



**Parent Handbook
of Policies & Procedures
Social Security Administration,
Birmingham
Child Development Center**

Managed by TodayCare Children's Centers, LLC



Dear Parents,

Welcome to the Social Security Administration Birmingham Child Development Center, a center serving the families of employees of Social Security Administration. Social Security Administration Child Development Center is managed by TodayCare Children's Centers; a company that specializes in the development and management of employer-sponsored child care programs.

TodayCare Children's Centers, in conjunction with the center staff, has developed a program to meet your needs as working parents and the developmental needs of your children. Assisted by a generous subsidy provided by Social Security Administration, the Center is able to offer a high-quality childcare program that is affordable, convenient and accessible for the hours that you work at Social Security Administration.

The Parent Handbook is intended to provide helpful information about the philosophy and operational policies of the Center. We hope the handbook will be useful to you as you prepare to enter your child in the program. Center management and the President/COO of TodayCare is available to answer any questions you may have about the program.

Our goal is to provide children with a safe, nurturing environment in which they may grow and learn. Thank you for sharing your child with us.

Sincerely,

Johnetta Nicholson
Director

Judy E. Simpson
President/COO
TodayCare Children's Centers

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Welcome to the Social Security Administration Child Development Center

Managed by TodayCare Children's Centers

You have just made one of the most important decisions regarding your child that you will make in the next few years. Early childhood experiences will have a long-term effect on your child's self-esteem, socialization and future academic abilities.

Mission Statement & Philosophy

TodayCare Children's Centers (TCCC) at Social Security Administration is committed to providing a safe and secure environment that is marked by excellence. We recognize the unique educational and developmental needs of our children. We are devoted to delivering a quality program that is rich in open communication, fosters lasting relationships and provides educational stimulation.

We believe in a family approach to child care. We recognize and respect parents as the most important influence in the lives of their children. It is our aim to work closely with parents as we assist in the care of their children. Parents have the right and responsibility to share in decisions about their children's care and development. We know that supporting the family is critical to the effectiveness of our work.

TodayCare Children's Centers believes early childhood is the most significant period of children's lives for preparing them for future success. Our goal is to facilitate the development of children who are:

- Competent
- Curious
- Initiating
- Cooperative
- Self-Directed
- Resourceful
- Exploring
- Attentive
- Cheerful

Our program is planned to generate excitement in learning and nurture pro-social skills. TodayCare Children's Centers believes development of intellectual curiosity, self-discipline and internal motivation are fundamental to the learning process. We further believe a vital part of the curriculum involves fostering feelings of security, self-confidence and independence. Central to TodayCare's philosophy is the idea that parents and our program are partners in nurturing each child's development. Therefore, a critical part of the program is open communication and close working relationships with parents.

TodayCare's philosophy is based on the belief that learning is achieved when each child works at his/her individual level in a supportive and unpressured atmosphere. Our program encourages divergent thinking, creative problem-solving and communication skills. Emphasis is placed on the process children use in learning and experiencing their world, instead of a "Final Product." We believe that young children learn best through play and direct experiences with the real world. Children who are free to make discoveries, explore skills, initiate ideas, and experience successes and failures within a supportive environment have a solid foundation in life for future success and happiness.

We believe that the childcare center staff is one of the most important factors determining a quality experience for children and families so we employ only the best and brightest child development professionals. We value experience in group care of young children and formal child development training and education. Each staff member must be a caring, nurturing individual and must complete TodayCare Children's Centers own training series prior to their actual involvement with children in our programs. The staff is supervised daily and evaluated regularly. Nurturing and caring staff is very important in our environment. Staff members receive a great deal of support for the important work they do which keeps staff turnover very low.

PROGRAM GOALS

The goals of the program are to provide an environment that allows children, at their own pace, to:

- Find success in activities of their own choosing and discover the challenge of new experiences.
- Grow in the feeling that they are unique and valued persons.
- Experience comfortable, secure relationships with peers and adults.
- Learn to define and express feelings.
- Build strength, muscular coordination and physical skills.
- Learn to manage routines and develop good health habits.

- Grow in understanding of the world in which they live, both natural and social environments.
- Develop concepts appropriate to age in solving problems and in broadening cognitive development.
- Experience creative expressions through art, music, literature and dramatic play.
- Broaden communication skills through language development.
- Try new foods and develop healthy, nutritional eating habits.
- Develop internal controls for their own behavior.

We achieve these goals by:

- Following the curriculum guidelines as outlined for each age group.
- Providing a highly organized environment using learning centers with developmentally appropriate activities in each center.
- Setting a minimum of appropriate rules to define clear boundaries and expectations for activities and behavior.
- Limiting “whole group” activities and emphasizing individual and small-group experiences.
- Directing learning experiences.
- Using open-ended questioning techniques.
- Using teachers as “Facilitators.”
- Developing skill-based, weekly activity plans.
- Providing low staff/child ratios and small group sizes.
- Developing a curriculum based on the child’s realm of understanding, experience and awareness.
- Emphasizing multi-cultural and non-sexist language usage and activities.
- Using transition activities.
- Expecting teacher/child interactions which enhance the child’s self-esteem.

Everyone at TodayCare understands and accepts wholly that each child is an individual and must be valued, respected and nurtured.

NAEYC Accreditation

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accredits early childhood programs that meet specific criteria for high quality. These standards go beyond the state standards and fewer than 10% of the child care programs in the United States meet the criteria. For more information regarding NAEYC Accreditation, you can find it at www.naeyc.org and click on accreditation. SSA Birmingham is a NAEYC accredited childcare center.

ChildCare in Corporate/Government Sponsored Environment

Childcare in a corporate sponsored environment is slightly different than childcare in a community childcare setting. Childcare sponsored by an employer is a three-way partnership – parents, employer and the center. The center is much like a private school with policies that reflect the needs of the corporate community.

