



Family Handbook

2024-2025

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Mission Statement

Create a positive impact in the development of children.

Vision Statement

Provide a safe, nature-based learning environment, where children engage in hands-on learning with a curriculum focused on whole child development.

Guiding Principle

To do what's best for children.

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Welcome to Connect Academy for Children!

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to another exciting year at Connect Academy for Children! We are thrilled to have you as part of our community and look forward to an enriching and joyful year ahead. **Our goal has always been to provide a nurturing and stimulating environment where your child can grow, learn, and thrive.** This year, we are especially excited to announce a significant transition in our educational approach—Connect Academy is now embracing nature-based learning.

The Benefits of Nature-Based Learning

Nature-based learning is an educational approach that integrates the natural environment into daily learning experiences. Research has shown that young children greatly benefit from this type of learning in numerous ways:

1. **Enhanced Physical Health:** Outdoor activities encourage children to be more physically active, which helps develop their motor skills, coordination, and overall physical health.
2. **Cognitive Development:** Interaction with nature has been linked to improved concentration, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Nature's dynamic environment stimulates curiosity and critical thinking.
3. **Emotional Well-Being:** Being in nature reduces stress and anxiety, promoting a sense of calm and well-being. Children who spend time outdoors tend to be happier and more balanced emotionally.
4. **Social Skills:** Outdoor learning encourages teamwork, communication, and cooperation as children engage in group activities and explore nature together.
5. **Environmental Stewardship:** Early exposure to nature helps foster a lifelong appreciation and respect for the environment. Children learn about sustainability and the importance of caring for our planet.
6. **Sensory Engagement:** Nature provides a rich sensory experience, engaging children's sight, sound, touch, and even smell. This sensory stimulation is crucial for brain development in young children.

At Connect Academy, our nature-based curriculum will include a variety of outdoor activities such as nature walks, gardening, observational studies, and hands-on environmental projects. Our goal is to create a balance between structured learning and

free play, allowing children to explore and discover at their own pace in a natural setting. Thus, your child may come home with dirty clothes and dirty shoes – but know it is from a day well spent in the outdoor learning environment or in hands-on activities in the classroom.

Our Commitment to Your Child's Growth

We understand the trust you place in us to care for and educate your child. Our dedicated team of educators is committed to providing a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment where every child can develop a love for learning. By incorporating nature-based learning, we aim to nurture not just academic growth, but also the physical, emotional, and social development of each child.

Thank you for choosing Connect Academy for Children. We are honored to be a part of your child's early education journey and look forward to a year filled with exploration, discovery, and connection with nature.

Warm regards,

Brooke Plack
Owner & Founder
Connect Academy for Children

Together, we connect. Together, we grow. Together, we thrive.

Enrollment Policy

Enrollment is open to any child, provided the Center can meet the needs of that child, the child meets the age requirements of the requested program, and there is availability at the Center. Enrollment shall be granted to Connect without discrimination as set forth in the Non-Discrimination Policy.

School Age Programs - After School Care & Summer Camp

After School Care enrollment will be on a first-come, first serve basis.

Every participant must submit an enrollment package and \$50.00 deposit before Connect Staff can secure an enrollment spot.

Enrollment Package includes:

1. Child Data Sheet
2. Medical Information Sheet
3. Shot Record (not applicable to School Age)
4. Development Needs Sheet
5. Photo Release Form
6. Commitment Form
7. Payment Information Form
8. Field Trip/Transportation Form
9. Shaken Baby Syndrome Receipt and Acknowledgement

Deposits may be paid via:

- Cash or Check
- PayPal: brooke@connectafc.com- or by scanning below!



Enrollment forms should be updated as necessary regarding all information contained on the forms. Any changes in address, emergency information, work, contact phone number, etc. are the responsibility of the parent to notify the Center.

Classroom ages will be divided by physical and mental developmental stages – and may fluctuate as children grow and mature. In the event the program reaches capacity, prospective applicants may be placed on a waiting list.

Morning Drop-Off Procedures

1. Because Connect has an open campus to parents and guardians, each parent will be given the door code to enter on the keypad to the right of the door.
 2. Sign your child in by scanning the Brightwheel QR Code AND signing the paper sign-in sheet when your child enters the building.
 3. Ensure your child enters with their backpack, lunch box, sheet, blanket, and any other items needed.
 4. Please double-check that there are no other items in their backpack – no medicine, creams, or non-food products of any kind.
 5. If applicable, any medication must be handed directly to the staff member checking you in and have an accompanying medication form.
 6. At drop-off, please communicate with the Hospitality Team any special needs or information for your child's teacher.
 7. Parents are reminded to drive slowly in the parking lot. Please turn off your car's ignition and take your keys with you during drop-off. Siblings of Connect should never be left unattended in a vehicle.
 8. Your child must be dropped off by 9:00AM each morning to prevent the disruption of instructional time.
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Afternoon Pick-Up Procedures

1. Stop by the front kiosk and sign your child out by scanning the Brightwheel QR Code AND signing-out on the paper sign-in/out sheet PRIOR to picking up your child from class.
2. Pick up your child's backpack, lunch box, and any other personal items.
3. Please also pickup your child's sheet and blanket on Fridays only (or the final planned day of attendance for the week).
4. Communicate with the Hospitality Team, Director, or your child's teacher about their day, including any questions or concerns you may have.

