



FAMILY HANDBOOK

2018-2019

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I. About Us, History and Philosophy

A. About Us

Middle Earth Child Development Center, Inc., founded as Middle Earth Day Care Center, Inc., was formed by students at the University of Oklahoma to provide low cost child care with a humanistic atmosphere. This low cost care was made possible through a co-operative system in which families could volunteer to spend a few hours per week in the classroom or in making improvements to the building to offset part of the cost of their child's care. The social climate of the 60's and the emerging feminist movement contributed the initial momentum; the University of Oklahoma Student Association provided the initial funds; and in February 1971 the school opened with 39 children, 4 full time staff members, and 3 student assistants. Michael Langenbach, PhD was the founding University of Oklahoma faculty advisor for Middle Earth and the president of Middle Earth's Board of Directors for over 18 years.

Today Middle Earth serves the community as a 501(c)(3), non-profit child development center, governed by our families through our Board of Directors.

Program Purpose: Children have the right to grow up with a positive self-image, a love of learning and a respect for all. Parents have a right to earn a living or further their education, secure in the knowledge that quality child development services are available.

It is our mission at Middle Earth, to provide high-quality non-profit child development services that incorporate developmentally appropriate activities through play. We are dedicated to maintaining standards of accessibility and accountability to ensure that parents, children and the community at large are best served.

B. Family Involvement

In 1971, the families of our children were University of Oklahoma students, many of whom, volunteered their time and imagination to make Middle Earth a wonderful place for children to spend their day. Today our families represent and include working students, OU faculty and staff, and individuals from the community at large. The pace and complexity of our lives has increased, as the school has grown substantially. Gradually fewer and fewer families have been available to work in our classrooms or participate in making improvements. Still, family involvement is crucial to make Middle Earth the best possible place for our children to be when they cannot be at home.

There are many ways for families to become involved at Middle Earth. Some of the best ways to support your children are to:

- Take an interest in what the children share regarding the activities of the day.
- Be familiar with the lesson plans which are posted for families to see and to provide a basis for discussing the child's daily activities.
- Read the periodic school newsletter, which will provide more information about what is going on at Middle Earth.
- Visit the child's class to share their expertise on interesting careers, experiences, or hobbies.
- Fill a position on the Middle Earth Board of Directors and serve on committees to improve Middle Earth.
- Donate financially, or with time and/or materials as we continually work to improve the Center... and remember your donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law!

C. Organizational Structure

Middle Earth is a 501c3, non-profit, licensed by the State of Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Middle Earth has been continuously licensed since 1971 and continues to strive for excellence. A full copy of Middle Earth by-laws is always available for review. The day-to-day operations of Middle Earth are conducted through the dedication and hard work of approximately 40 full time and part time staff.

Board of Directors

Middle Earth is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of parents, staff, professionals, and other members of the community. The Board of Directors is fundamentally a policy making body that issues the

authority to administer Middle Earth Child Development Center, Inc. Implementing and executing policy set by the Board will be the responsibility of the Executive Director.

The Board shall assume all financial responsibility for Middle Earth Child Development, Inc. The Board is responsible for the hiring and dismissal of the Executive Director. The Executive Director is responsible for the initial hiring, dismissal and evaluation of all personnel. The Executive Director attends all Board meetings as a non-voting member. The Board holds regularly scheduled meetings every month. Meeting dates and agendas are posted at the front desk. Please contact the Executive Director if you would like to be added to the agenda.

Board Committees

- **Executive Committee:** The Executive Committee is made up of Board of Directors Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and other *ex officio* positions as deemed necessary by the Board.
- **Finance Committee:** The Finance Committee is made up of Board of Directors Treasurer and at least two other members. Membership is not limited to Board members.
- **Governance Committee:** The Governance Committee Chair along with at least two other committee members will solicit nominees and present candidates to the Board of Directors for their consideration and vote. The Governance Committee will develop and implement guidelines for all Board members
- **Family Leadership Committee:** The Family Leadership Committee provides families an opportunity to participate in organizational and informational ways, working closely with the Administration and the Board of Directors to serve the children and teachers through special events and ongoing projects. This is an open committee and welcomes family participation throughout the year. All families will be notified as to when the committee will meet.

For more information on these committees, please contact the Executive Director or Board Chair.

D. Programs

Middle Earth provides a full day program from 7:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., Monday through Friday, for children ages 6 weeks through Pre-Kindergarten. In addition, our “Big Kids” program is available for school age children

on a more limited basis during public school holidays and summer months.

While physical care and safety is our first consideration, providing for the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of each child is an important part of program planning at Middle Earth. The curriculum provided by the Middle Earth staff is designed to be developmentally appropriate for each age level. Focused Portfolios allow for curriculum specific to children of differing abilities. Middle Earth cooperates with and supports implementation of Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) and Individualized Educational Plans (IEP). If you have a concern about your child’s development, please speak to the teacher or a member of the Administrative Team. Middle Earth will assist families in finding resources that might assess your child’s needs. We will gladly work with scheduled supportive services, if applicable, on behalf of your child.

Currently, there are 10 regular classrooms for children age 6 weeks through Pre-Kindergarten. Classrooms are usually, but not always, homogeneous by age. Developmental readiness is also a consideration when determining when to move a child up to the next class and all attempts are made to move children in small peer groups.

Program activities are planned to provide children with choices, allowing for a wide range of abilities and interests in arts and crafts, fine arts, science, music, storytelling, dramatic play, block play and building, cooking, math and reading readiness, manipulatives, creative movement, and large motor play. Activities are scheduled to provide a comfortable balance, alternating between structured and unstructured activities and allowing for plenty of time for relaxation.