TodayCare at Social Security Administration offers a high quality, developmentally appropriate program – it is not a babysitting service. We adhere to guidelines set forth by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and State of Alabama licensing requirements. This commitment to quality ensures that the needs of the children are met and that policies and practices are for the good of the children. The center enables parents to focus on their jobs knowing that their children are receiving the best care.

ENROLLMENT PROCEDURES AND ORIENTATION

Enrollment is open to all Social Security Administration employees, additional federal agencies and the community without discrimination in regard to sex, race, color, creed or political belief. Vacancies in the classes are filled by wait list applications bearing the earliest date with SSA employees having priority.

During enrollment procedures, a special orientation process will be arranged in order to provide families with important information about our program philosophy and daily operating policies and procedures. This orientation session will also allow time for parents to become better acquainted with the teachers who will be working most closely with their children. Several forms will be provided prior to, or during, our orientation which must be completed on, or prior to, a child's first day in the program:

- Parental Enrollment Agreement signed by both parents
- Child Background Information – All About Me
- Emergency Authorization
- Immunizations and Health Record (signed by physician). The form should be periodically updated as additional shots are received.
- Permission Forms
- Enrollment Agreement Form
- Release Authorization
- Payroll Deduction Form
- Additional forms as required

All children enrolled in the Center must present a physician's certificate of good health/physical before attending.

Children must be immunized in accordance with standard pediatric practice in order to be admitted to the Center. Infants and toddlers must follow the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended immunization schedule and provide a written record to the Center verifying each immunization so that the Center's records are kept current. Pertussis vaccine is included in this requirement.

All children must be immunized against Hemophilus Influenza Type B (HIB) and MMR. Children will receive three HIB vaccines with a booster at 12 and 15 months. The first HIB vaccine should be administered at two months.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Our hours of operation are Monday through Friday. The center is closed on the following holidays:

New Year's Day
Martin Luther King's Birthday
President's Day
Memorial Day
Independence Day
Labor Day
Columbus Day
Veteran's Day
Thanksgiving Day
Christmas Day

A full-time enrollee is defined as a child attending the Center on a regular schedule Monday – Friday for four/five days per week for a maximum of 9 hours per day.

A part-time enrollee is defined as a child attending the Center on a regular schedule either two or three days per week.

Back-up Child Care – Reservations may be made one week in advance for one day at a time. If space is not available for the date and time requested, you will be put on a Wait List and notified when space becomes available.

ATTENDANCE

- We encourage a child's arrival prior to 9:00 a.m. as daily planned activities begin no later than this time.

- If your child is to be absent or late, either in arriving or pickup, you must notify the center.
- Full tuition is charged for holiday, inclement weather and half day training closings.
- If you plan to terminate your child's enrollment, a month's notice is required.

It is important for parents to stay within the hours they have scheduled as closely as possible because staffing is based on children's schedules. Early drop off or late pick up can jeopardize the classrooms' teacher/child ratio. The center closes at 6:00pm. You will need to have picked up your child and be out of the building by 6:00 pm in order to not be charged for late pickup. The late pick up charge is \$1.00 per minute after 6:00 pm.

Teachers plan their daily activities based on the children expected for the days and hours children are scheduled.

SUBSIDIES

The Center accepts all federal government child care subsidies. Parents must complete all required paperwork on time to continue enrollment at the Center. All parents are also required to sign a fee agreement, agreeing to be personally responsible for the payment of the tuition even in the event they become ineligible to receive child care subsidies. All other subsidies will be accepted on a case by case-by-case basis, as long as the center will be paid the full cost of child care with the subsidy and any other monies provided.

TUITION

Tuition is payable bi-weekly and/or monthly and is due by the 25th of the month for the next month. If you choose to do payroll deduct, your first payment will be in advance for the next two-week period. If tuition is not paid per schedule, you will be charged a \$10 per day late payment fee. If you receive a Board scholarship or Alabama voucher subsidy, you are responsible for the difference between tuition charged and your subsidy/scholarship.

SAFETY AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

We do everything possible to minimize accidents through various safety procedures, facility inspections, routine maintenance and consistent policies and procedures. We will provide you with written documentation in the event your child is injured while in the Center's care.

Emergency drills for evacuation and severe weather are conducted monthly and plans are posted in each classroom of the Center. In the event of a sudden storm or emergency that prevents you from getting to the Center, we are prepared to care for the children for extended periods. In the unlikely event the Center is damaged and declared unsafe, you will be contacted immediately and evacuation plans will be put in place to enlist the appropriate professional authorities (fire, police, medical) and move the children to safety where they will await your immediate arrival.

CLOTHING

Activities at Social Security Administration include running, climbing, painting, resting, eating and many more creative experiences.

- Clothes designed for comfort, play and durability are recommended.
- Party clothes may be planned for special occasions, and parents will be given sufficient notification.
- Labeling of all clothing is important.
- Infants through two-year old should have two complete clothing changes at the Center.
- Preschoolers should have one complete change.
- Each child needs to bring a sheet, a special blanket and soft nap time item if they wish.

Sheets, blankets and clothes should be taken home at least once a week to be laundered.

Birthdays

Birthdays are an important day for a young child and they will be celebrated at our Center during the regular snack time.

- Parents are invited to provide moderate birthday treats for their child's class and to participate in the celebration. Our center is a peanut and nut free environment. Please remember – no items with nuts. All snacks provided must be commercially prepared with an ingredient list included.
- Please do not provide a clown or other performer. Many children are afraid of clowns and anyone who wears a face mask.

Safe Arrival and Departure

In order for parents to see each team member in their child's classroom, one staff member works the opening hours and the opposite team member normally works the closing hours. All children are assigned a primary caregiver.

- Parents will sign their child in and escort them to their classroom.
- Please notify the Director and child's teacher the name of the person who will pick up your child if it is different than usual.
- Authorization and proper identification of any persons picking up the child must be on file.
- The parent must sign the child out before leaving the classroom.
- If someone other than an authorized person is to pick up the child, parents must: Call the center and speak to one of the Administrators. Provide the person's name, driver's license number, and a physical description of the person. This information must be sent via fax or email with the parent's signature giving the Center permission to release the child to this person. Please state the approximate time the person will be picking up the child. Give a telephone number where the parent(s) can be reached. The parent will be called back to verify the information previously given.