NOTE: If there are special court orders regarding parental custody, please provide documentation to our team so we may abide accordingly.

IMPORTANT! If your child is being picked up by someone not on their authorized pick up list, you will need to contact Connect IN WRITING (text, email, or Brightwheel message) to let us know. Our team will check his/her ID up arrival to confirm identity. There cannot be any exceptions to this policy.

Hours of Operation

Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Programs

Monday – Friday | 6:30AM – 6:00PM

School Age Programs

Before School Care: 6:30AM >> School Drop-Off

After School Care: School Pick Up >> 6:00PM

Day Camps for School Closings: 7:00AM – 6:00PM

Summer Camp: 7:00AM – 6:00PM

Center Closings

To promote retention, provide a quality employment experience, and encourage our team to spend time with their families, Connect is closed on holidays and other dates throughout the year. Below you will find a list of the dates we are usually closed. The most current calendar is always linked on our website at www.connectafc.com.

On weeks when the center is closed for a holiday, billing is not adjusted as your child's teachers are still being compensated for their paid time off.

Closing Dates for 2024-2025

Juneteenth

Independence Day

Labor Day

*Columbus Day *Staff Training Day**

*Veterans Day *Staff Training Day**

Thanksgiving and the Day after Thanksgiving

Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

MLK Day

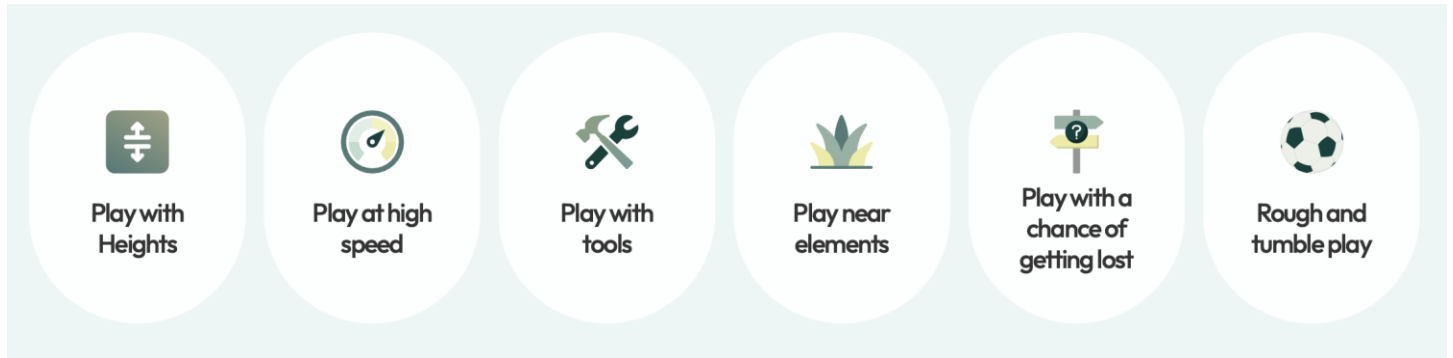
Good Friday

Memorial Day

Outdoor Play

What is Outdoor Play?

Outdoor play is a basic childhood need and taking risks is a necessary part of play. Whether jumping in a pile of leaves, climbing a tree, or playing street hockey, children are often happiest when playing. These kinds of experiences are a lot less common for kids today. Our worries and desire to protect our kids can result in setting too many limits on them, which can interfere with healthy development. Risky play can have many different shapes, but always involves the thrill and excitement of testing yourself and finding out what happens. These are some of the ways that children engage in risky play.^{[1][2]}



Why is Outdoor Play Important?

Outdoor play is different from indoor play as it tends to involve children feeling more freedom, being more physically active, moving their bodies in different ways, and playing differently than they would inside. The outdoors can offer more variety of play environments and loose parts (e.g., sticks, rocks, buckets, sand, crates) to move around, allowing their imagination to shape their play. Children need daily outdoor play opportunities for their development, physical health, and well-being.^{[1][2]}

Parent Resources for Learning more about the risks and benefits of Outdoor Play:

<https://www.outsideplay.org/tool-microsites/parent-tool>

Risky Play

What is Risky Play?

Risky play can be defined as any play that is thrilling or exciting and involves some risk of injury.

There are six key factors of risky play:

1. Height and elevation
2. Speed and momentum
3. Use of risky or adult tools
4. Interaction with natural elements
5. Play with a chance of "getting lost" (hiding in the bushes or wandering in the woods)

6. Rough-and-tumble play (play fighting)

Risky play helps children develop resilience, executive functioning skills, self-confidence, and risk-assessment abilities.

