



GUIDING LIGHT

Early Learning Center

Parent/Guardian Handbook

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I. Welcome to Guiding Light Early Learning Center

Welcome to Our Family

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**! We are so grateful and blessed that you have chosen our center to care for and nurture your child. We believe that choosing a childcare program is one of the most important decisions a family can make, and we are honored that you have entrusted us with your little one's care and early education.

At Guiding Light, we see each child as a **unique and precious gift from God**. Our greatest joy is to help children discover the love of Jesus, grow in their God-given talents, and develop a foundation of faith and learning that will carry them throughout life.

Our mission is "to provide a safe, nurturing, Christian environment for children to learn and grow."

Our vision is "to teach children about Jesus' love for all and how to share His love wherever they go."

We want every child who walks through our doors to know they are loved—by God, by their family, and by us. Together, with prayer, play, and purpose, we are raising a generation who will shine the light of Christ wherever they go.

Joyfully serving Christ together,

The Guiding Light Early Learning Center Team

Statement of Faith

At Guiding Light Early Learning Center, our foundation is built upon the Word of God. We believe:

- The Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God.
- There is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Salvation is found through faith in Jesus Christ alone.
- Each child is a beloved creation of God, worthy of love, care, and dignity.

We integrate Christian teaching through prayer, worship, and Bible stories that help children grow in faith and character.

"Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

— *Matthew 19:14*

Philosophy of Care and Education

We believe in nurturing the **whole child—spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and physically**. Our program combines faith-based principles with early childhood best practices, encouraging exploration, curiosity, creativity, and compassion.

Children learn best through play, discovery, and meaningful relationships with caring adults. Our teachers foster an environment of trust, consistency, and love where each child feels secure to grow and thrive.

Our curriculum encourages:

- A love of learning through hands-on discovery and creative expression.
- Christian character development through daily modeling of kindness, respect, and forgiveness.
- Collaboration and communication between home and school, recognizing parents as a child's first and most important teachers.

II. Program Overview

Licensed Capacity & Age Groups

Guiding Light Early Learning Center is **licensed by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)** under Rule 3 to provide high-quality care and education for children.

Our center's licensed capacity allows for close supervision, safety, and individualized attention for every child in our care.

We are licensed to serve:

- **Toddlers (16 months to 32 months) – Capacity 21: Ratio 1:7**
- **Preschoolers (33 months to 5 years) — Capacity 20: Ratio 1:10**
- **School-age children (Kindergarten through age 12) — Capacity 15: Ratio 1:15**

All classrooms are designed to support active supervision, safe exploration, and individualized care. We maintain these ratios at all times, ensuring that children are never left unsupervised and always within sight and sound of staff. Substitutes and volunteers may assist but are not counted in the child-to-staff ratio.

Hours of Operation

Our center is open **Monday through Friday, from 6:00 AM to 5:30 PM.**

We are closed on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth (Professional Development Day)
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Friday following Thanksgiving
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day
- Friday following Christmas Day

When a holiday falls on a weekend, the preceding Friday or following Monday may be observed. Families are notified annually of holiday dates and scheduled staff training days.

Closures and Inclement Weather

In the event of **severe weather or unsafe travel conditions**, Guiding Light may close, open late, or close early. Parents will be notified promptly through **ProCare**, email, phone call or text message.

Refunds will not be granted due to emergency closings, as staff wages and operating costs continue regardless of attendance. Our goal is always to remain open when safely possible while prioritizing the wellbeing of children, families, and staff.

Daily Flow

We believe that children thrive in an environment that balances **structure and flexibility**. A predictable routine helps children feel secure while allowing room for exploration, creativity, and spiritual growth.

Toddler Daily Routine (16–32 months)

- Arrival & Free Play
- Breakfast & Prayer
- Music, Bible Songs, and Story Time

- Sensory Play & Learning Centers
- Outdoor or Gross Motor Play
- Snack & Diapering/Toileting
- Lunch & Prayer
- Nap / Rest Time
- Snack
- Afternoon Exploration & Free Play

Toddler routines emphasize consistency, gentle transitions, and individualized care to support emotional security and developmental growth.

Preschool Daily Routine

- **Prayer & Morning Devotion** — starting the day with God’s Word
- **Breakfast** — shared time of fellowship and thanksgiving
- **Learning Centers** — literacy, math, science, social skills, art
- **Outdoor or Gym Play** — large motor development and teamwork
- **Bible Story Time** — integrating faith and character lessons
- **Lunch & Quiet Rest** — followed by story or music
- **Afternoon Exploration** — sensory play, dramatic play, and art
- **Snack & Closing Circle** — prayer, reflection, and gratitude

School-Age Routine

- **Before School:** breakfast, homework help, devotion, and free play
- **After School:** snack, group activities, outdoor time, and homework support
- **Full Day/Summer Program:** free play, breakfast, group activities, learning centers, STEM, art, lunch, reading time, homework help, outside play, and snack

Curriculum

Guiding Light integrates **Pinnacle Early Learning Curriculum** for academic growth with **One in Christ Curriculum** for spiritual formation.

