

THE CHILDREN'S HOUSE MONTESSORI SCHOOL
Of First Presbyterian Church

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PARENT HANDBOOK

Welcome to The Children's House! The Session of First Presbyterian Church of Ocean Springs established this school, which opened in September 1981, to provide quality pre-school education, in a Christian environment, for the young children of this church and the community. First Presbyterian Church provides and maintains the school building at 309 Washington Avenue and appoints a School Board to be responsible for policy, oversight and financial management.

The fact that you have your child enrolled with us shows that you care deeply about your child's training and education for the future. This training must be a cooperative effort on the part of parents and teachers in order to be most successful. To make any operation run smoothly everyone should understand the ground rules and be willing to abide by them. To ensure a most successful effort the following information is provided.

PLEASE KEEP THIS MATERIAL CLOSE AT HAND FOR EASY REFERENCE.

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THE PROGRAM:

The Children's House offers a pre-school/kindergarten program, currently licensed by the Mississippi State Department of Health for 40 children, based upon the psychological principles and teaching methods of Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Dr. Montessori developed what she called the "prepared environment" to introduce children to the joy of learning and provide a framework in which their intellectual and social discipline go hand-in-hand. Among its features is an ordered arrangement of learning materials in a non-competitive environment. Habits of order, initiative and thoroughness established in early childhood result in confident and competent learners.

Respect for others and for the environment is also cultivated. Basic Christian beliefs and values are emphasized in the classroom, and activities such as a weekly chapel program, Christian songs and a blessing before snack time are included.

Emphasis is placed on the individual child in the social setting of the group. With freedom of choice and movement, the classroom can be viewed as an organized society of small children, the teachers leading each child at his own pace, according to his interest and abilities. While at school each child finds that he can learn from and contribute to others. Thus he gains the self-confidence he needs for his future development.

The purpose of the classroom is to provide a social, early learning experience for children, ages 3 to 6 years of age. This experience will offer the child an opportunity to explore the world of the five senses, to learn to better care for herself and her environment, to proceed at her own pace from simple activities to more complex ones, traveling from concrete to abstract, to enjoy freedom of movement and choice within the bounds of the classroom ground rules, and to enjoy effective social interaction with her peers and other adults. Through this process of natural unfolding the child experiences the joy of discovery and develops his inner self. "Within each child lies the person he will become." (Maria Montessori, MD).

Before he can function effectively in the freedom of movement allowed in the Montessori classroom, the child must learn lessons in **grace and courtesy** and lessons in **independence**. That is, she learns how to shake hands and say "good morning", hang up her garments and see that her belongings are kept in the proper place. In the Montessori classroom **nothing is ever done for the child that the child is able to do for himself**. This is the first lesson and most important one that the parents must learn to reinforce at home.

Children learn courtesy by being treated courteously.

Children learn promptness by being prompt.

Children learn independence and self-assurance by being treated as if they are capable.

Concepts stressed at the Children's House include:

Success-oriented activities

Non-competitive atmosphere

Self-motivated learning

Respect for the child as a unique person

CURRICULUM:

- **Practical Life:** Pouring, scooping, stringing, polishing, cleaning, folding, food preparation and serving, etc. Purpose: to develop coordination, concentration, independence and to encourage a sense of order.
- **Sensorial Exercises:** Exploration of specially designed learning materials, using the five senses. Purpose: To compare, classify, make judgments.
- **Language Arts:** Activities and experiences which facilitate the child's total language development, through encouraging conversation, labeling the environment, story reading and the introduction of reading readiness skills (phonics) to those children who are interested and ready.
- **Math and Science:** Activities which allow the concrete manipulation of materials, which leads to the eventual "grasp" of the abstract concepts being introduced. All of the math materials teach concepts which will be absorbed and later recognized by the child when he enters the study of higher mathematics. Counting to ten (concretely), the binomial theorem, the decimal system, etc.
- **Geography:** Materials and activities to help the child better understand the world around him. These are approached in a sensorial and very concrete way in the beginning and then move to more abstract activities, such as map labeling.
- **Music and Movement:** For pleasure and appreciation. Singing, finger plays, rhythm, expression, balance and yoga on the line.
- **Art:** For pleasure and appreciation. Use of different mediums including pencils, crayons, watercolor, clay, glue and materials for collage. Featured artists and styles. This area is set up as a creative outlet for the child.
- **Bible Lessons:** The children learn about God, through Bible stories, parables and song. Pastor Scott Castleman visits the classroom once a week to share a Bible story with the children; this is a special time enjoyed by all.
- **Outdoor Activities:** Our playground has many types of equipment: swings, a slide, a pedal-go-round, a climber and a playhouse. We also offer activities such as hammering exercises, painting, sidewalk chalk, etc.