Parents as Partners

Involving parents in center activities is important for both you and your child because it strengthens the community between the child's experiences at home and at the center. Our program offers a variety of ways that you can become involved.

Open Door Policy for all Parents

You are welcome to visit the center at any time and are encouraged to do so. Areas have been created so that you can spend one-on-one time with your child. Please discuss with your child's teacher the best time to visit your child's classroom.

Eco-Healthy Practices

TodayCare encourages parents to work with the Center to participate in eco-healthy practices such as: reducing your families contact with environmental health hazards such as unhealthy air, heavy metals and chemicals. Please do not leave your car running when it is parked in the parking lot.

TodayCare is aware of and uses eco-healthy practices such as: washing fruits and vegetables before consumption; purchasing non-toxic toys and art supplies; recycling; monitoring daily outdoor air quality; and using least-toxic, fragrance-free cleaning products.

The TodayCare Center at Birmingham participates in Earth Day and includes it in the Curriculum.

Parent Volunteers

Parent participation in the classroom is a special treat for the children and the teachers. You are invited to “help out” whenever your schedule permits.

You may wish to bring a special activity for the children or simply participate in the activities planned. Please discuss with teacher before bringing in an activity. Parent volunteers are never left alone in the classroom with children.

Parent Support Group

A Parent Support Group (PSG) serves in a supporting capacity to the childcare center. The primary purpose of this group is to provide support and suggestions to the Center regarding:

- Policies – both current and proposed
- Need for additional services or programs
- Changes to the facility
- Need for additional equipment
- Risk management issues
- Parenting workshop topics
- Special activities

The Parent Support Group will typically be composed of 8 to 10 members. Members of the group will include staff and parents who currently have children in the Center. The Group will stay intact for one year at which time all parents in the Center will be solicited to become members of the Group.

To help ensure that the Center’s program meets the needs of parents and children, the Parent Support Group will meet regularly. The dates will be posted in the center and on the Center/Parent website and Parent Bulletin Board.

Our Commitment to Communication

It is the center's responsibility to communicate with you regarding your child's experiences at the SSA Center. Daily communication through the Kids Report App, monthly newsletters and parent/teacher conferences will keep you updated on your child's experiences in center activities. Remember, teachers are interested in working with you to meet your child's individual needs. Please feel free to talk with them about any questions and concerns.

Daily Communication

We believe that it is important that all of us who care for your child have a sense of the child's experience, both at home and at the Social Security Administration Center. The daily/weekly communication reports provide information about your child's day/week at the center and a critical communication link with home. Your child's teacher will communicate and share information about your child's day on the Kids Report App. In addition, we encourage informal daily communications between you and your child's teachers. Most classrooms will have a daily intake form for parents to complete.

Along with routine information, the Kids Report App completed by your child's teacher will indicate if there is a special need to meet with them and/or whether any significant information has been noted.

We understand that you have a busy schedule; however, please set aside time to talk with your child's teacher each day and look for notes on the Parent Bulletin Board and TodayCare-SSA Birmingham website for parents.

Website

The SSA Birmingham Child Development Center has a website where center information, monthly calendars, newsletters, etc. are posted. Each classroom will add a monthly newsletter.

Newsletters

You will receive a monthly newsletter containing general information about Center and individual classroom activities. If you are interested in contributing to the newsletter, please contact the Center Director.

Newsletters will be posted on the TodayCare-Social Security Administration web site.

Parent/Teacher Conferences/Assessments

In order to implement curriculum that is well planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive and comprehensive, we make ethical, appropriate, valid and reliable assessments for the children. Our curriculum is Creative Curriculum by Teaching Strategies, LLC. We use the Creative Curriculum assessment tool. When children enter our programs, educators will establish a personal file for each child.

The Assessment instrument groups skills and behaviors into four broad categories. The categories are: Social/emotional, language, cognitive and gross and fine motor development. The skills and behaviors are listed in the order that they are likely to emerge.

The assessment is administered through ongoing informal observations. Anecdotal notes give supporting evidence of children's acquisition of skills. The recording and observation of the acquisition of skills and behaviors will be conducted in a natural classroom setting and dated on the instrument as they are learned.

Our teaching staff develop weekly lesson plans to include individual needs of the children. The Curriculum and children's assessments are used as guidelines to meet both the individual needs of the children in the classroom as well as group needs and to help set goals for each classroom. These goals are incorporated into the center's annual Strategic Plan. Your child's individual assessment will be reviewed with you so that any questions can be discussed at the Parent/Teacher conferences.

Parent/teacher conferences are offered twice a year (fall & spring) for full time children. The purpose of the conference is to provide parents with an overview of their child's developmental progress, to get parent input into their child's care and to answer any questions or concerns parents may have regarding their child's stay at the center. A copy of the written assessment is provided to parents at the time of the conference. In addition, any parent may request a parent/teacher conference at any time.

Resolving Parent Concerns

Just as teachers are encouraged to discuss concerns with parents, parents are encouraged to ask their child's teachers any questions they may have about their child's care at the Center or about general Center issues. It is important for parents to clear up any questions or misunderstandings quickly. Most concerns are best addressed at the classroom level, but if parents and teachers are not able to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution, parents are encouraged to discuss their concerns with the Center Director.

Open communication between staff and parents is vital to the smooth operation of the Center. We are committed to the satisfactory resolution of parents' concerns. The President/COO of TodayCare Children's Centers is Judy Simpson. After you have talked with the Center Director and if your concern has not been addressed, please contact Judy. Her telephone number and email address are available at the Center and are on the website.