Our approach promotes developmentally appropriate learning across five key domains:

1. **Spiritual Growth** – teaching children to know and love Jesus.
2. **Social & Emotional Development** – fostering empathy, cooperation, and confidence.
3. **Cognitive Skills** – building curiosity, reasoning, and problem-solving.
4. **Language & Literacy** – encouraging communication and a love for books.
5. **Physical Development** – strengthening fine and gross motor coordination.

Our teachers plan intentional experiences that balance teacher-guided instruction with child-led exploration, supporting each child’s individual learning style.

Christian Foundation

Faith is the **heartbeat of Guiding Light**.

We teach and model Christian values such as kindness, forgiveness, patience, and gratitude. Prayer, worship, and Scripture are woven into daily routines, helping children form lifelong faith habits.

We celebrate Christian holidays including **Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving**, focusing on their Biblical meaning and the joy of God’s love.

“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it.”
— *Proverbs 22:6*

Enrollment & Admissions

Age & Eligibility

Guiding Light Early Learning Center welcomes children ages **16 months through 12 years**, based on availability and developmental readiness.

- **Toddler Program:** 16–32 months
- **Preschool Program:** 33 months to 5 years
- **School-Age Program:** Kindergarten through 12 years
- Toddlers and Preschoolers are not required to be toilet trained.
- Comfort items (such as a small blanket or stuffed toy) are welcome for rest time.
- Separation anxiety is developmentally appropriate and supported by staff.
- Families are encouraged to communicate routines, preferences, and developmental needs to support consistency between home and school.

Enrollment is based on space availability, licensing capacity, and the child's developmental needs.

Enrollment Process

To enroll a child at Guiding Light Early Learning Center, families participate in a personal meeting with the Director to discuss our mission, philosophy, policies, and curriculum. During this meeting, parents receive the **Parent Handbook**, a **Center Tour**, and an **Enrollment Packet** containing all necessary forms.

To complete enrollment, the following must be submitted before a child's first day of care:

- **Child Information Record** (including emergency contacts and authorized pick-up persons)
- **Current Immunization Record** (per MN Statute 121A.15)
- **Health Care Summary** signed by a licensed health care provider (required within 30 days of enrollment)
- **Enrollment and Permission Forms** (field trips, media, sunscreen, insect repellent, etc.)
- **Signed Acknowledgment of the Parent Handbook**
- **Registration Fee** (non-refundable)
- **Payment of First Week's Tuition**
- Families utilizing the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) must provide a current county childcare authorization before CCAP payments can begin

Children are admitted based on the date of completed registration.

Priority may be given to currently enrolled families requesting schedule changes before new families are admitted.

Diversity & Inclusion Statement

Guiding Light Early Learning Center **admits children of all races, colors, nationalities, and ethnic origins** to all rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded to children in the center.

We do not discriminate based on gender, race, color, national or ethnic origin, or family background in administration of educational or admissions policies.

As a Christian center, we share the love of Jesus openly while respecting the uniqueness of each child and family.

"For God shows no partiality." — *Romans 2:11*

Waitlist Policy

If a classroom is full, families may be placed on a **waitlist**. The child's name will remain on the list in the order of application date.

When an opening occurs, families on the waitlist will be contacted according to this order. Priority may be given to siblings of enrolled children and staff families.

Withdrawal & Termination

We request a **two-week written notice** before withdrawal from the program. Tuition remains due for this notice period. If a family withdraws without notice, two weeks' tuition will still be charged.

The center may terminate care for reasons including but not limited to:

- Unpaid tuition or fees
- Repeated late pick-ups
- Continued disregard for policies
- A child's needs exceeding the program's ability to provide safe, appropriate care despite reasonable accommodations

When possible, the Director will meet with the family to discuss alternatives or referrals before a final decision is made.

Data Privacy

All personal and health records concerning your child—including enrollment forms, health summaries, immunizations, and observations—are **confidential**.

They may be reviewed only by:

- Parents or legal guardians
- The Director and teaching staff
- Health consultants or licensing representatives as required by DCYF
- Accreditation or evaluation personnel (when applicable)

All records are stored securely in compliance with state and federal privacy laws.

Non-Refundable Registration Fee

A one-time, non-refundable registration fee is due at the time of enrollment. This fee covers administrative processing and helps secure your child's placement.

Re-Enrollment

Each year, currently enrolled families are given the opportunity to re-enroll prior to new families being accepted. Re-enrollment may include updated forms and fees and is contingent upon the family's account being in good standing.

Transition Between Classrooms

Children transition between classrooms when they are developmentally, socially, emotionally, and physically ready, and when licensing ratios allow.

Toddler transitions into preschool are based on:

- Age eligibility
- Developmental readiness
- Self-help skills
- Social-emotional development
- Available space

Families will receive advance notice and have the opportunity to meet with teaching staff to discuss expectations and routines.

IV. Tuition & Fees

Tuition as an Investment

At Guiding Light Early Learning Center, tuition represents an investment in your child's **spiritual, emotional, and educational growth**.

Tuition allows us to maintain high-quality programming, faith-based curriculum, professional staff, and a nurturing Christian environment.

Rates and Payment Schedule

- **Tuition rates** are determined by age group and schedule. Families will receive a current tuition rate sheet upon enrollment.
- **Tuition is due weekly in advance** and must be paid on or before the Friday preceding the week of your child's attendance each week.
- Families choosing to pay biweekly or monthly must have prior approval from the Director.
- Payment methods may include ProCare, check, or electronic transfer.