SEQUENCING OF MATERIALS:

Materials are sequenced in each of the areas of the environment. The year begins with the simplest of activities and these gradually increase in complexity as the year progresses. The teachers help the child understand this progression so he/she can become independent in choosing work.

BRINGING ITEMS TO SCHOOL:

We ask that you **do not allow** your child to bring toys to school. They often prove to be a distraction and a cause of dissension. Toys that are brought to school will be placed in a basket, out of reach of children, until dismissal time. Your child is welcome to bring items of special interest such as those relating to science or geography: flowers, rocks, shells, small pets, post cards, maps, clothing and artifacts from other areas. We encourage children to share books from home. (Please identify these with your child's name.) **Objects for the sound of the week should represent real things and fit in the palm of the child's closed hand.**

THE CLASSROOM GROUND RULES:

1. Walk slowly and carefully. Walk around rugs.
2. Use quiet voices.
3. Carry only one thing at a time.
4. Use only one activity at a time.
5. Return work neatly and properly to its correct place.
6. "Interrupt" others by a quiet hand on the shoulder of the adult or other child.
7. Handle materials respectfully.
8. Keep all work on a table or rug.
9. When an activity is on a table or rug, no one else may take it or touch it.
10. Only touch your own work, unless you are invited to join another.
11. If a material is broken, written on or otherwise damaged, it goes home for repair or replacement.

Stated simply, the rule is: **"you may not do any harm to yourself, any other person or any of the materials in the classroom."**

While abiding by these ground rules, the child is learning **self-respect, respect for others and respect for the property of others.**

MONTHLY TUITION:

The first tuition payment for each student is due August 1, 2021.

If you are paying in nine monthly installments, your first tuition payment is due August 1 and the last payment for the school year will be April 1, 2022. You are pre-paying in August 2021 for May 2022 tuition. **We can offer you Automatic Bank Draft through the school. If you are interested in doing this please contact us as soon as possible.**

Tuition is due on the first day of the month and late after the 5th. A late fee of \$20 will be added to any payment received after the 5th of the month.

Teachers cannot accept tuition payments from you. You should either hand deliver your tuition payment to the Church office or mail your tuition payment to:

Children's House Montessori School
921 Ocean Ave.
Ocean Springs, MS 39564.

OTHER FEES:

The Children's House has recently updated the school logo and in doing so, new canvas bags are now being made/ordered. Each child is required to have and bring this bag to school each day. The school bag should house your child's water bottle, lunch if needed, coat/sweater/jacket, and Kindergarten folders once your child reaches their 3rd year here. Having their bag ready and on their shoulder each morning allows your child to easily greet their teachers and safely walk up the stairs on their own. This independent act is vital and part of the CH experience for each student. Their bag will hang in their cubby during the school day. Each child learns to manage their cubby organization by loading and unloading their bag at the start and finish of each school day. Your child's bag provides a way for them to carry home any work/projects they've completed. The bag will be **10\$** and can be purchased at the Parent Meeting. The bags are now a heavier/better quality, a little larger in size, and washable. These bags should last all 3 years that your child attends The CH, but if a replacement bag is needed, the costs will be \$10. The Head of School will regularly order bags as needed each summer. Bags will be distributed at Open House each year.

There will be a small supply fee for Kindergarteners that will be collected once Kindergarten afternoons begin. Kindergarteners have extra/their own supplies, workbooks, and events throughout the school year that are separate from 1st and 2nd years. More information about this will be given by EmilyBeth and Rebecca at the start of the school year.

MORNING ARRIVAL:

Children are admitted into the school at 8:30am. If your family is providing snack or your child has a birthday celebration, you are expected to come in at 8:20 to drop the items – please use the back door by the play yard. Teachers use the morning to prepare for the day; this is not a good time for a drop-in conference.