CURRICULUM

As defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, "Curriculum is an organized framework that delineates the content that children are to learn, the processes through which children achieve identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help children achieve these goals and the context in which teaching and learning occur." We take this definition one step further in that we believe everything we do in the classroom and on the playground is learning and part of our curriculum. Every contact we have with a child is an opportunity for learning. Though we have lesson plans and daily activities, curriculum cannot be just what is planned or taken from a book. We believe children learn from meaningful experiences that occur often and are relevant to their lives. NAEYC calls this a "developmentally appropriate curriculum."

We utilize Creative Curriculum by Diane Trister Dodge, Teaching Strategies. Teachers are trained annually in the curriculum goals and adapting them to their classroom and children's needs.

PROGRAM POLICIES

Programs for Infants and Toddlers

We realize the transition of going back to work and leaving your child can be overwhelming. We would like to help make this adjustment as smooth as possible for your family. We have outlined our goals and philosophy of our infant program for you to be able to easily refer to as your child nears each new landmark development.

Infancy is the time when trust, self-worth, and independence/dependence are established.

Our priority with each baby in our infant room is to provide a safe, nurturing environment. Each infant is assigned a primary caregiver to promote bonding and foster communication with each parent. Caregivers are chosen because they are warm, nurturing individuals with experience in caring for young babies. All caregivers

go through an extensive training program that includes principles of child development, Social Security Administration/TodayCare policies and practices, and proper techniques in caring for infants in a group setting. All children will be supervised using sight and sound at all times.

Although each child will have his individual schedule, we do have guidelines which help provide consistency and stability for the children and our program.

Upon arrival to the Center each morning, we ask that you fill out your parent report and sign your child in. The information on the parent report lets us know if anything different is going on with your child.

We are a child development center and development begins as an infant. We provide a safe, loving, nurturing atmosphere as well as a challenging environment. The teachers prepare weekly lesson plans. This will keep you informed on how your child is developing physically, emotionally, socially and cognitively. Infants are not pushed to develop at a faster rate than a normal child or to “keep up” with the other children. Activities and infant stimulation are provided to encourage development in a regular sequence. As the child shows signs of being ready for the next developmental task, we will provide activities to assist your child to perfect the task.

Our philosophy is that children learn through play. We believe interaction with the children is as important as being fed and changed. For this reason, we attempt to keep the children on the floor with other children and toys when they are not sleeping. This encourages the child to become aware of his environment and the other children. The teachers are down on the floor interacting with the children as much as the atmosphere of the room at the time allows.

All infants and toddlers will be supervised by both sight and sound. When children are sleeping, teachers will check on them every 15 minutes. All infants and toddlers are easily seen if not in direct line of sight by looking up or slightly adjusting the position by at least one member of the teaching staff.

All infants, 12 months and younger, will be placed on their backs to sleep unless otherwise ordered by a physician. The sleeping surface will be firm and manufactured for sale as infant sleeping equipment and will meet the standards as approved by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission.

All infants will be placed on a firm mattress with a fitted bottom sheet. When a blanket is used on an infant 6 weeks to 8 months, it may only be brought up to the infant’s chest. Bumper pads, pillows, sheepskins and other stuffed animals will not be permitted in the cribs. Heads are never covered.

For more information on the Back to Sleep Guidelines, please see <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/sids/sids/cfm>.

Each child will be checked even when within sight and sound. A teacher will check on an infant in their crib every 15 minutes.

Experiences for the youngest children are designed to provide a warm, loving environment that promotes a sense of security and trust. Infants begin to develop positive relationships with adults and the nurturing environment enables them to explore the world around them.

Between the ages of 12 and 15 months, your child will move into the Toddler room. We are quite aware of the physical and emotional changes that your child is going through so we endeavor to make this transition a smooth one. A week or so before the move, we will try to let your child “visit” the new room so they will become familiar with the room and their new teachers as well as their new friends.

Toddlers are moving towards increased autonomy as new skills emerge. They enjoy constant movement as well as new activities and challenges. A consistent schedule, nurturing and patient teachers, and a safe environment rich in activities are keys to successful toddler programs. Promoting language development, learning self-help skills, developing inner controls and positive social skills are the goals for the toddler years.

The Toddler Curriculum is more structured with many more daily activities to satisfy their ever-inquiring mind. We include art, music, finger plays, songs, creative movement, discovery, story time and circle time. These are all age-appropriate activities.

TodayCare Children’s Centers uses the guidelines defined in *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (published by NAEYC)

Toddlers are very busy children! The world is so large and so full of fascinating things to touch, see, hear, taste, smell and try for the first time. Older toddlers will oppose you with “no”; use word-gestures; climb; speak a vocabulary of 10 to 50 words or more; jump off the floor with both feet; dance to music; have a short attention span; put simple puzzles together and much, much more. During the developmental stages of a toddler, they will continue to grow intellectually, physically, emotionally and socially. Because of this, they are able to develop more advanced skills. The teachers have to be very creative and perceptive to meet each of their needs.

Most children in the Toddler room have graduated to one nap each day. If your child needs a morning and afternoon nap, please let us know. Our program is built around what is best for each child.

The most common aggressive behavior we see is biting. This occurs for various reasons: teething, mimicking, self-assertion, cause and effect, or sensory exploration. As much as is possible, we try to prevent biting by keeping the children busy, giving plenty of individual attention, keeping frustrating situations to a minimum and redirecting inappropriate behavior.

Toddlerhood is a wonderful stage in a child's life. Every minute of the day they are ready to absorb and remember something new. They are openly loving and affectionate and a joy to be with. They will make you laugh and smile with their antics. It is a challenging but rewarding time. The Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers is the basis for its infant and toddler Caregiver/teacher orientation and training program.

TodayCare Children's Centers uses the guidelines defined in **Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs** (published by NAEYC) and The Creative Curriculum for Infants and Toddlers as the basis for its infant and toddler caregiver/teacher orientation and training program.

Program for Preschoolers

Experiences for the older children (3-5 years) are designed to enable them to learn about themselves and the world around them. Opportunities are provided for individual and group activities in a variety of learning centers including block building, sensory play, dramatic play, art, music and storytelling. Teachers guide the development of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social skills that will help prepare your child for the future. The curriculum serves as a planning tool for teachers to use in preparing the daily experiences with their group.