If a family's tuition payment plan is not maintained, the child's enrollment may be suspended until the account is current.

Late Payment Policy

- A **late fee of \$5.00 per day** will be applied to your account beginning at 9:00 A.M. the day after the due date, until the balance is paid in full.
- If an account remains unpaid for more than **two weeks**, the family will be required to meet with the Director to discuss payment arrangements.
- Continued non-payment may result in disenrollment.

Registration Fee

A **non-refundable registration fee** is due upon enrollment to secure your child's placement. This fee covers administrative costs, materials, and initial processing.

Supply Fee

An **annual supply fee** may be charged to cover classroom materials, art supplies, and curriculum resources. Families will be notified in advance of any changes.

Pick-Up Fees

Our staff works diligently to provide care during scheduled hours. To respect their time and maintain compliance with staffing ratios:

Late

- A fee of **\$10.00 per child per 5-minute period** will be charged for any drop-off before **6:00 AM** pick-up after **5:30 PM**.
- Repeated late pick-ups may result in dismissal from the program.
- If staff cannot reach parents/guardians or emergency authorized pick-up people after 30 minutes past the closing time, Guiding Light ELC staff will be required to call the local Law Enforcement. The early/late fee **MUST** be paid directly to the staff member who was with your child before/after the centers opening/closing times.

Returned Payments

A **\$45 returned check or declined payment fee** will be charged for each occurrence.

After two returned checks, future payments may be required by cash, money order, or electronic transfer.

Vacations and Absences

Regular tuition applies regardless of attendance. This policy ensures that staff wages and classroom ratios remain consistent.

Holidays and Center Closures

Tuition remains due for scheduled holidays and emergency closures (e.g., inclement weather).

These days are part of the annual operating schedule and are accounted for in staffing and budgeting.

Withdrawal Policy

Families are required to give a **minimum of two weeks' written notice** before withdrawal. Tuition remains due for this notice period, regardless of attendance.

If a family withdraws without notice, two weeks' tuition will be charged to the final account balance.

Financial Assistance

Guiding Light ELC proudly participates in the Minnesota Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). We are committed to partnering with families who receive childcare assistance while ensuring compliance with all Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) requirements.

Participation in CCAP helps make quality, Christ-centered childcare more accessible for eligible families. While Guiding Light ELC accepts CCAP payments, families remain responsible for maintaining their eligibility and complying with all county and center requirements.

Family Eligibility

Families are responsible for applying for and maintaining eligibility through their county or tribal agency.

Enrollment at Guiding Light ELC does not guarantee approval for childcare assistance.

Families are responsible for notifying both their county case worker and Guiding Light ELC of any changes that may affect childcare assistance, including but not limited to:

- Employment changes
- School schedule changes
- Household changes
- Address or phone number changes
- Changes in childcare needs or schedule

Failure to report changes may result in delays or changes to childcare assistance benefits.

County Authorization

Childcare assistance payments cannot begin until Guiding Light ELC receives an official childcare authorization from the county.

Families are responsible for providing any information requested by the county to avoid delays in authorization.

If care begins before authorization is received, families remain responsible for tuition and fees until CCAP coverage becomes effective according to county guidelines.

Parent Copayments

Some families may be assigned a parent copayment by their county. Parent copayments are the responsibility of the family and must be paid according to Guiding Light ELC's regular tuition schedule.

Failure to pay assigned copayments may result in late fees or suspension of childcare services consistent with the center's tuition policies.

Charges NOT Covered by CCAP

CCAP does not necessarily cover every charge associated with childcare.

Families remain responsible for any charges NOT covered by childcare assistance, including but not limited to:

- Registration fees
- Supply fees
- Late pick-up fees
- Early drop-off fees
- Returned payment fees
- Optional enrichment fees
- Any tuition balance not paid through CCAP

CCAP Attendance Requirements

Because CCAP payments are based on attendance, accurate attendance documentation is essential. Parents or authorized adults must ensure their child is properly checked in and checked out each day using Guiding Light ELC's approved attendance system.

Failure to accurately record attendance may affect CCAP reimbursement and could result in families being responsible for tuition not covered by CCAP.

Repeated attendance discrepancies may also affect continued eligibility for childcare assistance.

Schedule Changes

Families must notify both their county case worker and Guiding Light ELC whenever childcare schedules change.

Examples include:

- New work schedule
- Reduced work hours
- School schedule changes
- Additional childcare days needed
- Fewer childcare days needed

Guiding Light ELC cannot bill for care beyond an authorized schedule unless approved by the county.

Loss of CCAP Eligibility

If childcare assistance ends, is suspended, or changes, families are responsible for notifying Guiding Light Early Learning Center immediately.

Families remain responsible for any tuition or fees not covered by CCAP.

Continued enrollment is contingent upon maintaining a current tuition account according to the center's payment policies.

Partnership with Families

Guiding Light ELC values open communication with every family. Our goal is to work with parents and county agencies to ensure children receive consistent, high-quality care in a loving Christian environment.

If questions arise regarding childcare assistance, families are encouraged to contact both their county case worker and the GLELC Director.

Refund Policy

All registration and supply fees are **non-refundable**.