Each time they engage in risky play they are engaging in their own science experiment: pushing themselves out of their comfort zone without knowing what the exact outcome will be. Risky play allows children to learn their own limits and find out what they feel comfortable with. This awareness helps reduce the risk of injury as children learn to identify the point when they might need to stop to reassess the situation.

As they continue to gain experience with risky play, children can help identify when certain situations may be unsafe, and brainstorm how to make something safer. For example, if there is a large rock they want to climb but there are thorn bushes at the bottom, you might ask your child what they could do about that - how they might solve the problem in order to keep their body safe. Of course, as an adult you know that the solution might be to move the thorny bushes out of the way, or to climb up from the other side of the rock - but engaging your child in the problem-solving process will provide a foundation for their future independent risk-assessment abilities.

Supporting Young Children's Risky Play

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Not Letting Our Own Fears Get in the Way of Child Development)

Adults and caregivers' own fears can often get in the way of children's ability to engage in risky play. However, the likelihood of injury is incredibly low. A recent study showed that children would have to spend three hours a day engaging in a risky play for 10 years before they were likely to get an injury that required medical attention (<https://outsideplay.ca/#/fag/txperls>)

Experts suggest following the "17 second rule" - if you are starting to feel uneasy about how your child is playing, step back and observe what they are doing for 17 seconds before intervening or reminding them to be careful. Often with a little bit of space, children are able to figure out how to safely engage in risky play without adult intervention.

Giving Your Child Space to Learn and Explore

It is important to make sure that your child knows that you are there to support them, and that you trust them to explore the world on their own.

Many playgrounds in the United States are set up for structured play, but a typical playground doesn't always give children the space and freedom to use their imaginations, push their bodies, and grow their abilities. Removing or avoiding typical playground structures in favor of natural landscapes, organically designed play structures, or large and movable loose parts provides your child with far more opportunities to engage in physically and cognitively appropriate risky play. Playing with and among logs, mud, boulders, crates, sticks, ropes, hills, trees, and water can open a world of possibilities for your child.

Pro Tip: Instead of “**Be Careful**” try these phrases:

Help your child <u>Foster Awareness</u> by saying:	Help your child Problem Solve by saying:
<i>Notice how</i> ... these rocks are slippery, the log is rotten, that branch is strong.	<i>What's your plan</i> ... if you climb that boulder, cross that log?
<i>Do you see</i> ... the poison ivy, your friends nearby?	<i>What can you use</i> ... to get across, for your adventures?
<i>By moving</i> ... your feet slowly, carefully, quickly, strongly.	<i>Where will you</i> ... put that rock, climb that tree, dig that hole?
<i>By using your</i> ... hands, feet, arms, legs.	<i>How will you</i> ... get down, go up, get across?
<i>Do you feel</i> ... stable on that rock, the heat from the fire?	<i>Who will...</i> be with you, go with you, help you if...?

Risk Assessments for Nature-Based Play

Risk Assessments are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of children while allowing them to explore and learn from their natural environment while on our nature-based outdoor playground.

Completing Fall 2024: When planning for our outdoor playground, our first steps were to mitigate risk with the initial site inspection and to remove any obvious hazards, such as sharp objects, low limbs, and the growth and regrowth of poisonous plants, such as poison ivy, poison oak, and sumac.

As with any outdoor play space, it must be continually monitored and inspected to ensure it is as safe as possible.

Thus, each day teachers will observe the:

- **Natural Elements:** Assess the safety of natural features such as trees, rocks, and water. Check for loose branches, unstable rocks, and stagnant water, which could harbor harmful bacteria.
- **Play Equipment:** Inspect any installed equipment for damage, wear and tear, and proper anchoring. Ensure that all equipment meets safety standards for age-appropriate use.
- **Surface Materials:** Evaluate the ground surfaces, ensuring they are soft enough to cushion falls (e.g., mulch, sand). Check for tripping hazards like exposed roots or uneven paths.
- **Wildlife and Plants:** Identify any potentially dangerous plants (e.g., those with thorns or that are poisonous) and signs of wildlife (e.g., nests, burrows) that could pose a threat.
- **Weather and Environmental Factors:** Consider weather-related risks such as flooding, ice, or excessive heat. Assess the playground's exposure to the sun and ensure there are adequate shaded areas.

Teachers will then make their evaluations based on:

- **Assessing Severity and Likelihood:** For each identified hazard, evaluate the potential severity of harm (minor, moderate, severe) and the likelihood of occurrence (unlikely, possible, likely).
- **Prioritizing Risks:** Categorize risks into high, medium, or low priority. Focus on addressing high-priority risks that pose the greatest threat to children's safety.

Then, use the following Risk Mitigation Strategies as needed:

- **Eliminate Hazards:** Remove or replace unsafe elements (e.g., trim hazardous branches, remove poisonous plants).
- **Control Risks:** Implement measures to reduce risk, such as adding safety barriers around water features, softening hard surfaces, or installing signs warning of potential hazards.
- **Supervision Enhancements:** Increase adult supervision in areas with higher risks. Train staff on specific risks and emergency procedures related to the outdoor environment.
- **Maintenance Schedule:** Develop a regular maintenance plan to keep the playground safe, including routine checks for new hazards and repairs.