During this developmental stage, children are classifying and manipulating small objects, building and acting out the life they are trying to understand. Language and new cognitive powers enable them to question and explore new worlds through books and conversation.

Throughout the day, children plan and make choices about which aspects of the learning environment to focus on and participate in small groups.

Learning centers include more complex materials and their choices reflect the child's changing interests and capabilities. An integral part of the daily routine includes opportunities to work at the writing center, computer center and other centers. Preschoolers are independent, active and eager learners. Research clearly shows that preschoolers learn best by "doing," or through interactive play in an environment that is rich in experiences and exploratory opportunities. Our primary curriculum and training tool for the preschool classroom is The Creative Curriculum. This curriculum validates what current theory understands as appropriate practice in early childhood learning.

Each day has a schedule that includes group times (circle time, story time, etc.) as well as center time or child choice time. Teachers are trained to look for the "teachable moments" as they move through the schedule of activities. They serve as facilitators, constantly interacting and encouraging children's interests and explorations, supporting learning through encouraging language development, mathematical reasoning, and scientific thought.

Positive Guidance

Young children are eager to learn about the world around them. They are trying to make sense of their experiences and to learn how to behave in this mysterious place. They strive for understanding, independence and self-control. Children learn by exploring, experimenting, testing the limits of their environment and experiencing the consequences of their behavior. In this way, they come to understand how the world works and their own limits.

Our approach to guidance and discipline is to promote a sense of independence, autonomy and self-esteem, while maintaining the control necessary for a safe and non-threatening environment. The basis of this control is a secure, orderly, developmentally appropriate, caring environment. This atmosphere allows children to experiment and test their own behavior within clearly defined limits.

We will not subject children in our care to discipline that is severe, humiliating or frightening. We will not use sarcasm, ridiculing, or any form of coercion such as forcing a child to sit down, lie down, or stay down except when restraint is necessary to prevent a child from hurting himself or others. Under no circumstances will we use any form of physical abuse such as shaking, hitting, spanking, slapping, jerking, kicking, biting, pinching, excessive tickling and pulling of arms, hair or ears. We will not associate discipline with food, rest or toileting. Staff will not use psychological abuse or coercion when disciplining a child. Some examples of these types of punishment are: shaming, name calling, ridiculing, humiliation, sarcasm, cursing at, making threats, or frightening a child; ostracism or withholding affection or requiring a child to remain inactive for long periods of time.

When needed, staff will use a variety of methods to teach children self-control and how to express their feelings in acceptable ways. These include redirecting children to acceptable activities, using logical consequences to help children be responsible for their actions, using firm words and tones to help children understand how someone feels and modeling acceptable ways to express negative feelings.

TodayCare feels strongly about how children are disciplined. TodayCare's positive guidance policy is also included in the Employee Handbook and training on alternate forms of guidance are accomplished annually. When a child's ongoing challenging behavior must be addressed, we will consult with you and ask your permission to get professional help. We will work with you and professionals to develop an individualized plan to address the behavior. If that is not successful and TodayCare feels that they cannot keep your child and/or the other children in the classroom safe, we will ask you to make other arrangements for your child's care.

Diapering

Parents are asked to provide diapers in bulk. Parents also must provide appropriate wipes, ointments and other needed supplies. Diapers are checked every two hours and after a child wakes up from naps.

Toilet Learning

Toilet learning efforts of parents are assisted and supported. Toilet learning will begin when both the parents and the teachers feel the child is ready. A child should show signs of readiness before toilet learning can begin. Independence - not cleanliness - is the central issue in teaching a child to use the toilet. For the process to work, the child must have almost complete control over it. Parents and Caregivers should do a little more than arrange the environment so that the child can use the toilet easily.

A child will show readiness in two ways:

Physical readiness is the attainment of adequate bladder capacity and control. A physically ready child is able to stay dry for two or more hours during the day, wake up dry from naps and possibly wake up dry in the morning.

Mental readiness occurs when the child understands what toilets are used for and is curious to learn more about them. Signs of mental readiness include wanting to watch people use the toilet (allow it), wanting to flush and toilet and asking questions about it.

The presence of both readiness signals defines the most opportune time for toilet learning. This critical period usually emerges between the ages of 2 and 3, give or take 6 months and lasts for about 3 months. During this phase, the child is "primed" for toilet learning skills and needs only support and encouragement from parents to be successful.

Please discuss techniques with your child's teacher so that your child can experience continuity in adult expectations in this important area.

Celebrating Holidays

Holidays are special times to celebrate and opportunities to teach the children about different traditions and cultures. Although no specific religious instruction is offered, different holidays are discussed in order to help the children understand and gain an appreciation of various traditions and cultures. Parents are encouraged to share with the staff information about the customs and celebrations that are important to them. If you do not celebrate holidays for religious reasons, please discuss these with your child's teacher. If you do not wish for your child to participate in the holiday celebrations, you always have the option of keeping your child home.

Special Needs Children

All children are special, with individual needs that require careful attention and flexible programming. Because labeling a child's "special needs" may have considerable implications for a child's future, it is a step taken only after much thought and professional evaluation. A child's behavior while in child care may be very different from his/her behavior in other settings. The behavior we are concerned about may be a function of the setting, the environment, staff expectations and routines or scheduling.

Nap Time

Licensing guidelines require a rest time for children. Your child needs to feel comfortable during naptime: therefore, he/she may bring a sleep toy from home. Please bring a sheet and blanket for naptime. These personal items must also fit into each child's individual cubby. You need to take all sleeping items home weekly to launder and return. If after a child has been on his cot for more than 30 minutes and has not gone to sleep, he/she will be offered quiet activities to do on his or her cot. Infants will be placed on their backs to sleep unless otherwise ordered by a pediatrician.