Tuition refunds are not issued for absences, holidays, or partial attendance weeks.

Account Statements

Account statements are available upon request or through ProCare.

Families are encouraged to review their balances regularly to ensure accuracy.

Outstanding Balances

Families must maintain a **zero balance** before re-enrollment or before receiving tax documentation. Delinquent accounts may be turned over to a collection agency if not resolved within 60 days of disenrollment.

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men."

— *Colossians 3:23*

V. Attendance Policies

Daily Attendance Expectations

Consistency helps children feel safe and confident. We ask that children arrive each day by **9:00 AM** unless prior arrangements are made.

Parents must notify the center by **8:30 AM** if their child will be absent due to illness, vacation, or another reason.

Sign-In and Sign-Out Procedures

Parents or authorized guardians are **required to accompany their child into and from the center each day** and to **sign in and out** using the attendance log in their child's classroom.

- This procedure is required by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families.
- Signing in and out ensures each child's safety and accurate attendance records.
- Only persons listed on the child's **Authorized Pick-Up Form** will be allowed to remove the child from the center.
- Staff may request photo identification for verification at any time.

Children are considered under the supervision of Guiding Light ELC only during the times they are signed in.

CCAP Attendance Verification

Families participating in CCAP are required to accurately record their child's attendance each day using the center's approved attendance system. Accurate attendance records are required for state reimbursement and help ensure compliance with Minnesota DCYF requirements.

Parents should notify the center as soon as possible if they forget to check their child in or out so attendance records can be corrected according to state guidelines.

Failure to maintain accurate attendance records may impact CCAP reimbursement and may result in the family being responsible for tuition NOT covered by childcare assistance.

Daily Arrival

Upon arrival, parents should:

- Assist their child with removing outdoor clothing and storing items in their designated cubby.
- Communicate any special instructions (medication, schedule changes, or health updates) to the child's teacher.
- Greet the teacher and say goodbye to help your child transition smoothly into the day.

Early arrivals beyond contracted hours must be approved in advance to ensure proper staffing ratios.

Daily Pick-Up

When picking up your child, please:

- Inform the teacher that you are taking your child home.
- Sign out via attendance log in your child's classroom.
- Collect personal belongings and artwork.
- Support consistency by encouraging your child to help clean up before leaving.

If your child will be picked up by someone other than a parent or regular guardian, please notify the center through ProCare or in writing before that day. The person **must show a valid ID** upon arrival.

Late pick-ups beyond 5:30 PM will result in late fees as outlined in Section IV.

Absences

We staff according to enrollment and licensing ratios; therefore, tuition is not adjusted for absences. If a child is absent for **more than two consecutive weeks without communication or payment**, the space may be forfeited and offered to a family on the waitlist.

Early Arrival or Extended Hours

If your child will arrive more than **15 minutes earlier** than usual or needs to stay later for special circumstances, 24-hour notice is required to ensure compliance with DCYF ratio guidelines.

Closures and Emergency Weather

Guiding Light Early Learning Center will make every effort to remain open each weekday except in extreme conditions. If weather or emergencies require closure, a delay, or early dismissal:

- Parents will be notified promptly through ProCare, email, phone call and/or text message.
- Refunds will not be granted due to emergency closures.

Our closure decisions prioritize the safety of children, families, and staff.

During storms, fire drills, or emergencies, staff will follow all DCYF-approved safety and evacuation procedures. Designated shelter areas are equipped with emergency supplies, flashlights, radios, and first-aid kits.

Holidays

Guiding Light ELC is closed on:

New Year's Day, Good Friday, Memorial Day, Juneteenth (Professional Development), Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, the Friday after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day.

If a holiday falls on a weekend, the preceding Friday or following Monday may be observed. Tuition is still due for holiday weeks, as staffing and operational costs continue year-round.

Extended Absence or Leave of Absence

If your family anticipates an extended absence (e.g., parental leave, family travel, or medical recovery), please notify the Director in writing as early as possible.

The center may hold the child's spot for a limited period with prior arrangement and continued tuition payments.

"Let all things be done decently and in order." — *1 Corinthians 14:40*

VI. Licensing & Compliance

Licensing Authority

Guiding Light Early Learning Center is **licensed by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)** to operate as a child care center under **Minnesota Statutes, Rule 3 (9503)**.

We are committed to maintaining full compliance with all licensing standards regarding:

- Health and safety
- Staff-to-child ratios
- Staff qualifications and training
- Physical environment requirements
- Record keeping
- Nutrition and food service
- Behavior guidance
- Emergency preparedness and safety drills

Our current license and most recent DCYF inspection report are posted in the center's main entry for families to view at any time.

Parents may review the Minnesota child care licensing rules at:

 <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=9503>

Compliance Standards

All Guiding Light staff are responsible for ensuring compliance with DCYF regulations and the policies outlined in this handbook. Our center abides by the following key standards:

- **Child Supervision:** Children are always within sight and sound of qualified staff.
- **Staff Qualifications:** All lead teachers, assistants, and aides meet DHS Rule 3 educational and experience requirements.
- **Background Studies:** All employees and regular volunteers have completed state-mandated fingerprint-based background studies through DHS before beginning work.
- **Ratios and Group Size:** Ratios are maintained at all times, including during transitions, outdoor play, rest, and field trips.
- **Training Requirements:** All staff complete annual training in child development, child maltreatment prevention,

emergency preparedness, and CPR/First Aid.