Middle Earth children enjoy opportunities for indoor and outdoor play daily. Our spacious playground is located on the south and east sides of the building. Younger and older children enjoy their own areas of the playground. Our large indoor play space provides the children with ample room to run, jump and play.

In all classes at Middle Earth, we maintain an atmosphere of trust, playfulness and acceptance of your child’s individuality. We are dedicated to providing developmentally appropriate activities designed to help your child learn and grow. We aim to promote positive self-esteem through an emphasis of your child’s intrinsic value, strengths and talents.

Classroom Ratios

Middle Earth exceeds the minimal requirements for teacher and student ratios as recommended by DHS. These minimal requirements are posted near our Family Information bulletin board and within each classroom. Staffing patterns and classroom assistance are established according to the needs of each age group.

Sample Schedule

- Arrival/Breakfast
- Outdoor play
- Small group/large group
- Lunch
- Nap
- Snack
- Small group/large group
- Clean-up
- Departure

E. Transition to Kindergarten

Middle Earth partners with the Norman Public School system, serving as a satellite location, offering an extended day Pre-Kindergarten program for Middle Earth children. Those in the Pre-K before school care program can begin their day in the Detectives classroom at 7:00 am and join the Norman Public School teacher in the Pre-K classroom at 7:40 am. Their day in the Pre-K classroom includes breakfast, lunch and nap.

Norman Public Schools Pre-Kindergarten program fosters all areas of development: intellectual, language, physical and social, emotional within an active and appropriate early childhood environment. The Pre-Kindergarten structure and routine help students develop school behaviors that support successful learning in following years, including working with others in small groups, listening as another is speaking, making choices, taking turns, problem solving and building peer relationships. Students enrolled in the Pre-K after school care program will remain in the Pre-K classroom under the care of Middle Earth staff from 3:05 pm through 6 pm, with an afternoon filled with activities meant to further your child's education.

II. Enrollment and Attendance Policies

A. Enrollment Policy

A child is considered enrolled when the following steps are completed:

- \$25.00/student registration fee paid (non-refundable)
- \$150.00/family enrollment fee (non-refundable)
- First tuition payment is made
- Completed enrollment packet is submitted
- Gradual and start dates are determined
- Court documents regarding custody or visitation rights are provided
- Immunization records are provided

Upon enrollment, each family will receive a welcome packet specific to the child's classroom.

Gradual Adjustment

In order to provide a comfortable beginning at Middle Earth, we offer a gradual adjustment period for new children and their families. This adjustment typically consists of a three-day orientation in which the child is gradually introduced to the classroom and the presence of an adult family member is gradually decreased. Graduals are 9:00-11:00.

- Day 1: Family and child visit the classroom and participate in activities.
- Day 2: Child visits classroom. Family stays for the first hour, then leaves and returns at the end of the period.
- Day 3: Family leaves child for gradual period. Family reviews Family Handbook with Director, addressing any questions.

There is no additional charge for these three days if the deposit has been paid and the child has been officially enrolled in the Center.

Transition to New Classrooms

When staff identifies a child's readiness to move to the next class, families are involved in establishing this transition. Our goal is to provide the child's family with 2 weeks' notice. Families will then have the opportunity to visit with both the sending and the receiving teachers. The Administrative Team will sign the initial paperwork, followed by the sending teacher and then the receiving teacher. The paperwork will then be presented to the family for their final signature along with a welcome packet of information from the receiving teacher. Staff members are always available to consult with families who may have questions or concerns regarding their child's transition to the new class.

Withdrawal Procedure

Families shall notify the Center's office in writing by completing a Middle Earth Withdrawal Form, two weeks prior to the permanent withdrawal of the child from the Center. Clients who have withdrawn or whose enrollment has been terminated who wish to return to Middle Earth must formally re-enroll.

B. Financial Policies

Middle Earth recognizes and believes that families have the right to earn a living or further their education secure in the knowledge that quality child development services are available and accessible.

Payment options include:

- **Private Pay:** We research the market value of our services to be sure our private pay tuition rates are comparable to other providers in our area.
- **Subsidy from the Department of Human Services:** We accept qualified individuals who receive support for tuition from the State of Oklahoma.
- **Multiple children discount:** Families enrolling more than one child at the Center will receive a 10% discount for each subsequent child enrolled at Middle Earth. The discount will be applied to the lower tuition rates.

Our 501(c)(3) non-profit status ensures that:

- We provide services without financial gain to our members.
- We abide by all relevant state and federal laws.
- We maintain financial sustainability of the organization and its child development services.

Tuition

Middle Earth is a non-profit child development center. Tuition is applied directly to the costs of providing the best possible care for the children. Tuition rates, determined by the Board of Directors and based on an annual budget, are kept as low as possible while still maintaining the high standards of care we require for the children. The Board of Directors compares community rates and adjusts tuition when applicable. Families are given due notice regarding tuition increases. The current fee rate is posted on the payment box near Center's entry.

Tuition is due in advance and may be paid monthly (due on the 1st of each month) or weekly (due on the first day of each week). No discount is made due to vacation, holidays, illness, or any other reason. Timely payment of full tuition is required to hold a place for your child.

Payment is also due in advance for school age children who participate in the "Big Kids" program on those days during the school year when Norman Public Schools are closed. Space for children on these days must be reserved in advance.

Enrollment Fee

An enrollment fee of \$150.00 per family is required at the time of enrollment. An enrollment fee is also required of DHS clients and to hold a place for a child in the summer "Big Kids" program.

Annual Enrollment Renewal Fee

An annual enrollment renewal fee of \$100 per family will be administered on April 1 of each year a family is enrolled at Middle Earth. Families who qualify for subsidized tuition through DHS, Tribal contracts, or are Staff of Middle Earth will pay \$25 annually. The fee will apply to any family who has been enrolled six months or longer.