Field Trips

Field trips may include walking visits to special places within the campus community. Special precautions are taken to assure the safety of children on field trips. You will be notified in advance of planned field trips; parent permission is required. You may request that your child not participate. Parents are welcome to participate in field trips as their work permits. Most field trips will be brought to the center.

Outdoor Play

Your child's experiences on the playground are an important part of the program and his/her development. The playground is an extension of the classroom. It combines opportunities for exploration, creativity and play.

Our private playground features separate play space for younger children and older children. A wide range of riding toys for the trike path, water play, climbing structures, playhouse and a covered area for rainy days are among the playground's amenities.

Children will go outside each day as weather permits. Parents can assure their comfort by providing appropriate outdoor clothing. Due to staffing demands, children are not allowed to stay inside while their group is on the playground. Children who come to the Center will be expected to join the others in outdoor play.

Meals and Snacks

- Breakfast, lunch and an afternoon snack will be served daily. Times served will vary by age group.
- All food and drinks, both snacks and meal time foods, will be provided by the Center.
- If your child needs a special diet, please discuss with the Director. You will need to provide that diet from home.
- All foods brought from home should be in a container that will allow the food to remain cold and/or hot to be served. All food must be labeled and dated. We cannot heat food.
- The American Academy of Pediatricians recommends that food for children should NEVER be heated in a microwave.
- If infants arrive at the Center later than 9:00 am, they should have been fed breakfast at home.
- Toddlers and preschoolers arriving after lunch time should already have had lunch.

NAEYC standards state that curriculum should include teaching children healthy eating habits. Studies show that after eating sugar a child's immune system drops immediately, making them more susceptible to airborne germs. In order to keep all children healthy, we enforce the following nutritional guidelines. Foods should be easy to swallow.

Acceptable Foods

Fresh/dried fruit
Cooked vegetables
Cheese slices or sticks
NUT FREE granola bars
Variety of sliced breads
Muffins
Bagels
Wholesome cereal (non-sugar)
Unsweetened fruit/fruit in lite syrup

Unacceptable Foods

Soda
Raw Carrots and peas (under 4)
Candy (gummy bears, hard Candy)
Raisins (for toddlers)
More than 4 oz of juice (infant)
NUTS
Whole grapes
Hot dogs (children under 4 years)
Popcorn
Sugary cereals
Pretzels and chips
Peanut Butter
Peanuts

Social Security Administration is a peanut and nut free environment.

All foods must meet Alabama licensing guidelines for childcare centers. The Center follows the SSA food safety program pertinent to serving and preparing meals.

- Leftover food which has been opened will be discarded.
- No open cans or jars may be sent for your child to the Center.
- Formula must be provided for infants not using breast milk.
- Expressed breast milk may be brought from home but must be frozen or kept cold during transit. All bottles must be prepared with the child's name on each bottle.

DUE TO SEVERE ALLERGIES, NUT PRODUCTS ARE PROHIBITED FROM OUR CENTER (For example, no peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, peanut butter and crackers, certain cereals contain nut products, granola bars, Cracker Jacks, trail mix with nuts, cookies with nuts, or nut based milk products.)

Children will be given the opportunity to brush their teeth at least once each day preferably after the lunch meal.

Infant Feeding

Children in the infant program are fed on demand. For children 6 weeks to 12 months, parents provide food and formula. The center can accommodate the use of frozen breast milk. Formula must be in a ready-to-feed, non-glass bottle with the child's first and last name clearly displayed. Bottle feedings do not contain solid foods unless the child's health Care provider supplies written instructions and a medical reason for this practice. Breast milk must be labeled with the date, child's first and last name. Pediatrician's diet orders must be updated regularly.

Nursing Mothers

Nursing mothers are welcome and encouraged to come into the center to feed their child. A quiet, private area will be provided.

Sleeping

Cribs are provided by the Center for infants (12 months and younger) and cots are provided for toddlers and preschoolers. Children lay down anytime they feel the need to rest.

Should Parents Stay? It Depends...

Most early childhood professionals believe that a caring policy allows parents to stay as long as necessary, especially if children appear to need parental support. No optimal policy exists. Children are different and temperaments vary. Children who adapt to change well or know about school from other experiences cannot understand why a parent might stay, but are perfectly amenable to parents in the room. Other children approach new experiences with hesitation and adapt better if the parent remains. Parents offer valuable support by staying, but if they make themselves too available, children may be reluctant to relate to other children or to teachers.

Circumstances vary as well as children's temperaments. Children who have had few babysitters and whose parents rarely left them may need a more gradual separation than children with a large extended family or a history of multiple caregivers.

Saying Good bye the First Day

At some point, parents must leave. Saying good bye to your child builds trust. Repeated goodbyes strengthen children's beliefs that parents will come back. If children know that a parent is leaving, they will be better prepared to begin their day.

OPERATIONAL POLICIES

Days and Hours of Operation

The Center is open Monday through Friday. Our typical hours of operation are 6:30 am until 6:00 pm. Please plan to have your child in their designated classroom at the time of day that you specified in their reservation.

For your child's safety and to provide an opportunity for your child's teacher to talk with you, please escort your child to his/her classroom. Social Security Administration is a secured environment.

The center is closed on the following holidays:

New Year's Day
Martin Luther King's Birthday
Presidents Birthday
Memorial Day
Independence Day
Labor Day
Columbus Day
Veterans Day
Thanksgiving Day
Christmas Day

For your child's protection, only persons authorized by the parent are permitted to take a child from the Center. Parents must list names of anyone who might pick up the child on the Enrollment Application, Release Authorization Form and the Child's Emergency Information. If the adult picking up your child is unfamiliar to staff, the adult will be required to show his/her photo ID for identification. Whenever an adult takes a child from the Center, he/she must sign out in the sign-in/out book in the lobby. It is extremely important that you maintain current information on all of your child's records and emergency information. Please be sure to notify the Center Director of any changes immediately. This includes a change of telephone numbers as well.