Drop off procedure:

- Please **park** in the parking lot on the north side of the school, in a parking space. The parking places closest to the steps should be left available for those families with infants or younger children
- **Please use extreme caution in parking area as there are children moving about**
- **Parents are responsible for their child's behavior until they are greeted by a teacher at 8:30.**
- At 8:30 a teacher will come to the landing on the entrance stairs to receive your child
- Please bring your child to the bottom of the short stairs, wait for the teacher to receive your child, and say your good-byes here. Your child should have their bag, jacket etc.. and be prepared to start their day
- No parents are to come into school in the morning – unless pre-approved by the Head of School and then they will use the back door by the play yard
- Each child will be greeted in the morning by at least one teacher demonstrating grace and courtesy.
- All children should be received by 8:40. Teachers have to get into the class and begin the day
- Anyone arriving late should come into the school through the back door by the play yard and sign in. This is a state requirement. Please be courteous and depart quickly.

For the parents of newly registered children: Your child may do a certain amount of crying or protesting for the first day or two before coming up the steps. The less upset you appear by this behavior, the sooner it will stop. Remember, we are trying to teach independence and self-reliance. The sooner a child is allowed to exercise self-reliance, the more self-reliant he/she will become.

If you have information to pass on to the teacher, please be prepared with a note you can hand to the teacher, call/text or leave a message, or send an email to childrenshouse@fpcosms.com

MORNING DEPARTURE:

It is extremely important that parents pick up children promptly at 11:30. Pick-up is done the same way as drop off. Parents form a line/gather near the bottom of the small stairs, and a teacher will bring your child(ren) down to you. Young children are often quite distressed when parents do not arrive when they are expected to. We encourage you to please make every effort to be prompt.

Afternoon Departure: Same as above but at 2:30.

LATENESS CHARGE FOR LATE PICK UP:

There will be a \$5.00 charge for every ten minutes of lateness, beginning at 11:40 A.M. This should be paid to the teacher who is waiting with your child. This also applies to the afternoon lunch bunch and kindergarten extended day when a child is picked up after 2:40.

SNACK:

Snack will be provided in a self-service fashion each day in the classroom. Every family will be assigned one week during the school year to provide snack for the school – please bring enough snack for 44 people each day. If you have more than one child at the Children’s House, your children will share the same snack week. *The emphasis is on the family providing snack for the whole school.* Snack is brought to school daily - ready for serving. **The student/s of that family will bring the snack into the school each morning, with the help of their parent. Please come to the back door by the play yard at 8:20 and take the food quietly to the kitchen.** A teacher will help the student/s set out the snack using the correct serving equipment. We ask that snack items be healthy, natural and fresh. We do not allow sugar, dyes or heavily processed foods. Snack will be provided in the class from 8:30 until 11:20.

***We are going to continue to the use of individual water bottles this year. They have proven to be easy for the children to access when thirsty, more environmentally and financially friendly for us here as well. Each child needs to have their water bottle with them each morning at arrival. It should have their name clearly visible and a lid that closes and keeps spills at a minimum. Your child should be able to open and close it with ease and without help from a teacher. They will use their water bottle during play time, snack time, and during lunch if they stay for the afternoon. We will re-fill it as needed throughout the day for your child. We will provide examples at the parent meeting if you are unsure of what to purchase, etc. Please do not send any drinks during your child’s snack week, it is not needed.**

Some suggested snack foods are:

- Any vegetable – cleaned and ready to eat
- Any fruit –cleaned and ready to eat
- Hard cheeses – cheese cubes, cheese sticks
- Nuts, trail mix or granola - not overly sugared or processed
- Finger sandwiches made at home
- Crackers, pretzels, veggie straws/chips
- Hummus
- Yogurt (no go-gurt or tubes of yogurt) with fruit or granola

Total snack serving should be about ½ cup in size – even if the snack has multiple items, the entire snack should not exceed ½ cup in size. Any extra food will be sent home with your child(ren) each day. If you send food that is not appropriate for snack, it too will be sent home and not served.