Vacations

No credit toward tuition is granted when a child is absent for vacation or illness. Full tuition is required to hold a place for your child. Middle Earth children who elect to leave the Center for the summer, but who intend to return in the fall, must leave a non-refundable sabbatical fee of \$25 per month/per child, due at the time of notification, on account to receive first priority over new applicants for available openings at the end of the summer. A place for the returning child cannot be guaranteed. If you would like to guarantee enrollment for your child through an extended sabbatical, full tuition is due for the entire sabbatical period.

Late Payment Policy

A late fee of \$25.00 will be assessed and added to the tuition due when the tuition payment is not received within 5 working days of its due date.

In the event that the family allows their payment to lapse for a maximum of ten working days, the child/children will not be accepted by the Center and their position may be filled by a child(ren) from our waiting list.

C. Termination of Services

We attempt to meet the individual needs of each child as well as the needs of the group. If we cannot meet your child's needs or if we cannot meet the group's needs, we will not be able to care for your child. Services can be terminated for the following reasons:

- Non payment of tuition
- Family does not cooperate with Middle Earth policies and procedures
- After appropriate evaluation by Middle Earth staff, Early Childhood Education specialists and the family, it is decided that another educational setting would be more appropriate to meet the special needs of the child, such as chronic harmful behaviors or specific services identified to be helpful for the child's development which Middle Earth cannot provide.

D. Arrival & Departure

An adult must accompany children arriving at Middle Earth into the classroom. It is very important that a child be signed in and out every day. If you have business to conduct with the office, please do so after situating your child in his/her classroom. Supporting relationships with our families is a top priority. There should be no cell phone use during arrival and departure. Always communicate with the teachers if you have a health concern about your child. The teacher must be made aware of the child's arrival and departure. Children must not be released in the parking lot or at the front door.

To Ensure a Safer, Child-Friendly Campus

- Enter and exit the Center through main front doors. This allows us to know who is in the building at all times.
- Middle Earth is a non-smoking facility, inside and out. This includes the parking lot, on the sidewalks and the playground area.
- No cell phone use during drop off and pick up at Middle Earth. Your child(ren) need your attention as you bring them in and pick them up each day.
- Middle Earth will call Norman Police Department to report any suspicious individual or suspicious vehicle on or near the premises if there is a concern regarding the safety of the children.
- Firearms are only allowed on the premises by those public officials who have authority to carry them. Concealed weapons of any type are not allowed on the Middle Earth premises.

Arrival Considerations

- Our handicap parking spaces are reserved exclusively for those families with a handicap-parking permit. Please be respectful of this law.

- If you arrive before the opening time of the day, please wait with your child until 7:00 A.M. when your child's teacher is available to receive students.
- When your child is unable to attend or will be arriving late (after 10 A.M.), please notify the office. Accounting for all the children is important for the teacher's lesson plans and meal preparation for the day.
- Breakfast is served promptly at 8:15 A.M. Please have your child here BEFORE 8:00 A.M. so they may transition easily into the classroom and prepare for breakfast. Late arrivals are disruptive to the classroom. If you arrive after 8:40 A.M., and the kitchen still has food, you may request a serving and sit with your child while they eat in the break room.
- Please do not bring your child to the Center during naptime unless you have made prior arrangements with the office.

Departure Considerations

- When children are leaving the Center, an adult must sign them out. No child will be allowed to go to the parking lot unaccompanied.
- If children are to be picked up by someone other than their family member, the person should report directly to the office upon arrival. The person must be listed on the Child's Information Form in the office and will be required to show photo identification if he/she is unknown to the Center.
- Only parents or legal guardians can name individuals who have permission to pick up a child. If you are sending someone to pick up your child who is not on your Child's Information Form, you must personally notify the office before we will release your child. If you wish this individual to have permanent status on your pick-up list, then please update your child's form. The adult picking up the child must present valid photo identification and must be at least 16 years old.
- Please do not pick up your child from the Center during naptime unless it is absolutely necessary.

Late Pick-Up Fee

The Center closes at 6:00 P.M. Please ensure that your child(ren) is picked up by that time, as teachers are not scheduled to work beyond that time. In the event that a child is not picked up by 6:00 P.M., a late fee of \$1.00 per minute per family will be charged upon your arrival. This fee should be paid to the attending staff member before you leave the Center.

E. Schedule of Operation

Middle Earth Child Development Center is open 7:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. Children will not be accepted before 7:00 A.M. and must be picked up by 6:00 P.M. The Center operates year round and is closed only on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Memorial Day
- Labor Day
- Independence Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the days before and after
- One or two days at Christmas, depending on the calendar
- Professional Development Days – two days before Norman Public Schools begin

Special events are scheduled throughout the year. You will be notified of these opportunities through notices, school newsletters and postings at the front desk.

F. Closures for Inclement Weather

Middle Earth will close if it is deemed unsafe for staff and families to travel. We do not necessarily follow the public school schedule. Our Board Chair and Executive Director will take into consideration the road conditions, travel advisories, area schools and business openings or closings when making a decision regarding our hours of operation. We announce any change in our school's schedule of operation (including early closures or late openings) by email, Middle Earth's Facebook page and Middle Earth's website.

III. Classroom Policies and Procedures

A. Items to be Brought to School

Every child will be assigned a place in which to keep their personal belongings. Your child will need the following items brought to the Center:

- At least one change of clothing, including socks and underclothing
- Extra pair of tennis shoes if possible
- A sufficient number of extra diapers/training pants (younger children)
- Two refill packs of wipes at the beginning of each month
- A small naptime blanket or small stuffed animal if needed for security

- Gallon size bags for the return of soiled clothing/items

Appropriate Clothing

During the course of each day, children will be involved in active exploration and play. Many kinds of materials and equipment will be available. Children should wear clothing that is appropriate for active play. We therefore will not guarantee the condition of children's clothing and accessories. The following guideline should help you and your child choose suitable clothing:

- Wear clothing that is permitted to get messy or dirty.
- Clothing should be easy for the child to put on and take off when using the toilet.
- Clothing should be loose enough to allow free movement without being so loose that it becomes entangled in the equipment.
- Clothing should be suited to the weather. Wearing layers of clothing may be most appropriate.