- **Health Consultant & Nutrition Oversight:** Guiding Light partners with qualified consultants to ensure compliance with state nutrition, health, and safety standards.

Mandated Reporting

All Guiding Light staff are **mandated reporters** as defined by **Minnesota Statute 626.556**.

This means that if any staff member knows or has reason to believe that a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused, they are **legally required** to report it immediately to either **Child Protection Services** or **local law enforcement**.

Reports are made to:

- **McLeod County Social Services:** (320) 864-3144
- **DCYF Licensing Division:** (651) 539-8300
- **DCYF Maltreatment:** (651) 539-8222

Failure to report suspected maltreatment can result in penalties under state law.

Guiding Light maintains a zero-tolerance policy for abuse, neglect, or inappropriate treatment of children.

Maltreatment of Minors Reporting Policy

If you have concerns about any staff member's conduct or suspect child maltreatment, you may report it directly to:

Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families Division of Licensing

Mail Code 444, P.O. Box 64943, St. Paul, MN 55164-0943

📞 (651) 539-8222

All complaints are taken seriously and are investigated promptly and confidentially. Retaliation for reporting is strictly prohibited.

Program Oversight and Inspections

The DCYF Licensing Division regularly inspects child care centers to ensure ongoing compliance.

Guiding Light welcomes these visits as an opportunity to maintain transparency, uphold high standards, and improve our care and education practices.

Any violations cited during inspections are promptly corrected and documented in our compliance records, available upon request.

Staff Training and Professional Development

Each staff member completes annual training that includes, but is not limited to:

- **Child Development and Learning**
- **Health and Safety Practices**
- **Emergency Preparedness**
- **Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) and Abusive Head Trauma (AHT)**
- **Child Maltreatment Prevention**
- **CPR & First Aid (renewed every two years)**

We believe professional growth enhances the quality of care and reflects our calling to serve children and families with excellence and integrity.

“Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” — *1 Corinthians 10:31*

Parent Access and Rights

Parents and legal guardians are welcome to visit and observe their child at any time during operational hours. All classrooms operate under an **open-door policy**, and families are encouraged to participate in activities, celebrations, and conferences.

Parents have the right to review:

- Their child’s personal records
- The center’s DCYF license and inspection reports
- The center’s health, safety, and emergency procedures

Program Evaluation

Guiding Light conducts regular **program evaluations** to assess quality, curriculum implementation, and family satisfaction. Parents are encouraged to share feedback through annual surveys or conferences.

This partnership ensures that our center remains Christ-centered, developmentally appropriate, and compliant with the highest standards of care.

VII. Educational Program

Philosophy of Learning

At Guiding Light Early Learning Center, we believe that children are created by God with unique gifts, purposes, and potential.

Our educational program supports the whole child—spiritually, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically—through a blend of structured guidance and purposeful play.

Learning happens best in an environment filled with love, curiosity, and Christian values. Children are encouraged to explore, ask questions, problem-solve, and express themselves while learning about the world God created.

We see play as the primary vehicle for learning. Through play, children build critical thinking skills, social awareness, creativity, and confidence—all while experiencing the joy of discovery.

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” — *Matthew 5:16*

Curriculum Framework

Our curriculum integrates two key approaches:

- **Pinnacle Early Learning Curriculum** for academic and developmental foundations.
- **One in Christ Curriculum** for spiritual growth and Biblical learning.

This combination ensures that all experiences—academic, social, and spiritual—work together to form a child who is prepared for school and grounded in faith.

Core Developmental Goals

Each classroom implements lesson plans aligned with both **DHS Rule 3 developmental domains** and **Biblical values**, helping children grow in grace and knowledge.

1. Spiritual Development

- Discovering that God made and loves them.
- Learning to pray, worship, and practice gratitude.

- Understanding forgiveness, kindness, and compassion.
- Learning Bible stories that teach moral and spiritual truths.

2. Social and Emotional Development

- Building friendships and learning to share, cooperate, and serve others.
- Managing emotions through guidance, modeling, and reflection.
- Developing self-confidence and a sense of belonging.
- Understanding that everyone is a child of God, worthy of respect and care.

3. Cognitive Development

- Encouraging problem-solving and curiosity about God's world.
- Introducing foundational literacy, math, science, and critical thinking skills.
- Providing hands-on exploration through experiments, games, and dramatic play.

4. Language and Literacy

- Fostering a love for reading through daily story time and Bible lessons.
- Encouraging conversation, active listening, and expressive vocabulary.
- Promoting early writing, letter recognition, and phonemic awareness.

5. Physical Development

- Promoting fine motor skills through art, building, and sensory activities.
- Developing gross motor coordination through outdoor play, gym time, and movement.
- Teaching body awareness, health, and safety through daily routines.

6. Creative Arts

- Encouraging artistic expression through music, painting, dancing, and drama.
- Providing opportunities for worship through song and movement.
- Teaching children to celebrate beauty as part of God's creation.