**If providing snack for school is a financial hardship for you, please speak to the Head of School in private and other arrangements can easily be made.*

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS:

We celebrate birthdays with a group lesson on the earth and the sun. The child walks around a rug, circling the “sun” (a candle), while carrying the globe – one walk for each year of the child’s life. This teaches the earth/sun relationship and that the year is the amount of time it takes for the earth to circle the sun one time.

A birthday celebration is the time for the child’s family to come to school and help us celebrate the birth and life of our friend. **We ask that you arrive with your child at 8:20, just before morning arrival to set up the birthday rug. Please come back at 10:15am for the birthday celebration and we should be finished by 10:45am. We will provide seating for you and your guests.**

- We ask that you send a picture from each year of the child’s life as well as an outfit from infancy or a special friend or lovey – these should arrive at school with the child in the morning as we lay these items out for display during the day. Please do not send anything that is irreplaceable.
- We ask that you provide us information (in writing) to mark the developmental milestones for each year of your child’s life – for instance, the place of birth, how much he/she weighed, when he/she first walked, favorite toys etc.. If you write it out for us the first year, you will only need to add to it one year at a time.
- We ask that you provide a special snack for your child’s birthday celebration: **A napkin and a sweet (small in size)**. No other snack items or drinks are necessary as we provide daily snack in the classroom. Up to 50 napkins for students, teachers and guests and the same number of muffins, cookies or brownies are permitted on this special day. **No icing of any kind please – we will not serve it.** Please do not send candy, tokens or gift bags to school. We will not allow them to be passed out. **The snack – ready to serve - should be dropped off in the morning with your child at 8:20 to set up the birthday rug.**
- You are welcome, but not required, to participate in a long-standing tradition in which the child gives a book to our school library in honor of his/her birthday. We will read this book on the day of the celebration at dismissal and you can write an inscription inside the cover to commemorate your child’s special day.

With 40 children and only 35 weeks of school, we try to have only one birthday celebration per week - with a few necessary exceptions. We will let you know your child’s birthday celebration day before the start of school. We try to have them on the actual birthday or at least within the week of your child’s actual birthday. Wednesday mornings Pastor Scott visits the classroom, we prefer that birthdays are not scheduled for Wednesdays. Summer birthdays will be celebrated as “half or non-birthday” celebrations during the school year (about 6 months from their actual birthday). We ask that you approve this before the school year starts and mark the date in your family calendar as our schedule affects 40 children and is difficult to change. Although we certainly understand that you may want to record special times at school (ie: birthday celebrations, parties and other school events), please be considerate of others that may appear in these pictures/videos who may not want to be posted on line or other social media.

SCHOOL LUNCH:

If your child stays for the Afternoon extended day or Kindergarten, they will need to bring a packed lunch along with their water bottle in the morning. The lunch boxes stay in the child's cubby until 11:30. Please provide cold packs if needed. As with snack and birthday celebrations, we encourage children to eat healthy and nutritious food. They will see their teachers eating likewise. Please consider portion control when packing lunch. If you see food being brought home, it is because we asked your child to bring home what they didn't eat. We are happy to help but children should be able to open any containers you send as we encourage independence. Microwaves are available to heat anything that requires warming. The children will all have their water bottles and we will also serve milk each day if they would prefer milk. Desserts are up to your discretion **but we do not allow candy or icing** at school. Because we are teaching table manners and correct eating habits, we ask that children **do not bring go-gurt or squeezable pouch food for lunch**. Children will eat their lunches on plates and will have a cup if they would like milk to drink. We sterilize our dishes and cups each day after use. The children actually help in loading dishes into our dishwasher as part of the clean-up process from lunch each day.

OPEN HOUSE:

After the parent meeting and before school phase-in starts, we will have an open house. This is an opportunity for the student and parent to come into the school for a short visit to tour the environment and meet the teachers. We want to make sure a child can identify the locations of their cubby and the restroom. Please enter the school from the parking lot north side and exit at the back door by the play yard.

- If your last name begins with A-L, you may come from 9:00 – 9:45.
- If your last name begins with M-Z, you may come from 9:45-10:30.

Your time in the school should last 15-20 minutes. We want the child to have an introduction, or reintroduction for returning students, to the environment but we do not want to encourage children to work without having lessons. We know parents and children love to see each other at the end of the summer and we encourage you to have those visits outside in the play yard. We try to keep the classroom as peaceful and quiet as possible for the new students as this is their first encounter with "school".