Special attention to clothing and footwear will protect your child from injuries on the playground. Rubber soled shoes and shoes that fit securely on your child's feet help to prevent falls when they run and climb. We request that you do not send your child in flip-flop shoes. We constantly survey our playground and other equipment to identify and correct potential hazards, but your attention to these matters will increase your child's safety.

As children strive for independence in toileting and dressing, choose clothes that are easy for the child to remove, replace, and fasten. Clothing that is soiled with body fluids while here at the Center cannot be rinsed out or laundered. We will enclose these items in a plastic bag for you to take home.

At school, smocks are provided for painting, water play, and similar activities; however, smocks do not always prevent accidental stains on clothing.

Dress your child in shoes that permit running, climbing, and balancing. Gross motor development is a major task of early childhood. Western boots, flip-flops, and open toed shoes may inhibit a child's development of gross motor skills.

Fall

Jacket or sweatshirt
Rubber boots
Rain jacket

Winter

Winter coat
Hats/scarf/gloves or mittens
Boots
Thick socks

Spring

Jacket or sweatshirt
Rubber boots
Rain jacket

Summer

Wide brimmed sun hat
Sunglasses

B. Weather/Outside Considerations

Children are expected to participate in outdoor play with their class each day. Outdoor play will take place each morning and afternoon for short periods of time unless the weather is determined to be detrimental to health and safety. Children should be dressed appropriately for changing weather conditions.

The children play outside every day the temperature will allow and it is not too windy, hot, rainy or extremely muddy. All children will go outside when the temperature is above 40 degrees. When the temperature falls below 40 degrees the length of time for outside play is reduced depending on the age group. Each classroom will follow the temperature guideline posted when determining how long they will play outside. Outdoor play will not take place if the weather is determined to be detrimental to health and safety (i.e. electrical storms, excessive heat index above 100 degrees F, or wind chill below 0 degrees F). If children are too ill to play outside for even a short period of time during cool weather, they are too ill to be at school.

Proper clothing must be provided for outside play. This includes warmer clothes, coats, hats, and mittens during the winter; jackets or sweaters and a head covering during the spring and fall, when it tends to be cool and windy in the mornings and late afternoons.

Sunscreen

Sunscreen is applied two times a day during the summer months. Middle Earth provides Babyganics Mineral-Based Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 50+, chosen for its UVA/UVB protection, non-allergenic and tear free properties, without the use of PABA, phthalates, parabens, fragrances or nano-particles.

C. Rest/Nap Time

Each child will have the opportunity to rest quietly or take a nap on a cot, during the early part of the afternoon. Children may bring a small pillow and/or blanket and a soft sleep toy such as a doll or stuffed animal, to sleep/rest with on their cots. The cot sheets are provided by Middle Earth and are washed weekly. Children are not forced to sleep nor will we prevent them from sleeping. Please know that the children play hard and have very full, rich days at Middle Earth and the afternoon rest time

is much needed. All children are expected to remain quiet so not to disturb the others who are sleeping.

D. Behavior & Guidance

A teacher's role is to help each child understand realistic expectations, the consequences associated with their actions and to use this knowledge for making responsible choices and decisions. We are there to be a guide for your child and to help them learn and grow on a daily basis. Every behavioral challenge can be turned into a learning situation for each child. We encourage children to be responsible for their actions. At Middle Earth, discipline is not a "punishment", but rather a means of guiding children to help them develop the personal skills needed to live as positive, productive individuals.

Some of our guidance techniques include:

- **Be Observant and Available:** Acknowledging positive behavior is the single most effective discipline method. Children need to know what they are doing well. Behavior, which is reinforced, is most likely to be repeated. Teachers are encouraged to demonstrate the behavior, which they want children to learn. Many behavior challenges can be diffused or minimized by a teacher's ability to interact with the children during play, or simply to physically move closer to an escalating situation. A teacher's demeanor and behavior makes a tremendous difference.
- **Clear Expectations & Logical Consequences:** Children need clear expectations and logical consequences in order to build a trusting foundation for life and to make sense of their world. By applying logical consequences to behavior, children can see the result of the choices they make. For example, if the child drew on a table he would be directed to clean the table and then select another place to work. When he could properly use the markers he would be allowed to select that activity again.
- **Redirection:** When a discipline issue arises, it is helpful to direct the child's attention to another activity. This technique is especially good with the young child who has a short attention span. Sometimes the behavior displayed by the child is not "wrong". It is just occurring in an inappropriate place or time. For example: A child who is playing in the sink can be redirected into a clean-up activity with sponges. Sometimes when a problem arises with a child and emotions are high, the child may need to leave the activity/area for a short period of time to calm down. The teacher discusses the incident or

situation with the child and helps him/her arrive at alternative ways of solving the problem.

- **Conflict Resolution:** Techniques used to assist children must be modified for the appropriate ages of the children. With staff guidance, we encourage children to talk to each other about the confrontation. The teacher encourages each child to explain the situation while the other one listens. The teacher then asks the children to suggest solutions that would be acceptable to both. For example, “If I understand this correctly, you want that car but Jimmy is playing with it now.” “Is that right, George?” “Jimmy what can you do about this?”