Additionally, the Center will ensure:

- **First Aid Stations:** Ensure first aid kits are readily available and fully stocked. Staff should be trained in first aid specific to nature-based play injuries (e.g., snake bites, splinters).
- **Emergency Contacts:** Display emergency contact information prominently, including local poison control and wildlife rescue services.
- **Incident Response Plan:** Create and rehearse an emergency response plan tailored to the outdoor playground, covering scenarios like injuries, extreme weather, or missing children.
- **Engagement with Educators:** Discuss the typical activities that children engage in within each zone. Understanding how the space is used will help in identifying potential risks.
- **Regular Reviews:** Schedule periodic reviews of the risk assessment, especially after significant changes to the playground or after a reported incident. Update the documentation accordingly.
- **Staff Communication:** Share the risk assessment report with all staff members. Hold a meeting to discuss the findings, and ensure everyone understands their role in maintaining a safe environment.
- **Feedback Loop:** Encourage staff, parents, and even children (age-appropriately) to provide feedback on the playground's safety. Use this input to continuously refine the risk assessment process.
- **Ongoing Training:** Provide regular training for staff on risk management, nature-based play safety, and emergency procedures.

These procedures aim to balance the inherent risks of nature-based play with the need to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children to explore and learn.

Hygiene Procedures

Handwashing

All Children wash hands upon arrival to school. Hands will be washed before each meal and after all bathroom use.

Toileting (for potty-trained age)

Children are taken to the toilet as a class at regular intervals. Additionally, all children will be taken to the toilet individually as needed. Should children need to potty while outdoors – the child will be escorted indoors and supervised by an additional staff member.

Animals

All children and staff must sanitize hands after handling any animals.

Supply List - Toddlers & Preschool

Send your child daily in clothes that can get dirty – this is part of our nature-based curriculum!

Backpack – Sheet & Blanket – send on Monday (*or first day of attendance for the week*)

Rain Jacket with Hood – to be sent with student every day

- Preferred Options – [Amazon](#) | [Amazon](#) | *or similar*

Kids Beanie with Ear Covers & G loves – to be sent with student everyday November thru March

- Preferred Options – [Gloves](#) | [Beanie](#) | *or similar*

Lunch Box

- Include milk + protein + veggie/fruit + grain

Insulated Water Bottle

- Preferred Options – [Owala](#) | [YETI](#) | *or similar*

Insulated Winter Coat with Hood – to be sent with student on all days below 50 degrees

- Preferred Options – [Arctix](#) | [Eddie Bauer](#) | *or similar*

Waterproof Mittens - to be sent with student on all days below 50 degrees

- Preferred Options - [Amazon](#) | [Amazon](#) | *or similar*

Rain Boots – to be left at Connect

Diapers or Pullups

Wipes, if not potty-trained

Change of Clothes should be in bag daily – please use a labeled gallon ziploc

Supply List - Infants

Send your child daily in clothes that can get dirty – this is part of our nature-based curriculum!

Backpack

- Large enough to hold Sheet each Monday (or first day of attendance for the week)
- Diapers
- Wipes
- Bottles for the Day
- Change of Clothes should be in bag daily – please use a labeled gallon ziploc

Inclement Weather Policy

In the event of inclement weather, Connect will follow the local school district's lead for school delays and cancellations.

If school is delayed, Connect's After School Program will be in session.

If your school is canceled, Connect **may** be canceled. Check Social Media & the Website for Details.

If your school district closes early due to inclement weather, Connect transportation will pick up from school at the scheduled dismissal time & bring them back to our facility.

In the event the weather becomes dangerous in the middle of the school day, parents are encouraged to arrive early as possible to pick up their children from the program.

No Staff member or child will be put in a dangerous position in order to allow a parent to pick a child up during an emergency situation.

Effective May 15th, 2021, Connect's tuition will not change on weeks shortened due to holidays, inclement weather, etc.

NOTE: This allows Connect to provide paid leave opportunities for our staff.

Vacation Policy

Once a child has been enrolled at Connect for 12 consecutive months, your family will be eligible for one week vacation in which your child will not attend and you will not pay tuition.

After two consecutive years of enrollment, you will be eligible for two weeks vacation.

After three consecutive years of enrollment, you will be eligible for three weeks vacation.

A Vacation Request Form must be submitted through the website at www.connectafc.com at least two weeks PRIOR to the beginning of your vacation.

Only two families will be approved for any given week on a first come, first serve basis.

To receive vacation credit, your child cannot be in attendance the full billing week of Monday through Friday.

Attendance Policy

Early Childhood & Preschool Attendance Policy

The parent or guardian will identify the days their child will attend Connect. This important information assists the Connect Staff to ensure the safety of all students.