A special word on picking up your child later than expected: It can be difficult for young children to stay at the Center longer than they are used to. Please notify the Center if, due to an emergency, you are unable to arrive on time. The teacher can then tell your child that you will be late.

Withdrawal and Disenrollment

Your right to withdraw a child from the Center will be respected. However, you will be required to provide a 30-day written notice of intent to withdraw if you are a full-time or part-time enrollee. You will be charged your regular tuition for that period whether your child is in attendance or not.

Parents may pay their tuition bi-weekly or monthly via payroll deduction and/or through the Tuition Express App.

Termination of ChildCare

The Center may require parents to withdraw their child when:

- Parents abuse the policies and procedures of the center; ie, failure to pick up a sick child within 1 hour of the time notified; negligence in updating medical records, or failure to pay all tuition and late fees promptly.
- Child's physician recommends withdrawal.
- Parents are unwilling to cooperate with center staff in the best interest of the child as determined by the management team.
- After repeated attempts to correct inappropriate behavior, a child continues to disrupt the learning process of the group and/or poses a risk of harm to self or others.
- Child purposely and maliciously hurts another child and/or damages the property of the Center.
- Child is verbally abusive including repeated use of inappropriate and offensive language.
- Other circumstances deemed inappropriate by Center management team.

If withdrawal is deemed necessary due to one of the reasons listed above, the center will provide parents with as much notice as possible (one week) unless child poses a risk to himself and has a history of harm to children in the group.

When a Social Security employee leaves employment with the Social Security Administration, they must immediately begin paying the non-federal employee rate.

Risk Management

Every effort is made to provide a safe and secure environment for children. The entrances are locked and monitored from the Center office. Unauthorized persons will not be admitted. The Center has a central phone/intercom system as well as central fire alarm and sprinkler systems. Evacuation routes are posted throughout the Center.

All staff are trained in Pediatric First Aid, CPR and emergency procedures. The Center Director is responsible for risk management, including periodic inspections and training of staff. Parents are encouraged to identify and discuss with the Center Director any perceived risks to a child's health or safety.

Staffing

The Center staff are trained and dedicated early childhood professionals. They exceed the education and experience requirements of the Alabama Child Care Licensing

regulations. The high quality of the staff is a benefit to you and your child. The results are the positive development of your child and the increase in your ability to focus on your work. We encourage you to treat your child’s teacher and the rest of the Center staff with dignity and respect. They are early childhood professionals with whom you have entrusted the care of your child.

The following are the **teacher: child** ratios and **group sizes** which will be followed.

Teacher/Child Ratio Group	Age	Teacher/Child Ratio	Group Size	Total spaces In each Classroom
Infant	6 wks-1 yr	1:4	8	8
Young Toddler	1-2 yrs	1:5	10	10
Older Toddler	2-3 yrs	1:6	12	12
Young Preschool	3-4 yrs	1:9	18	18
Older Preschool	4-5 yrs	1:10	20	20

Cooperating with Regulatory Agencies

The Alabama Department of Human Resources licenses TodayCare Children’s Centers/Social Security Administration Child Development Center. The Center meets and/or exceeds state standards. The license is clearly displayed at the Center. All Center staff are mandated to report any suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the Alabama Department of Human Resources Child Care Services Division.

Child Custody

Legal decisions regarding issues of child custody will be respected. In fairness to parents and children, documentation of the rights of each parent is required in order to restrict visitations when necessary. Please be advised that the Center cannot refuse to release a child to the child’s parent or legal guardian without a court order or legal document restricting or denying that person of such right.

Chronic Medical Conditions

Children with pre-existing medical conditions will be evaluated for admission on an individual basis. After admission, documentation of regular medical follow-up will be required. Children with chronic asthma will be allowed to remain in the Center if there is no “whistling” and/or difficulty breathing and the child is not running a fever.

Immunizations

All children are required to be immunized according to the State of Alabama Licensing Regulations. On the child’s first day of attendance, each child from two (2) months to enrolled in Kindergarten shall have a valid State of Alabama Certificate of Immunizations on file in the center, unless one of the following is on file in the center:

A valid State of Alabama Certificate of Medical Exemption

Or

A valid Alabama Certificate of Religious Exemption.

Each child’s Certificate of Immunization shall be updated according to the expiration date indicated on the certificate.

You may elect to not have your child immunized based on either medical or religious reasons. The forms listed above can be attained at your local Health Department.

Any under immunized child will be excluded from care in the event that a vaccine-preventable disease to which children are susceptible occurs in the program.

Medications

Often medicine can be prescribed for morning and evening doses versus several times per day, thereby avoiding the need to administer medication at the Center. We prefer that you discuss this with your pediatrician and make arrangements accordingly if possible.

However, if necessary, management can administer medicine under the following guidelines:

- Medication will be administered one time per day per child only. Medicine will be given as your physician prescribes and will be administered by the Center Director and/or Assistant Director. Please ask your physician to prescribe medication accordingly.
- We cannot administer any type of medication without a physician’s current prescription (or written prescription approval by health personnel for non-

prescription drugs with specific dosage) and a signed Medication Authorization form to be completed by the parent. Forms are available in the office.

- Medication must be provided in the original container and labeled with the child's name, date, directions and physician's name. The Center will not administer medication after the expiration date nor will we administer medication to a child that was prescribed for another child. A member of the management team must log the medication into the Medication Log Book.
- Never leave medication in your child's diaper bag or backpack. All medication must be left with Center Management. Medication left at the center is kept in a locked container. If medication requires refrigeration, it is kept in a lock container in the medication refrigerator. If medication is not to stay at the center, it is the parent's responsibility to remember to take medications home with the child at pick up time. Medication which is required for extreme allergic reactions will be kept in the classroom in a locked container.
- Upon enrollment please discuss any allergies/medical conditions your child has with center management and note them in "allergy/medical conditions list" section of the enrollment form. It is the parents' responsibility to keep us informed of changes in their child's health. Any medications your child may need upon an allergic reaction will be stored in a labeled container in the office.
- The application of diaper rash ointment and sunscreen requires that a medication form be filled out by the parent.