It is our policy to resolve conflict without verbal or physical abuse. Similarly, we cannot allow others (including children or their families) to use verbal or physical abuse within the school property. For this reason, we also expect interactions between family and staff members remain at a respectful level. Should a family member display an inability to control himself/herself, we reserve the right to dismiss him/her from the program.

Depending on the ages and circumstances involved, additional strategies may include:

- Ensuring that the environment provides enough challenging activities
- Carefully observing the involved child(ren) to identify precipitating events and prevent recurrences
- Maintaining a log to track when the behavior occurs
- Conferences with family to discuss the child(ren)’s actions at home, family discipline techniques, search for outside resources, etc.

Chronic Behaviors

Unfortunately, chronic behaviors that are harmful to other children do occur. Such behaviors may include the following: biting, pinching, pushing, punching/hitting. The teachers and administrative team will work with the family if the child is exhibiting these behaviors. However, we must set some guidelines in order to protect the other children.

Procedure for termination of services related to chronic behaviors:

While we hope this policy will never have to be implemented, Middle Earth policy permits the permanent dismissal of students from the Center in extreme cases. Family conferences will always precede

any such action. The following course of action will be followed:

- Behaviors that are disruptive or harmful will warrant an Incident Report. This report will require a parent signature.
- Conferences will be scheduled with parents if particular problems occur. If a child’s behavior consistently endangers the safety of the children around him/her, then the Director has the right, after meeting with the parents and documenting behavior problems and interventions, to terminate child care services for that particular child.
- In the event the family refuses to attend a conference, the child will be dismissed from Middle Earth.
- If no improvement is apparent after a probationary period and the agreed upon action plan, the family will be notified to remove their child from the center.
- After notification, families have the right to appeal this decision within one week by writing the Chair of the Middle Earth Board of Directors.
- A special meeting of the Board will be called to discuss the appeal. The decision of the Board is final.
- The process as stated above for termination of services may be modified to reflect immediate termination of services in extreme cases.

Please note: Additional policies regarding termination of services can be found on pg. 7.

E. Family & Teacher Communication

Communication between home and the Center is vital for the optimal progress of your child. Please let the teacher know if there are special circumstances occurring at home that may affect your child’s behavior or emotional well-being. It is very helpful to know about moves, travels of family members, long-term visitors to your home, marital discord, or the illness or death of any loved one. Extra assurances and attention from all adults may be needed at that time.

Each classroom will establish their methods of communication with families regarding their child. Through such methods as classroom notes, journals, daily sheets, portfolios, folders, developmental assessments or conferences, families and teachers will communicate on behalf of the child’s classroom experience and their development. Daily sheets with information such as diaper changes, naps, eating habits, etc will be sent home daily for the younger children. All classes hold fall and spring family/teacher conferences.

Family/teacher conferences may be requested at any time to discuss a concern or share information.

Informational Bulletin Boards and newsletters help keep families informed about special Center events, classroom news and policies.

Middle Earth Staff will make every attempt to communicate in a timely manner with families regarding information directly related to the safety, security and well-being of their child(ren). A member of the Administrative Team will be the primary point of contact should the Executive Director be engaged and otherwise unavailable for immediate communication.

F. Maintaining Confidentiality

Teachers and staff will not discuss private and confidential information regarding the programs, fellow employees, families, or children with anyone outside of Middle Earth. Teachers and staff will also not discuss your child's development or situation with any other parents in the program. The only exception to this is authorized personnel on a need to know basis, particularly as it relates to mandated reporting laws.

G. Reporting of Child Abuse

Middle Earth staff is required by Oklahoma law and federal law to report any suspected evidence of physical, mental, or sexual abuse or child neglect to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Welfare. DHS will determine if an investigation is warranted.

As we partner with families in the care of all the children, Middle Earth Administration requests that you bring to our attention if you suspect evidence of physical, mental, or sexual abuse or child neglect regarding our staff.

H. Grievance Policy/Procedure

Families are asked to speak with their child's teacher if they have a concern. If the concern cannot be or is not met by the teacher, the concern should be taken to the Executive Director. The Executive Director will set a conference with the family and teachers to address the family's concerns. Our goal is to meet the needs of our children and their family.

If the Executive Director cannot or does not address the concern to the satisfaction of the family, then they should request to meet with the Board of Directors for consideration. Grievances not directly related to your child's classroom should be taken to the Executive Director first.

I. Nutrition

Meals & Snacks

Middle Earth believes that our meals help develop the comfort of a home environment. Meals and snacks at Middle Earth are prepared with an emphasis on fresh food, rather than processed or packaged food. The meals, which surpass Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) requirements, provide the children with a variety of foods in reasonably unlimited quantities. Each month, menus are posted on the family information bulletin board and sent home for your convenience.

Several children and usually at least one adult share meals and snacks together at each table. Table manners are encouraged and expected at a developmentally appropriate level for each child. Families are invited to have breakfast or lunch with their child.

Breakfast is served promptly at 8:15 A.M. We ask that all children arrive early enough to transition easily into the classroom and to the table. Our meals are hot, well balanced, "home-cooked" meals, served in a family style setting. Lunch is served promptly at 11:30 A.M. and an afternoon snack occurs at 3:00 P.M. The afternoon snack includes a nutritious food and water and milk. Additional snacks are provided as necessary.

Formula, Rice Cereal and baby food are provided by Middle Earth. All bottles and jars brought from home must be dated and labeled with the child's name. Per DHS requirements, bottles will be sent home daily for cleaning.

We understand families vary in food culture and strive to support the environment you provide your child at home. Please see the Executive Director regarding such preferences. Any substitutions must meet the nutritional requirements of the CACFP, must be provided and emulate our menu.