As a result of our need to ensure the safety of students, the following policies must be followed:

- Students enrolled in Connect's Early Childhood & Preschool Program are expected to attend all days identified by the parent/guardian during the initial enrollment process.
- Changes to that schedule must be submitted to Connect **two weeks prior** to going into effect, so that the proper Staff can be notified in a timely manner.
- If your child is not going to be attending the Early Childhood or Preschool Program on a regularly scheduled day, parents should **notify Connect by 9:00 am** that day or in writing via text, email, or Brightwheel, prior to the absence, so the proper information can be provided to the Staff.
- All children should arrive by 9:00am. If your child will be late on any given day, parents should notify Connect Staff via phone, text, or Brightwheel. NOTE: Late arrivals after 9:00am disrupt the beginning of instructional time and are strongly discouraged.

School Age Attendance Policy

It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to identify the days their child will attend Connect.

This important information assists the Connect Staff to ensure the safety of all students.

During the calendar school year, the Connect Staff and School Administration will work together to create a safe transition from school to the Connect After School Program and, therefore, attendance by students and communication with parents is **very important**.

Connect and the Schools cannot be held responsible for students and families who neglect to follow the attendance procedures in place.

As a result of our need to ensure the safety of students, the following policies must be followed:

- Students enrolled in Connect Summer and After School Program are expected to attend on all days identified by the parent/guardian during the initial enrollment process. Changes to that schedule must be submitted to Connect **one week prior** to going into effect, so that the proper Staff can be notified in a timely manner.
- If your child will not attend the After School Program on a regularly scheduled day, Connect shall be notified **NO LATER than 1:00 pm the day of** in writing (via text, email, or written documentation) prior to the absence, so the proper information can be provided to pick-up Staff, if transportation is not needed.
- If we are not notified, a \$5.00 fee will be charged to your account as this causes the van driver and all students to deboard the van and walk into the school in search of your child.
- After the 3rd failed notification, a **\$10 penalty fee** will be charged to your account.

- Failure to attend three regularly scheduled days without notification to Connect Staff can result in your child being placed on suspension, until the issue of non-attendance is resolved by Connect Director and the parent/guardian.
 - Notification of suspension may be conducted by phone or written correspondence. During the suspension period, your child will not be picked up from school by the Connect After School Program Staff or be allowed to be checked in for the Summer Program.
 - Inconsistent or lack of attendance at the Connect After School Program will result in the student's name being removed from the attendance roster. Notification for attendance roster removal will occur by written correspondence.
-

Financial Policy and Fees

Connect Tuition payments reserve your child's enrollment positions - regardless of attendance.

Tuition Rates: Each child enrolled at Connect will have an individual tuition plan, which will be outlined by the Director and parent/guardian in your Enrollment Packet. Tuition payments reserve your child's enrollment tuition and is non-refundable regardless of attendance.

Tuition for the **following week** is posted on **Monday of the prior week** and **drafted from your account on Thursday evening of the prior week.**

Tuition for Weekly Students must be paid by 6pm Friday evening for the following week.

No student will be allowed to be dropped off on Monday morning if tuition has not been paid unless the parent brings cash with the child.

Tuition can be made payable check to "Connect AFC".

If paying with a check, enclose payment in an envelope and write the child's name on the outside of all payments.

Check payments for the following week must be turned in by Friday of the week prior at 9:00AM.

If paying with cash, please bring the exact amount owed.

NOTE: We do not keep cash on hand and cannot give back change.

Discounts & Fees

Discounts, effective September 1, 2024:

- Annual Registration Fee (\$50) will be waived each March for:
 - Active Duty Military
 - First Responders (Fire/EMT/Law Enforcement/ER Personnel/Med Flight)
 - Public School Employees

Enrollment Fee

- All new students will submit a non-refundable \$50.00 enrollment fee via cash, check, or [Paypal.me/connecta/c](https://www.paypal.com/connecta/c) to hold your child's spot in care for up to two weeks (or for the coming semester if enrolling in advance). Fee must be submitted prior to spot being secured.
- If your child is dropped and later re-enrolled, a new enrollment fee will be charged.

Mat Fee

- Non-refundable one time mat fee (\$28.00) for all early childhood enrollments infant through preschool.

Late Payment Fees

- If payments are not received by Wednesday of the week receiving services, a \$35.00 fee is assessed each week.

Returned Payment Fee

- If payments are returned for any reason, a \$35.00 fee will be assessed to your account for each occurrence.

Late pickup fees for any child picked up after 6:00pm:

- \$15.00, up to 15 minutes
- \$2.00 per minute after 6:15pm

Annual Registration Fee

- Each family will be charged an annual registration fee of \$50.00 due by March 15th every year.

Payment Information

- Parents will be billed on Friday for the upcoming week.
- Payments are due on Monday of the week services are provided.
- We accept cash, check, and autodraft payments via the Brightwheel app.

Effective May 15th, 2021, Connect's tuition will not change on weeks shortened due to holidays, inclement weather, etc. NOTE: This allows Connect to provide paid leave opportunities for our staff and teachers.

If you find it necessary to withdraw your child from Connect, a **TWO WEEKS** notice must be given.

