Administrative Office at this address:

**Dick Howser Center
Attn: Administrative Office
240 Mabry Street
Tallahassee, FL 32304**

Credit card payments can be taken at the Administrative Office or by calling the Administrative Office at (850) 574-3906 between the hours of 8:30 to 5:30 p.m.

When mailing your payment, please be sure to indicate your child's first and last name on your check or money order. This helps to ensure accuracy in posting payments to the correct account. Mailed payments must be **received** on or before the 5th of the month to avoid the \$25.00 late fee.

Tuition payments may also be made at the centers by giving check, money order or credit card to the Program Director or Assistant Director. **We cannot accept cash.** Please keep all of your receipts.

LATE PAYMENT FEES

Tuition and parent fees are due *on or before* the first day of each month. We depend on prompt payment of tuition in order to pay our staff salaries and meet our operating expenses. **A \$25 late payment fee will be charged for any tuition that is paid after the 5th of the month. If Tuition has not been paid by the 10th of the month services will be suspended.**

LATE PICK UP FEES

If you pick your child up after 6:00 PM a late fee will be charged. Late fees are \$1.00 per minute per child. If your child is picked up late more than two times you may be asked to withdraw your child from the center.

TUITION DISCOUNTS

"NO" tuition discounts are given for family vacations, holidays or center closures. Please refer to the center closure section of the handbook for further information.

QUESTIONS REGARDING TUITION

If you have any concerns regarding payment of tuition, contact the Center Coordinator at (850) 671-3569.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

When a problem cannot be resolved through informal means such as meetings with staff members (classroom personnel, the Program Director, or other management staff), please be advised that the following procedure exists for filing a formal complaint or grievance:

Formal complaints or grievances regarding this agency's alleged non-compliance with applicable civil or human rights laws, or regarding this agency's delivery of services should be directed in writing to:

**Executive Director
The Dick Howser Center for Childhood Services, Inc.
240 Mabry Street
Tallahassee, FL 32304**

Within seven days of receiving a written complaint or grievance, the Executive Director will respond to the complaint in writing and a meeting to attempt resolution will be held with the complaining party. If the resolution of the complaint is unsatisfactory to the complainant, a written request should be made for review by the Board of Directors, which will act as a Grievance Committee. This request should be directed to:

**Chairman of the Board of Directors
The Dick Howser Center for Childhood Services, Inc.
240 Mabry Street
Tallahassee, FL 32304**

Within fifteen days (15) of receiving the complaint, the Board of Directors will respond in writing and a meeting for attempted resolution will be held with the complaining party. **The Executive Director may also be reached by telephone at (850) 574-3906.**