Daily Program and Schedule

Our teachers use flexible daily routines to provide both structure and freedom for children to explore and grow. Activities include:

- **Morning Devotions & Prayer**
- **Bible Story Time**
- **Circle Time** (calendar, weather, songs, discussions)
- **Learning Centers** (art, literacy, math, science, sensory, dramatic play)
- **Indoor and Outdoor Play**
- **Music and Movement**
- **Rest or Nap Time**
- **Afternoon Exploration and Group Activities**
- **Closing Prayer and Reflection**

Each classroom posts its own daily schedule and monthly lesson plan on the family bulletin board and in ProCare for parent access.

Assessment and Parent Conferences

Each child's development is observed continuously through play-based assessments and teacher observations. We hold **formal parent-teacher conferences twice a year**, during which families receive a written developmental report.

Parents are also encouraged to request additional meetings at any time to discuss goals or concerns.

Our goal is to partner with parents to ensure that every child experiences success, growth, and joy in learning.

Individualized Instruction

Because every child develops at their own pace, our staff tailor learning experiences to meet individual needs. We celebrate progress rather than perfection—helping each child discover their strengths and build confidence in the way God designed them to grow.

Faith Integration in Learning

Faith is woven naturally into every part of the day.

Children hear, see, and feel God's love through:

- Daily prayer and worship
- Bible-based stories and songs
- Acts of service and kindness
- Modeling of Christian behavior by staff
- Celebrations of Christian holidays and seasons (Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, etc.)

"Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you; and behold, I am with you always." — *Matthew 28:20*

VIII. Health & Safety

Commitment to a Healthy Environment

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, we believe that each child is created in God's image and deserves to grow and thrive in a clean, safe, and healthy setting.

We are dedicated to maintaining high standards of health, safety, and cleanliness throughout our classrooms and facility.

Our health and safety practices comply with all requirements of:

- **Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families (Rule 3, 9503)**
- **Minnesota Department of Health**
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)** guidelines

"Beloved, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you." — *3 John 1:2*

Health Care Summary & Immunizations

All enrolled children must have a **current Health Care Summary** completed and signed by a licensed health care provider within **30 days of enrollment**.

Children must also have an **up-to-date immunization record** per **MN Statute 121A.15**.

Families choosing exemption for medical or conscientious reasons must provide the appropriate documentation signed by a parent or health professional.

Health forms must be updated annually or as requested by licensing authorities.

Daily Health Check

Teachers conduct a visual health check each morning as children arrive.

If a child appears ill, staff will determine whether the child may participate safely in daily activities. If exclusion criteria are met (listed below), the child will not be admitted for the day.

Illness and Exclusion Policy

To protect all children and staff, Guiding Light follows the **Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) exclusion guidelines**. A child will be excluded from care if they:

- Have a temperature of **100.4°F or higher**
- Experience vomiting or diarrhea within the last **24 hours**
- Have a contagious rash, eye infection (pink eye), or draining sores
- Exhibit signs of a communicable illness (e.g., strep throat, COVID-19, RSV, influenza)
- Are unable to participate comfortably in group activities

Children may return when they are:

- Fever-free for **24 hours without medication**
- Symptom-free for **24 hours**
- Cleared by a healthcare provider when necessary

If symptoms develop while at the center, the child will be separated from the group under staff supervision, and parents will be contacted to pick up promptly.

Medication Administration

Guiding Light will administer medications only under the following conditions:

- A **Medication Authorization Form** is completed and signed by the parent.
- The medication is in its **original labeled container**.
- Prescription medications include the child's name, dosage, and prescribing physician.
- Over-the-counter medications are age-appropriate and labeled with the child's full name.

Medications are stored in a **locked cabinet or refrigerator** (as required) and are logged each time they are administered.

Staff receive DCYF-approved medication administration training and maintain current First Aid and CPR certification.

Injury and Incident Reporting

If a child is injured, staff will:

1. Administer **basic first aid** (cleaning the wound, applying bandages, ice, etc.).
2. Complete an **Incident Report** describing what occurred and how it was treated.
3. Notify the parent at pick-up or immediately for more serious injuries.

For any **head injury or injury requiring medical attention**, parents will be contacted right away. In an emergency, 911 will be called, and the child will be transported to the designated hospital.

A staff member will accompany the child until the parent or guardian arrives.

Emergency Procedures

Guiding Light has an **Emergency Preparedness Plan** that includes:

- Fire evacuation procedures
- Tornado and severe weather sheltering
- Intruder and lockdown procedures
- Medical emergency responses
- Relocation site coordination

Emergency drills are conducted regularly:

- **Fire drills** – monthly

- **Tornado drills** – monthly April through September
- **Lockdown drills** – quarterly

Parents will be notified if an actual emergency requires relocation or early dismissal.

Accidents or Medical Emergencies

In the event of a medical emergency:

1. The first staff member on scene will call **911**.
2. The child's parents/guardians will be notified immediately.
3. A staff member will accompany the child to the hospital, bringing all emergency contact and medical information.
4. A report will be filed with DCYF as required.

Our designated emergency hospital is:

Hutchinson Health

1095 Highway 15 South, Hutchinson, MN 55350

📞 (320) 234-5000

Handwashing & Sanitation

Proper handwashing is practiced and taught throughout the day. Children and staff wash hands:

- Upon arrival
- Before and after meals
- After toileting or diapering
- After outdoor play
- After coughing, sneezing, or wiping noses

All toys and surfaces are sanitized daily, and classrooms are cleaned thoroughly at the end of each day using DCYF-approved disinfectants.