- You will be responsible for the tuition throughout the two weeks even if your child does not attend.
- There are no exceptions to this policy.

Parent & Family Guidelines

- Make on-time payments of all tuitions and fees. This allows us as a Center to meet all our financial obligations on-time to our staff, vendors, and other expenses.
- Provide a lunch that meets State Guidelines - and alternative snack if your student chooses not to eat snacks provided by Connect .
 - **All student lunches should include the following:**
 - **Milk (Cow's Milk provided by Center.)**
 - **Protein (i.e., Meat/Meat Alternative)**
 - **Veggie**
 - **Fruit**
 - **Grain**
- **Send required seasonal supplies with your child each day.**
- Notify the site if anyone other than the parent/or authorized person(s) on application will pick up the child (**We MUST have this in writing via email or text**).
- Update child's records if any changes occur.
- Keep shot record on file current (*Preschool only*)
- Sign your child in and out daily.
- Pick your child up by scheduled pick up time daily.
- Notify the Director of any special needs your child may have.
- Immediately communicate concerns with us. We can't fix it if we don't know what's wrong. Our Director and Staff will work swiftly and diligently to address your concerns.
- Be aware of all field trips and holiday closings by checking Brightwheel, email correspondence, the Connect website, etc.
- Encourage your child to follow rules and instructions written and given verbally by Connect Staff.

Behavior Guidelines for Children

- Follow directions.
 - Use inside voice when we are inside - outside voices when we are outside!
 - Be respectful.
 - Keep our classroom clean. And our playground dirty!
 - Keep hands & feet to yourself.
 - Follow all playground rules.
 - Wash hands before entering class space in the morning.
 - Wear shoes that are secure to your feet (can wear sandals with straps - no flip-flops).
 - Take turns.
 - Run only in areas reserved for full body activities.
 - HAVE FUN, LEARN & GROW!
-

Conscious Discipline

It is the philosophy of Connect to provide **Conscious Discipline** to all children.

The Seven Skills of Discipline (shown below) transform everyday discipline issues into teaching moments. These moments are our opportunity to teach children the social-emotional and communication skills necessary to manage themselves, resolve conflict, prevent bullying and develop pro-social behaviors. (Consciousdiscipline.com, 2020). Connect Families are encouraged to read more information on the Conscious Discipline website.

In the event of severe misconduct, Connect AFC employs a zero-tolerance policy for the following types of misconduct:

- General misconduct, including loud or boisterous behavior that tends to disturb other students, and includes running in the classroom/halls, minor defacement of property, and pushing or shoving others.
- A student's persistent refusal to follow the instructions of program Staff, program administrators, or any school employee. This shall also include a student's refusal or failure to properly identify oneself on request.
- Use of obscene, vulgar, profane, disrespectful, demeaning or threatening words and/or actions or gestures directed to or in the presence of any student or school employee.
- Mutual physical confrontations between students (fighting).
- Possession and/or use of any tobacco, vape or drug related items or 'look a like' items – this may include cigarettes, chewing tobacco and other tobacco-related products, lighters, alcoholic substances, drug-consumption devices, and any substance suspected of being a 'drug'.
- A behavior that may result in physical or mental abuse to one's self.
- Committing an act of indecent exposure in the presence of any other student, member of the Staff, or school employee.
- Possession and/or use of any type of weapon or "look a like" items – this may include guns, swords, knives, pepper spray, or any item suspected of being brought to be used as a "weapon".
- Use of offensive language or the harassment of any Staff member by a parent.

Disciplinary Action for zero-tolerance infractions will follow these steps.

- Verbal discussions and/or reprimand
- Parental Notification
- Program Staff/student/parent behavioral contract
- Suspension from Program:
 - First Offense – 1 day suspension
 - Second Offense – 3 days suspension
 - Third Offense – Parent/Staff conference to determine enrollment in the program.

Immediate notification of authorities if appropriate.

Depending on the severity of the misconduct, disciplinary action may result in immediate suspension or dismissal from the program.

Bullying Policy

Respect for the dignity of others is a fundamental value of Connect and its Staff. Bullying robs a person of their dignity and creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation which inhibits the positive environment that fuels education growth. Therefore, bullying will not be tolerated in any form.

Bullying is defined as any pattern of behavior by an individual student or by a group of students that is intended to harass, intimidate, ridicule, humiliate, or instill fear in another child or group of children. Bullying behavior can be a threat of, or actual act of, physical harm. Bullying can be verbal abuse.

Examples of “bullying” may include, but are not limited to, a pattern of behavior involving one or more of the following:

- Sarcastic “compliments” about another student’s personal appearance
- Pointed questions intended to embarrass or humiliate
- Mocking, taunting, or belittling
- Non-verbal threats and /or intimidation such as “fronting” or “chesting” a person
- Demeaning humor relating to a student’s race, gender, ethnicity or personal characteristics.
- Deliberate physical contact or injury to person or property
- Stealing or hiding personal belongings of another child
- Threats of harm to student(s), possessions, or others

Students found to be in violation of this policy shall be subject to disciplinary action up to and including disenrollment from all Connect Programs.