Food Allergies

The Center is required by CACFP to have a completed Medical Statement on file for children who are unable because of medical or other special dietary needs, to eat certain foods. The Medical Statement form is available at the front desk. Please consult our Kitchen Staff regarding your child's dietary needs. The substitutions of foods for special diets must be provided and emulate our menu. We provide soy milk and lactose free milk for those children that cannot drink regular milk. Other milks such as organic or almond must be provided by the

parent. Allergy Lists are posted in the kitchen, the office, and in all classrooms. Our staff is very careful to ensure the safety of children with food allergies.

J. Health

In accordance with Oklahoma State Licensing Requirements, families must submit a child's immunization records, a list of special health needs and the name, address and telephone number of the child's physician.

Immunizations

We keep current immunization records on all children. As subsequent immunizations are given, please notify the office with an updated verification. Children without current immunizations may be excluded from the Center. Please consult with your physician. [Oklahoma Immunization Requirements](#)

Sick Children

As early care professionals, we carefully observe children for symptoms of illness or infestation. Any child showing symptoms of illness or infestation will be separated from the group and parents will be notified. For this reason please inform us if any changes occur in the telephone number where you may be reached. Families are required to pick up their child in a timely manner. If the family cannot be contacted, the Center will notify the person noted on the child's Emergency Information Form as the one to contact in the event of an emergency. When a child is sent home sick, an Illness Form will be sent home to let the family know when the child can be re-admitted.

IMPORTANT: When a child has been exposed to a communicable disease (for example, strep throat, chickenpox, etc.), families are required to report that information to the office and the classroom staff. If a child contracts a communicable disease, families must keep the child at home for the appropriate exclusion period and must report the disease to the office and the classroom staff. All families with children in that particular classroom will be notified when a child in the group has contracted a communicable disease.

Middle Earth follows the OKDHS guidelines regarding the exclusion of sick children. Families will be notified and asked to pick up if a child exhibits the following symptoms:

- Fever, defined as axillary (armpit) temperature of 100 degrees or higher, or oral temperature of 101 degrees or higher, with another sign or symptom of illness.
- Diarrhea, defined as runny or watery stools with increased frequency of loose stools.
- Vomiting two or more times in a 24-hour period.
- Undiagnosed body rash or pox, except diaper rash, with fever.
- Draining skin wounds that cannot be kept completely covered by a bandage.
- Sore throat with fever and swollen glands.
- Eye discharge, defined as thick mucus or pus draining from the eye or Conjunctivitis (pink eye) without evidence of allergic reaction.
- Yellowish skin or eyes.
- Severe and/or persistent coughing, where a child gets red or blue in the face, makes a high-pitched whooping sound after coughing, or coughs to the point of vomiting.
- Appears to be severely ill from an unexplained cause, such as extreme lethargy, irritability, persistent crying, difficulty breathing, or any other unusual signs.

As a general rule, children who have been ill may not return to school until they are no longer contagious and are ready to participate in the full program, including outdoor play. **For additional reference, please review Chapter 7: Managing Illnesses & Infestations of the [Good Health Handbook](#), provided by the Oklahoma State Department of Health.**

Children who have chronic health conditions may need additional assistance. Please provide the program with written medical instructions for handling such conditions as asthma and serious known allergic reactions. We will work with you to ensure that your child receives the protection and care he or she needs.

K. Medication

Middle Earth teachers will administer current, prescribed medications that are part of a therapeutic plan under the supervision of a physician and over-the-counter medications under the following specifications:

- All medication must be provided by the family in the original container and clearly labeled with the child's full name and dosage. For medicine to be administered families must complete a medical authorization card with the child's full name, the

name of the medication, with the amount and time medication is to be given.

- Medication can only be administered to the child for whom it was prescribed. We cannot give a higher dosage than is recommended on the medication nor more often than is prescribed for your child's age. Out-of-date medications will not be given. It will be disposed of and parent will be notified.
- Tylenol may not be given to a child without a family written consent. If your child develops a temperature of 100 degrees or higher during the day, you will be notified to pick him/her up.
- Medicine must be stored in the classroom refrigerator or in the classroom medicine tub on a high shelf inaccessible to children. DO NOT leave medication unattended in cubby, backpack, etc.

MECDC staff will administer medications requiring the use of needles or other sharps. Parents or guardians must provide an appropriate sharps disposal container.

L. Classroom Helpers/Volunteers

Middle Earth thrives on family volunteers. Bring your favorite book to read or share your special gifts and talents with us, during group play at 9:30 A.M. or 3:30 P.M. Family members always have a place at our table.

M. Celebrations

Children's cultural heritage and celebrations are important parts of their personal-social development. Fostering respect for cultural diversity is an important goal at Middle Earth. Emphasis is always placed on respecting individual differences and beliefs and families are encouraged to share their cultural heritage with others in the program. Activities related to traditional U.S. holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter are "low-keyed," age appropriate, and presented in a manner that does not address specific religious beliefs. Plans are often discussed with families to ensure that celebrations are sensitive to cultural diversity. Any family wishing to share their cultural celebrations is asked to contact your child's teacher or the Middle Earth office.

In honor of the rich diversity of our community at Middle Earth, each year in the first week of December, we host a school-wide pot luck and classroom party called: The Celebration of our Middle Earth Family. This is a heartwarming, fun family event and includes the opportunity to provide gifts for the classroom. In the weeks prior to this event, children and staff will have

identified items they would like. Each classroom will have a unique system for gift requests.

Other school-wide celebrations are held throughout the year to honor such events as: Week of the Young Child, Teacher Appreciation Week, Grandparent's Day, and Back to School.

Birthdays are special days when children enjoy sharing with their friends. You are welcome to provide birthday snacks (store-bought only) for the classroom and families are always welcome to attend birthday parties, which will begin immediately following the afternoon snack at 3:00 P.M. We ask that families not send invitations for private parties to school, unless an invitation is sent to every child in the class.