DISCIPLINE:

Physical discipline of any kind will not be inflicted on any child. In general, we follow Rudolph Dreikur's philosophy that the child should understand the "logical consequences" of his behavior. If you don't put your glass back on the shelf, it will not be there the next time you want to get a drink. If you forget to be polite and say "excuse me", your friend will not let you by. If you run in the classroom, you will lose your freedom to move about freely for a short time. Loss of freedom is used in some cases both inside and out on the play yard.

In the case of reoccurring problems we will contact the parents of the child by phone. The behavior will be discussed and help from home will be solicited. Feedback will be given to the parents. If the behavior has stopped, the process ends. If the behavior continues, a conference will be set.

The conference is to discuss the problem further and set up a plan to help change the behavior, set goals and a time frame. If the behavior persists, another conference is scheduled and recommendations are made as to whether the school and the child are the best fit. The effects of the behavior on the other children in the classroom is considered. It will be determined at this time if the child can remain in the school or if it is best for the child to be withdrawn.

HEALTH:

- Each child must have an up-to-date shot record (form 121). We must have this in our files.
- When a child appears to be ill at school a parent will be called and the child will be made comfortable until the parent arrives.
- The school must be informed if there has been exposure to any communicable disease.
- Medicine will not be administered to your child without a written note of instruction and discussion with a teacher.

Please do not send your child to school on days when he or she is not feeling well.

When a child doesn't feel well, home is the best place for them to get better. We request that you keep your child home if he or she:

- Is developing a cold or has a cold less than three days old.
- Has a sore throat or ear ache.
- Has swollen neck glands.
- Has a "fresh" runny nose.
- Has red/pink, itchy or runny eyes.
- Has an unusual rash or sore.
- Has had a fever in the last 24 hrs.
- Has had vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hrs.
- Acts sleepy or complains of a headache.
- Appears ill to you.
- Has visible head lice or nits in their hair - child must be nit free to return to school.

If your child is sick at school and you are called to pick him up, we expect the child to stay home the next day to recover.

For Covid-19 Policies and Procedures, be refer to the addendum

CLOTHING:

Please send your child to school in play clothes and comfortable shoes. They are less restrictive and are more conducive to classroom activities. In general, for a child who is just learning to use the bathroom by himself, belted pants are an obstruction. If you choose clothing with front openings and encourage him to help himself you will be adding to his self-confidence. All clothing should be suited to the weather and washable to minimize the disaster of accidental spills. If your child comes home in different clothing it is best to make no comment or criticism. Simply wash and return the clothes.

SHOES:

Sensible, soft soled shoes are best to support and protect the developing foot of the child. Shoes that are easy for your child to take off and put on by themselves are preferred. **Absolutely NO flip flops, cowboy boots, shoes with wedges, heels or hard soled shoes** - these shoes are not

conducive to the environment inside or out on the playground. If we notice these kinds of shoes on your child's feet, you will be asked to bring them appropriate shoes.

BAD WEATHER:

If Ocean Springs public schools are closed due to weather conditions, we will also be closed. At times, we may opt to have school if these conditions are due only to bus pick up for the public school system. You will receive a phone call or a text if we choose to be open. If the Ocean Springs delay is two hours or more, we will not have school that day.

OBSERVATION/CONFERENCES:

After Thanksgiving vacation, if you would like to observe the classroom, please contact the Head of School to make an appointment. It is less disruptive if we have no more than one extra person at a time in the classroom. Parent conferences will be held in the Fall, on an as needed basis, and in the Spring for everyone. If you have any questions or problems, we are available to discuss your concerns. We also encourage you to share your talents and interests with us in the classroom.

AT HOME:

In the home, as much as possible, reinforce the Montessori training and discipline. To encourage neatness, try to give your child a low shelf for toys rather than a toy box. Hang pegs and clothing bars at a level within your child's reach. Encourage independence.