Injury Documentation Procedure

If a child is injured while in the care of Connect, first aid will be administered and **documentation will be provided to the parent/family.**

If treatment by a doctor is needed, we will make every effort to contact the parent and/or guardian as well as the doctor listed on the Medical Information Sheet completed at the time of enrollment.

In the event of an emergency, Staff will ensure the child receives the necessary emergency treatment until the parent or guardian is reached.

The authorization for emergency treatment must be signed before your child can be admitted to the program.

Parents are responsible for any expenses incurred due to an injury sustained while participating in the Connect Program.

If your child sees a doctor regarding an injury sustained while participating in the Connect Program, documentation from the medical institution and/or physician must be given to the Director of Connect for our files.

Medication Policy

A Medical Information Sheet and a current shot record (*Early Childhood & Preschool Only*) must be provided for every child as part of the enrollment process.

Connect Staff can only administer medications following the completion of proper documents by the legal parent/ guardian of a student.

Proper documentation would include, but not be limited to, a signed and dated letter from the physician and parent/guardian stating the need of the medication, proper dosage, time of dosage and any reactions that must be monitored.

All medications must be provided in the original prescription packaging with a child resistant cap that shows the child's name and dosage instructions. (Aspirin substitutes, such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen, may be provided by the facility if parental permission has been granted in writing on the Medical Information Sheet. These medications shall be in the original containers and must be dispensed in the dosages listed on the packaging.)

Connect Staff will document each time they administer any medication to a child by initialing the permission slip and recording the date, time, and dosage that was administered. This information will then be provided to the parent/guardian at the end of the day.

General Health Requirements

Fever

A child will be removed from the classroom environment and closely monitored if they are running a fever or showing any symptoms of a contagious or infectious disease.

Connect Staff will notify a parent/guardian or approved adult as soon as possible so the child can be picked up. **Arkansas licensing states the child must be “FEVER FREE” without the use of any medication for 24 hours before they can return to the program. A fever is a temperature of 100 or higher.**

Individualized Care Plans

Participants with special health care needs (ex. Asthma, seizures, diabetes, etc.) who require scheduled daily medications or medications to be given on an emergency need basis (ex. Benadryl, EpiPen, rescue asthma medications, etc.) shall have a care plan.

Care plans shall have clearly stated parameters, directions, and symptoms for giving the medications. Care plans shall be updated as needed with **no more than 12 months between updates**. Care plans will be coordinated with the Director of Curriculum & Parent Relations.

Daily Wellness Checks

Each child will be given a well check by his/her teacher at the time of drop off each day in compliance with licensing regulations.

Sending a Child Home

If your child is sent home with any of the symptoms listed below, he/she will not be readmitted until said symptoms are gone and/or a physician has cleared the child to return to school.

General Health Requirements set by Connect reflect the the Minimum Licensing Requirements set forth for all Arkansas Child Care Centers and are listed as follows:

- **Fever:** temperature of 100 or higher
- **Diarrhea:** more than 2 watery stools within a 24 hour period
- **Vomiting:** vomit more than 2 times in a 24 hour period
- **Stools:** blood or mucus present
- **Sores:** multiple sores in the mouth or on body.
- **Rash:** including with fever or behavior change
- **Cough:** severe coughing that causes a child to gag or vomit or have difficulty breathing
- **Contagious diseases:** pink eye, ringworm, and impetigo

- **Scabies or head lice:** can return after first treatment
- **Strep Throat:** can return after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment
- **Chicken Pox:** can return after all lesions have crusted
- **Abdominal Pain:** lasting more than two hours
- **Active tuberculosis:** must receive documentation of therapy
- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella:** until 6 days after onset of rash
- **Whooping Cough:** until 5 days of antibiotic treatment
- **Hepatitis A:** minimum 1 week after onset of illness
- **Head Lice:** minimum 24 hours with treatment and no bugs in hair
- **Sudden Change in Behavior:** lethargy or lack of responsiveness, unexplained irritability or persistent crying, difficult breathing, or quickly spreading rash.

If there is an outbreak of any contagious illnesses (viral or bacterial), the Connect Director may send any child home with any symptoms resembling the sickness. *Ex. Low grade fever of 99.0 or higher, green mucus, coughing, etc.*

Nutrition Guidelines

Snacks

Connect will provide each child with a morning/afternoon snack, as applicable to the daily schedule. All snacks will meet state nutritional guidelines.

If your child has a special condition concerning his/her diet, please notify the Director at the time of enrollment.

Parents are allowed to send a snack with their child if the child prefers to not eat the snacks provided.