Illness and Injury

Parents will be notified immediately if their child becomes ill at the Center. Parents shall remove children from the Center within one hour after notification. Please be sure all emergency numbers are up to date at all times.

Children exhibiting signs of illness listed below should remain at home. The following are indications of illness that will necessitate removal from the center:

- Unusual drowsiness or severe lethargy
- Extreme fussiness
- Persistent or excessive crying
- Severe wheezing
- Uncontrolled coughing
- Rapid or labored breathing

- Asthmatic with upper respiratory infection and coughing that are interfering with the child's ability to learn.
- Unable to play
- Complaining of severe pain
- Yellowing of the eyes or skin
- Undiagnosed rash
- Fever above 100.4 degrees
- Vomiting with two or more episodes within one day
- Diarrhea of 2 abnormally loose stools within 1 hour period
- Severe cold with coughing, sneezing, and/or thick nose drainage

If the parent or guardian cannot be reached, an emergency contact person, designated by you, will be called. Your child will be transported to the closest hospital if required due to a severe illness or injury. In extreme emergencies, immediate treatment will be administered as determined by emergency medical personnel. You will be responsible for payment of any medical fees incurred.

Parents are required to inform the Center of reportable communicative diseases. We will notify public health authorities, as well as parents of other children who may have been exposed to your child. Your family's identity will be kept confidential.

Health Consultation

All policies and procedures adopted by the Center are reviewed and approved by our Director of Medical Affairs. Social Security Administration works in tandem with pediatricians, pediatric sub-specialists, and Alabama Department of Child Care Licensing.

All children will have access to annual screenings for vision, hearing and a developmental screening that evaluates language, cognitive, gross motor, fine motor, and social and emotional development.

Waiting List

When the Center reaches maximum capacity enrollment for any age group, we will implement a waiting list. Applications for enrollment will be placed in the order that they were received.

Priority for enrollment will be given to siblings of children already enrolled in the Center.

When a space becomes available, the Center will notify you, after which you will have 48 hours to complete enrollment. If you cannot complete enrollment within 48 hours,

you may opt to pay the appropriate weekly tuition rate to guarantee the space. If you decline an offer of enrollment, you will be moved to the end of the waiting list. If you decline a second time you will be removed from the list and another enrollment application with a new inquiry date will be required if you are still interested in enrolling your child at another date.

Sibling Discount

Parents with more than one child enrolled in the Center will receive a sibling discount of 5% for each additional child enrolled based on the tuition for the oldest child. Only children enrolled in regularly scheduled full time care will receive the sibling discount.

Tax Statements

Each year we provide a statement of the amount you paid the previous year for child care. This is a free service to our clients whose accounts are current. Any delinquent accounts will be gladly accommodated as soon as your account is current. We are required by the Internal Revenue Service to provide you with our name and federal identification number. These are posted in the front office lobby.

Safety and Emergency Procedures

We do everything possible to minimize accidents through various safety programs, facility inspections, routine maintenance and consistent policies and procedures. We will provide you with written documentation in the event your child is injured while in the Center's care.

Emergency drills for evacuation and severe weather are conducted monthly and plans are posted in each classroom of the Center. In the event of a sudden storm or emergency that prevents you from getting to the Center, we are prepared to care for the children for extended periods. In the unlikely event the Center is damaged and declared unsafe, you will be contacted immediately and evacuation plans will be put in place to enlist the appropriate professional authorities (fire, police, medical) and move the children to safety where they will await your immediate arrival.

Recommended Dress

Busy, creative, learning and play can be messy regardless of the age of the child. We use washable paints and smocks to cover clothing, but we cannot guarantee spills and stains will be avoided. Please dress your child in clothing that is washable, durable and labeled with permanent marker. If you notify us when you have a special appointment after the child care day, the teacher will be happy to change your child prior to pick up.

Closed toed shoes must be worn in school. For your child's safety, we recommend sturdy shoes, such as tennis shoes. Thongs, sandals, clogs, jellies or smooth soled shoes are not permitted. Water shoes may be brought for "water play days." Teachers will assist children in changing into these for the water experience.

Drawstring Jewelry, and other articles hung around the neck

Children are not permitted to wear any shirts, jackets, sweatshirts, jewelry or article that is tied around the neck. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure compliance with this safety policy by sending children to the Center with appropriate clothing. Hooded drawstring clothing presents a major safety hazard for children. The cord can become caught while a child is climbing, sliding or engaged in other active play and result in choking or other serious injury. The same risk is associated with necklaces, locket, keys or other articles hung around the neck.

Your Child's First Day

What to Bring:

There are a number of things you should bring with your child to the Center. Be sure to label everything with a permanent marker.

These should include:

- Two complete changes of clothes labeled with the child's name (this is needed for all ages) preferably folded and sealed in a gallon sized zip-lock plastic bag. The SSA Birmingham Child Development Center is not responsible for any lost and/or stolen items.
- Breakfast, lunch and afternoon snacks will be served depending on the hours of care. Any foods that you provide should be in a container that will keep it hot or cold. We do not have the resources to warm or refrigerate food except for infant foods.

- Disposable diapers, wipes and all ointments.
- Infant food and/or formula/breast milk already prepared in bottles. Bottles must be labeled with your child's name and the date it was prepared. We cannot serve baby food from an already opened container.
- Crib and/or cot sheet, security blanket, soft nap item and/or a pacifier if needed.

What Not to Bring:

Please leave toys, food, gum, candy, pets, toy weapons, jewelry and money at home. All children share the learning materials at the Center as part of the learning experience. When children are not concerned about their toys becoming lost or broken, they are able to participate more fully in our educational environment. We are not responsible for any items lost or broken.

Thank you for choosing the Social Security Administration Child Development Center. If you have any questions, please call the center.

TodayCare @Social Security Administration Birmingham
Johnetta Nicholson Director
Judy Simpson, Pres/COO