MONTESSORI VS PUBLIC SCHOOL:

Ideally, children attend the Montessori program for three years, starting at 3 yrs. of age and remaining through Kindergarten. Transferring from a Montessori school into the First Grade of public school makes the smoothest transition. Though, by comparison the environments may be of great contrast, the Montessori student has no difficulty adjusting to public school. During three years in the Montessori environment your child will have mastered valuable lessons in self-discipline, while learning the demands of achievement and its procedures. This will help in traditional classroom work. The love of learning, independence and self-confidence cultivated at The Children's House will provide motivation in any environment.

SCHOLARSHIPS:

If this three year stay is difficult for you financially please ask about scholarship availability.

PLAY YARD SUPERVISOR:

We ask a parent/family each year to coordinate volunteers from each age group and help keep the play yard in nice order. The play yard needs upkeep multiple times each year:

- August- in time for the first day back to school
- Fall just before the Fall Festival
- Winter just after Christmas Break
- Spring before the Easter party

The parent/family coordinator this year is the Sukiennik-Houck family. Their daughter, Quinn, is a Kindergartener this year. You might have already received an email from Kait and Mark and should look for more as the year progresses and clean-up days are needed for the specified times listed above.

Keeping the yard consists of power washing decks and equipment, raking, spreading pine straw, planting, and possibly some minor upkeep of equipment. The school has a small budget to accomplish this work. The budget covers the cost of pine straw, plants and repair parts if needed. The play yard supervisor will contact parents via email to find help for play yard work events. If you would like to volunteer your time or would like to help Quinn's family in organizing parents to do these tasks, please speak to the Head of School.

PARTY PLANNER:

There are various parties/functions during the school year that are planned by a party planning parent volunteer(s). Most parties start at 10am. Parents plan, implement and pay for all parties. There are guidelines set by the Head of School for each event which are handed to the party planning parent(s). If you are interested in volunteering to be the party planning parent, please speak to the Head of School. The party planning parent(s) will have access to the Children's House storage room in the church's Education Building where party supplies are stored. It is the responsibility of the party planning parent(s) to keep those supplies organized and in order.

Parties/Functions Include:

- Fall Festival – play yard party celebrating the Fall. We have scarecrows, Fall themes, food and craft stations. This party takes place just before/around Halloween but is not a dress-up costume party.
- Christmas Party – This party takes place on the last day of school before Christmas break. The children sing songs in the church sanctuary and then we move into the church fellowship hall for a party with food and a special guest.
- Easter Party – This party takes place on the school play yard during the week before Easter. The children hunt eggs, eat and do crafts at stations.
- Graduation – Non-Kindergarten parents throw a graduation/end of school year party in the fellowship hall or play yard (weather permitting) following a graduation ceremony in the church sanctuary.

FUNDRAISERS:

At the Children's House we are fortunate that our costs are kept in check. Our School Board, Head of School, and Financial Administrator (Mary Ann Bounds), work hard to ensure a stable budget. The amount of money each family pays in tuition is carefully managed to support the school's overhead, teachers and material needs. We will only hold a fundraiser if there is a special need.

SCHOOL WISH LIST:

We are often asked by parents if there is anything we need for the school. The Head of School can provide a wish list of materials upon request.

SMALL HANDS PROMOTION:

Small Hands Catalog - most years you will receive a Small Hands catalog in early October. This catalog has materials that are wonderful for children at home. You may purchase materials through this catalog if you wish. One parent volunteer will coordinate the order and distribute the orders when they arrive. When the order is made, the school receives a merchandise certificate (based on the amount of the total school order) that allows the teachers to order materials for the school.

THINGS TO REMEMBER 2020-2021:

Your Child's Birthday Celebration is on _____

Your Family snack week is _____

Monthly Tuition is _____. Tuition is due on the 1st of the month and late if received after the 5th. Please add a \$20 late fee to your tuition amount if your payment is made after the 5th.

COMMITTEE COORDINATORS 2021-2022:

Playground Parents: Kait Sukiennik and Mark Houck (Quinn)

Party Planner: Dani Polen (Kindergarten parent)

Dani's Team: Christine Woods (1st year representative) and Lauren Clark (2nd year representative)

Scholastic Book Order Parent: Kelly Darnell (Anne)

Small Hands Coordinator: Joanna Allman (Mary Charlotte and Caroline)

Box Top Coordinator: Amber Fairley (Ava)