Lunch

Parents are required to provide a lunch, which meets the state nutritional guideline. All student lunches should include the following:

- ◆ Milk (Cow's Milk provided by Center.)
- ◆ Protein (i.e., Meat/Meat Alternative)
- ◆ Veggie
- ◆ Fruit
- ◆ Grain

If a lunch substitute is required to meet the meal requirement, ***your account will be charged \$5.00 for a substitution.***

Open Campus Policy

Connect maintains an “open campus” visitation policy. Parents, teachers, family members, and guests are encouraged to visit the program, anytime, during the hours of operation.

We love volunteer readers and welcome any family member, friend, or volunteer. To signup, please email us at info@connectafc.com.

Visitors are free to sit in any classroom and view the academic progress and growth being developed.

Whenever possible, visitors are also encouraged to participate in the learning activities of the classroom.

NOTE: All visitors must bring a photo ID and check in at the front door.

Bringing Items from Home

Connect discourages children from bringing items from home.

Any item, including but not limited to: toys, electronic devices, additional clothing, glasses, etc, that is brought into the facility is the direct responsibility of the child.

Connect will not be responsible for any item that is lost, stolen, broken, or damaged in any form.

Connect will not pay for or reimburse the cost for any item brought in by children under any circumstances.

Non-Discrimination Policy

In accordance with Federal Law, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual preference or other similar characteristics and circumstances.

Connect will obey all Non-Discriminatory Rules in, but not limited to: employment opportunities, student enrollment, activities, field trips, etc.

Smoke Free – Drug Free Campus

Connect Academy for Children has a ZERO TOLERANCE plan for the use of drugs and smoking.

Connect is dedicated to providing a healthy, comfortable and productive learning environment for all employees, students and visitors. Therefore, smoking and the use of all tobacco products are prohibited on the campus. This policy applies to Staff, students, and visitors. Any violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action.

In accordance with the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act and the Federal Drug Free Schools and Communities Act, the following employee policy on drugs and alcohol has been established: an employee of Connect shall not unlawfully manufacture, distribute, dispense, possess or use controlled substances or alcohol on Connect property or in conjunction with any Connect activity, whether work related or non-work related. An employee who violates the policy will be subject to disciplinary action and/or dismissal.

Confidentiality Policy

All information (written and verbal) shall be kept confidential by all Staff of Connect AFC. This includes, but is not limited to: all Connect records containing family information, all personal contact information for Staff and/or participants, any personal information regarding family environments (ex. divorce filings, parental rights disputes, arrests, serious illness within a family, financial status/issues, etc.), or any stories told by children while in attendance regarding any information about their families.

All parents are hereby notified that Connect AFC has no control of photos or videos taken by students and/or parents who attend events such as, but not limited to: field trips, field activities, swimming outings, etc.

Emergency Procedures

Connect Staff will execute monthly Emergency Drills. These drills will prepare for on-site and off-site evacuations in order to educate all participants in proper procedures in case of fire, natural disasters, or emergency situations including, but not limited to: tornadoes, flooding, terrorist threat, fire, power outages, etc.

Emergency Plan will include 3 options: shelter inside, evacuate outside the building, or facility lock-down. Connect will retain a detailed list of students during all drills containing complete information on each student, including but not limited to: name, emergency contact information, and medical need information.

Reporting Child Abuse

Connect AFC is required by law to report any incidents of suspected child abuse or neglect. The child maltreatment hotline number is 1-800-482-5964. Children may be subject to interviews by licensing Staff, child maltreatment investigators and law enforcement officials to determine licensing compliance or for investigative purposes. ***(Per DHS: Child interviews do not require parental notice or consent.)***

For more information, please visit: <https://humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/children-family-services/how-to-report-child-abuse-neglect/>

Lost and Found Policy

If your child is missing articles of clothing or personal property, please inquire with Connect Staff as soon as possible.

Remember to label everything to help the Connect Staff get the items back to the rightful owner.

Unlabeled and unclaimed items will be put in the Director's office for up to 14 days. Unclaimed items will then be donated to a local charity. Connect is not responsible for lost items.

Withdrawal from the Program Procedures

If you find it necessary to withdraw your child from Connect, a **TWO WEEKS notice must be given in writing**. Your account should be current and paid in full at the time of withdrawal. The Commitment Form included in the enrollment packet is a signed contract and is legally binding. You will be responsible for the tuition.

Report Suspected Licensing Violations

Should a licensing violation be suspected please contact the Connect Director immediately. Our number one goal is to provide a safe learning environment for all children. The public may submit complaints directly to the Department of Education at the following link:

https://ardhslicensing.my.site.com/elicensing/s/complaint/submit-complaint?tab=CC&language=en_US.



Parent/Family Acknowledgement of Handbook Update

Student Name(s): _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

By signing below, I have read and understand the 2024-2025 Connect Family Handbook.

I acknowledge that my child will be participating in nature-based curriculum, which has inherent risks, including but not limited to bites, cuts, scrapes, falls from a height no higher than hip level (walkers and above), and getting clothes and shoes dirty.

I understand Connect will do everything in their power to reduce and/or eliminated these risks when possible.

I agree to contact Connect staff or director immediately should I have a question or concern before posting on social media, leaving negative reviews, etc.

Signature _____

Date _____