Outdoor Safety

Outdoor play is an essential part of our program. Children go outside daily unless:

- The temperature (including windchill) is below **0°F**
- The heat index exceeds **90°F**
- There is lightning, heavy rain, or unsafe air quality

Toddlers receive close, hands-on supervision during outdoor play. Activities and equipment are selected specifically for toddler development and safety. Staff remain in close proximity to support climbing, balance, and exploration while ensuring safe interactions with peers and equipment. Staff ensure children are dressed appropriately for the weather. Sunscreen and insect repellent may be applied with written parent permission.

Nutrition and Food Safety

Guiding Light provides meals and snacks that meet or exceed the **U.S. Department of Agriculture Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** guidelines.

We serve nutritious foods that promote healthy habits, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy.

Parents must notify the center of any **food allergies or dietary restrictions** in writing. A care plan may be developed for children with food allergies, signed by a physician and parent.

Meal blessings are said before each meal or snack, thanking God for His provision.

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." — *1 Corinthians 10:31*

IX. Daily Experiences

Purposeful Daily Routine

Each day at **Guiding Light Early Learning Center** is designed to help children grow in faith, learning, and joy. Our routines provide structure and predictability, while also allowing flexibility for discovery, creativity, and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Children thrive when they know what to expect and feel secure in their environment. Teachers provide loving guidance, smooth transitions, and opportunities for both independent and group learning throughout the day.

“This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” — *Psalms 118:24*

Example Daily Schedule (Toddler)

6:00 – 8:00 AM - Arrival/Free Play
8:00 – 8:10 AM - Clean Up/Wash Hands/Diapering/Toileting
8:10 – 8:30 AM - Breakfast
8:30 – 8:45 AM – Morning circle time
8:45 – 9:00 AM – Transition to Outside time (weather depending) or Large Motor Room
9:00 – 9:45 AM – Outside Time (weather depending) or Large Motor play
9:45 – 10:00 AM – Transition to Learning Centers, diapering/toileting
10:00 – 10:45 AM – Learning Centers
10:45 – 11:15 AM - Jesus Time/Music & Movement
11:15 – 11:50 AM - Lunch Time
11:50 – 12:00 PM - Clean up, wash hands, diapering/toileting & Transition for Nap Time
12:00 – 12:30 PM - Quiet Story Time
12:30 – 2:30 PM - Nap Time (after 30 minutes of resting quietly, children may engage in quiet activities)
2:30 – 3:00 PM - Snack Time & Transition for Outside Time
3:00 – 3:30 PM - Outside Time (weather depending) or Large Motor play
3:30 – 4:00 PM – Diapering/toileting & transitioning to free play
4:00 – 5:30 PM - Free Play/Dismissal

Example Daily Schedule (Preschool)

6:00 – 8:00 AM - Arrival/Free Play
8:00 – 8:10 Clean Up/Wash Hands/Bathroom
8:10 – 8:30 Breakfast
8:30 – 8:45 Morning Group
8:45 – 9:45 Learning Centers
9:45 – 10:00 Bathroom & Transition for Outside Time
10:00 – 10:45 Outside Time (indoor large motor play weather depending)
10:45 – 11:15 Jesus Time/Music & Movement
11:15 – 11:50 Lunch Time
11:50 – 12:00 Bathroom & Transition for Nap Time
12:00 – 12:30 Quiet Story Time
12:30 – 2:30 Nap Time (after 30 minutes of resting quietly, children may engage in quiet activities)
2:30 – 3:00 Snack Time
3:00 – 3:15 Afternoon Group
3:15 – 3:30 Bathroom & Transition for Outside Time
3:30 – 4:00 Outside Time (indoor large motor play weather depending)
4:00 – 5:30 Free Play/Dismissal

Example Daily Schedule (School Age)

Before School: Breakfast, quiet activities, homework help

After School: Snack, homework time, indoor/outdoor play, enrichment activities

Full Day/Summer Program:

6:00 – 8:15 Arrival/Free Play/Homework Help
8:15 – 8:45 Breakfast Time
8:45 – 9:00 Bathroom Break
9:00 – 10:30 Learning Centers/STEM/ART
10:30 – 11:00 Jesus Time
11:00 – 11:15 Clean Up For Lunch
11:15 – 11:50 Lunch Time
11:50 – 12:00 Bathroom and Transition to Outside Time
12:00 – 12:45 Outside Time (indoor large motor play weather depending)
12:45 – 1:15 Quiet Reading Time
1:15 – 2:30 Free Play
2:30 – 3:00 Snack Time
3:00 – 3:30 Outside Time (indoor large motor play weather depending)
3:30 – 5:30 Free Play/Homework Help/Dismissal

Christian Enrichment

Our days are filled with opportunities to experience God's love through:

- **Bible stories** that connect faith with daily life.
- **Songs and prayer** woven into transitions and routines.
- **Service activities** (such as making cards for nursing homes or food drives).
- **Seasonal celebrations** that highlight Christian holidays like Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving.

Children learn that faith is part of every moment—from sharing toys to thanking God before snack time.