IV. Special Circumstances and Events

A. Emergency Procedures

Injury/Illness Involving a Child

In case of an extreme emergency, involving a child, (i.e. accidental injury or acute illness) the Center will contact an ambulance or paramedic immediately.

Unless otherwise specified, a child will be transported to the following hospital:

**Norman Regional Hospital
901 N. Porter, Norman, OK
(405) 307-1000**

At the same time, the family will be called, advised of the injury or illness, and where the child has been taken. If the family cannot be reached, a person listed on the child's Emergency Information Form will be called. A staff member will accompany the child to the hospital and remain until the family arrives and is informed of the situation.

As is true with any accident or incident, which may occur while a child is at Middle Earth, our staff will thoroughly document the events that occurred and what actions were taken. These reports will be signed by the reporting staff, Executive Director or Assistant Director, and the family, and then filed in the child's file. Additionally, Middle Earth will notify the Department of Human Services.

Middle Earth Staff will make every attempt to communicate in a timely manner with families regarding information directly related to the safety, security and well-being of their child(ren). A member of the administrative team will be the primary point of contact should the Executive Director be engaged and otherwise unavailable for immediate communication.

Disaster Evacuation Plans

Fire Procedures

Specific procedures are outlined for the Center staff and children to follow in case of fire. These procedures are practiced through monthly fire drills. During a fire drill, children practice walking out of the building, taking attendance, and remaining in the safe place during the fire drills. In case of a fire, children and staff will immediately follow their exit routes to their designated safe areas, outside of the building and remain there, in

their classroom groups, for further instruction. Exit routes are posted in each classroom room and the front office.

Emergency contact information of all students and staff is taken outside with us as well as portable phones, and/or cell phones. Teachers will take classroom attendance sheets to ensure all children are accounted for.

Tornado Procedures

In case of severe weather, the Center staff will listen for directions from emergency weather advisory personnel through our weather radio or television news station. If instructed to seek shelter, all children will be taken to the tornado shelter, where they will remain until given further instruction. The tornado shelter is equipped with a disaster preparedness kit.

Specific procedures are outlined for the Center staff and children to follow in case of a tornado. These procedures are practiced through monthly tornado drills. During a tornado drill, children practice walking quickly to our tornado shelter, located adjacent to the gym.

Missing Child

At Middle Earth, we take the responsibility of caring for all children very seriously. Our teachers are constantly maintaining accurate accountability regarding the supervision of all the children in their class. In the event that a child is determined to be missing while at Middle Earth, the staff will be alerted immediately. One full-time staff person from each classroom will remain with the children in their classroom, while all other staff will leave their classrooms to search their designated quadrant/area of the Middle Earth property, starting with the outside parameters and moving to the inside of the building.

Norman Police Department will be called immediately, as well as the family of the missing child. All events and actions will be documented thoroughly.

Bomb Threats

Bomb Threat checklists are kept at the front desk. Middle Earth will be evacuated if notified by Norman Police Department to evacuate. We will move to a location and in a manner, as instructed by Norman Police Department. Families will be notified regarding the evacuation and will be expected to pick up their children from this location immediately upon notification.

B. Field Trips

Field trips may begin in the Discoverers classroom. The classroom staff will plan field trips to supplement and extend the curriculum. Field trips require special regulations to ensure children's safety. Our Center follows all the requirements outlined by the Department of Human Services for transportation of children.

Families will be given prior notification of each field trip. Written permission to participate is required. A child arriving too late to participate in a field trip with his/her group will be temporarily placed in another classroom. Families are always invited to accompany the group.

The Middle Earth 15 Passenger Van will be used on field trips. Car seats, if applicable for your child's age/weight, are required. If extra automobiles are needed, volunteers and staff who are transporting children on field trips must provide documentation of a current driver's license and their automobile's insurance verification form. A map of the traveling route will be posted at the front desk.

A first aid kit, cell phone and emergency information on each child will accompany the teacher on the field trip. If a minor emergency occurs, the appropriate medical care will be given. In the event of a serious emergency, 911 will be called. Families will be notified, advised of the injury or illness and where the child has been taken. For this reason, please advise us if any changes occur in the telephone number where you may be reached.

Snacks on Field Trips

Snacks and meals will be scheduled so that none are missed by children on a field trip. Occasionally these are carried, provided as part of the field trip experience, or prepared by the group on site.

C. School Pictures

Individual pictures are taken in the spring & fall. School pictures are fun in that they often capture the natural appearance of your child as opposed to a studio picture. Teachers will assist in combing your child's hair before pictures are taken. Notices are posted in the hallways, in the classrooms and in the newsletter prior to picture day. Fall group photos are scheduled at a later date.

D. Fundraising

Families will have several opportunities throughout the year to participate in individual and school wide fundraising efforts to support the Center's mission and staff. The Board of Directors will make every effort to identify, in advance, which aspect of Middle Earth the

fundraising proceeds will benefit. Some examples include:

- Middle Earth T-shirts
- Seasonal Sales of Butter Braids
- Annual Book Fair
- Other opportunities as they arise

A Staff Holiday Bonus fund has been established. Families may make a donation to this fund any time throughout the year, rather than waiting until the busy holiday season. Holiday bonuses are then distributed to staff around mid-December. Middle Earth is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation and donations are tax-deductible, in accordance with federal and state tax laws.

V. *Additional Information*

A. DHS Resources

Compliance

The DHS Compliance file is located at the front office. It contains monitoring visits and or complaints from the last 120 days.

[DHS Compliance](#)

Licensing

[Licensing Requirements for Child Care Programs](#)

B. Helpful Links

[Zero to Three](#)

[Parenting with Zero to Three](#)

[Artful Dad](#)

[CDC Milestones](#)

[NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)

Oklahoma Affiliate: [Early Childhood Association of OK](#)

C. Our Commitment to You

It is through these written policies and many unwritten daily child developmental practices that you can be sure we at Middle Earth are committed to providing and maintaining a high quality educational program for your family. Middle Earth has a rich history on which to build and an expansive future to strive for, as we continue to serve the families in our community. Thank you for choosing Middle Earth!

D. Statement of Philosophy and Purpose

In 1977, Middle Earth's original Statement of Philosophy and Purpose was published in the widely used textbook, Day Care Curriculum Considerations written by Michael Langenbach and Teanna West Neskora, founding Faculty Advisor and first Director of Middle Earth respectively. This statement has been used by professional educators throughout the nation and still remains the root from which we came. Although written in "70's" language, the content and essence is timeless and still reflects the core values and understanding of children and their development, which we remain committed to today.

"Children need a happy, comfortable place to spend their time away from home. The children who attend a day care center look to the staff for the same affection, love, support, guidance, and discipline that they receive at home. The staff becomes substitute family members to the children during the day, but parents remain the most important people in a young child's life. Staff members strive to supplement the family and encourage family involvement in the program, so the child can feel a close bond between home and center. The physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of the children are considered the first priority of the program. The children's needs always come first and are considered before the needs or conveniences of the parents or the staff.

Each child is unique, and all children are respected for their differences. The same performance or behavior is not expected from any two children. All children are encouraged to develop their own personality; to hold their own thoughts, opinions, and ambitions; and to express these ideas comfortably and freely. The integrity of the individual child is always respected; this means expecting and accepting differences. If we want children to maintain their uniqueness and their differences, then we must provide an environment that will assist them to this end. Every child, regardless of sex, race, or religion will have the same advantages and opportunities as every other child. If children are to maintain pride in who and what they are and what they want to become, then they must never be faced with stereotyped sex, race, or religious roles or attitudes that will inhibit their choices.

Children have the right to develop to their maximum social, emotional and intellectual abilities. It is the adult's responsibility to provide opportunities for this development to occur. Each child is allowed to progress at his or her own pace according to his or her own needs. All children have the right to grow with good self-image—a good feeling of personal worth. It is the responsibility of the staff and the parents to assist children to think well of themselves and to provide experiences that foster feelings of confidence, success, value and pride. Children should never have to prove themselves to gain acceptance or attention from adults. All adults working with children have the responsibility to create an atmosphere of acceptance and cooperation among children rather than a climate of competition.

All children need opportunities to interact socially with their peers and are guided in respecting the rights and feelings of others. An atmosphere of gentleness, respect, and humanitarianism is a prerequisite for children to

learn to care and be concerned for others and to settle differences in a peaceful way. Children are allowed to disagree with other children and adults, but they are not allowed to hurt one another or to be destructive. Likewise, all children need opportunities to be alone and are guided in becoming independent, self-sufficient individuals. To foster independence, children are given as much responsibility for their own lives as they can comfortably handle. The amount and kind of responsibility given to any particular child is determined by his or her ability to assume responsibility. One of the major areas of responsibility that the children are encouraged to develop is an attitude of construction and cooperation where their environment is concerned. An appreciation for life, nature, and man's creative efforts is encouraged.

Independence is encouraged by giving the children freedom to make choices and decisions for their activities during the day. Children have a propensity to make sense out of the world. They actively seek answers or some degree of resolution of the problems they perceive. When given an interesting, challenging environment, children will make wise choices for their learning activities and will learn those things they are interested in and capable of learning. This is not to say that children in need of assistance in a particular area of development shall not receive encouragement to participate in activities that will strengthen their deficiencies.

It is the responsibility of the staff to thoughtfully and consciously plan activities and experiences that meet the developmental needs of all the children. A program with many planned options available has more potential for children than a program that forces children to do the same thing at the same time or a program that allows children to encounter activities and experiences randomly or fortuitously. Children are not forced to participate in activities, nor are they punished for not participating. It is recognized that in the best situations with the most thoughtfully planned program, all children are not going to behave in an acceptable manner all of the time. However, physical punishment of children for misbehavior is unacceptable. Children are never

physically, verbally, or mentally abused and food is never withheld as punishment nor offered as a reward. Children need to be assisted in understanding why their behavior is not acceptable and their actions should be redirected in a positive way. We are critical of a child's behavior but we are never critical of a child. Children are loved and accepted at all times regardless of their behavior.

This program can be offered simultaneously with good physical care of children that includes a safe and sanitary physical plant, a nutritious food program and careful supervision. With sufficient parental involvement and support, high-quality child care can be offered at a reasonable cost to families."

Though the organization and structure of Middle Earth has grown and changed, our philosophy remains much the same. We believe that children need a happy, comfortable place to spend their time when they cannot be at home with their families. We believe that Middle Earth must be more than just a care facility, but also an extension of the home and family that provides a positive, loving, and safe atmosphere for children to learn and grow.

Middle Earth Child Development Center provides a developmentally appropriate program where children have the opportunity to develop physically, emotionally, intellectually, and socially through play. All children are allowed to develop at their own pace and as distinct individuals. We believe that children should never be faced with stereotyped roles or attitudes, which inhibit their choices. The integrity of the individual child, regardless of sex, race, religion, differing ability or socio-cultural background is always respected.

Above all, we believe that children have a right to grow up with a positive self-image and a feeling of personal worth. It is the responsibility of Middle Earth staff and families to give the children experiences that foster feelings of confidence, success, value, and pride.

VI. Middle Earth's Family Commitment Statement

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the policies and procedures as stated in the Middle Earth Family Handbook.

Signature

Date

Name(s) and age(s) of child(ren) enrolled at Middle Earth:

Please complete this page and return it to the front desk.
Thank You!