Rest and Nap Time

A daily rest period is provided for all children.

- **Toddlers and Preschoolers are supervised at all times during rest periods.**
- **Staff remain in the room and conduct regular visual checks to ensure each child's safety and comfort. Individual sleep needs are honored, and comfort items such as a small blanket or soft toy are permitted.**
- **Toddlers who wake early are offered quiet, supervised activities until the rest period concludes.**
- **Preschoolers** rest on individual cots or mats for approximately **90 minutes** after lunch.
- Soft worship music or gentle reading helps children relax.

Children who do not sleep are encouraged to rest quietly or engage in quiet table activities after an initial rest period.

Parents must provide a small blanket and a soft toy (for comfort only). Items are stored individually and sent home to be washed weekly.

Toileting and Diapering

Toileting and diapering are handled with **dignity, privacy, and encouragement**. Staff follow strict handwashing and sanitation procedures as required by DCYF. Toddlers who are not yet toilet trained will be diapered in designated diapering areas following strict sanitation and handwashing procedures per DCYF guidelines.

- Diaper checks occur routinely and as needed
- Parents must supply diapers, wipes, and extra clothing
- Toilet learning is supported gently and in partnership with families
- Children are never punished or shamed for accidents
- Toileting training is coordinated between staff and parents to ensure consistency.

- Positive reinforcement is used—children are **never punished or shamed** for accidents.

Supplies such as diapers, wipes, and extra clothing must be provided and labeled by parents.

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is a vital part of each child's day, encouraging large motor development, creativity, and appreciation for God's creation.

Children go outside daily, weather permitting, to engage in:

- Playground play and group games
- Nature walks and exploration
- Large-motor activities such as bikes, balls, and climbing

Children will not go outside if:

- The temperature or wind chill is **below 0°F**
- The heat index is **above 90°F**
- There is lightning, heavy precipitation, or poor air quality

Staff ensure that children are properly dressed for the weather. Please send **seasonal clothing** labeled with your child's first and last name.

Nutrition and Mealtime

Guiding Light provides nutritious meals and snacks each day in accordance with **USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)** standards.

- **Breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack** are served daily.
- Menus are posted monthly on the parent communication board and in ProCare.
- Mealtimes are seen as a time for **fellowship and gratitude**.

Before each meal, children pray together, thanking God for His blessings: "Give us this day our daily bread." — *Matthew 6:11*

Toddlers are seated with staff during meals and snacks. Teachers provide age-appropriate assistance with utensils, portioning, pacing, and opening food items as needed. Self-feeding is encouraged, but children are never rushed or forced to eat. Mealtimes are treated as a learning opportunity that supports independence, social skills, and healthy eating habits. Children are encouraged, but never forced, to try all foods. Teachers model healthy eating and conversation, helping children develop independence and table manners. Parents must inform the center of any **allergies, dietary restrictions, or religious dietary preferences** in writing. Alternative meals or substitutions will be provided when possible.

Clothing and Belongings

Children should wear **comfortable, weather-appropriate play clothes** that can get messy. Closed-toe shoes are required for safety during play and outdoor activities.

Each child should bring:

- A full change of clothing (including socks and underwear)
- Weather gear (coat, hat, mittens, boots, snow pants, sunscreen)
- Water bottle (labeled - will be sent home daily to be washed and sanitized)
- Blanket for nap time (labeled)

All personal items must be clearly labeled with the child's first and last name.

Celebrations and Birthdays

We love to celebrate the special milestones in a child's life!

Parents are welcome to bring **store-bought treats** for birthdays or special occasions. Please check with your

child's teacher regarding allergies and the best time for celebration.

Birthdays are celebrated with prayer, songs, and words of blessing over the child.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above." — *James 1:17*

X. Parent Partnerships

Our Approach to Family Partnership

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, we view parents as the **first and most important teachers** in their child's life.

We believe the best learning happens when **families and educators work together**—sharing information, building trust, and celebrating milestones.

We are honored to walk alongside each family, supporting not only the growth of the child but also the faith and wellbeing of the entire household.

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor." — *Ecclesiastes 4:9*

Communication

Open, honest, and respectful communication between families and staff is essential.

We strive to maintain consistent contact about your child's experiences, development, and progress.

We communicate through:

- **ProCare** (daily updates, attendance, messaging, photos, and billing)
- **Parent-Teacher Conferences** (formally held twice a year)
- [Monthly Newsletters and Event Calendars](#)
- **Email and Phone Communication**
- **In-Person Conversations** during drop-off and pick-up

Parents are encouraged to share important updates, concerns, or prayer requests at any time.

Staff are available before and after class to discuss brief matters; longer conversations can be scheduled privately to allow uninterrupted attention.

Parent Involvement

We joyfully welcome parents and guardians to participate in the life of our center. Examples include:

- Reading a Bible story or book to the class
- Sharing a skill, hobby, or cultural tradition
- Volunteering at classroom parties or field trips
- Attending family worship events and programs
- Joining special service projects (like food drives or mission outreach)

Volunteers working regularly with children must complete **DCYF background studies** before participating.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Conferences are held **twice per year**, typically in the fall and spring.

Teachers provide written assessments, review developmental milestones, and discuss goals for continued growth.

Parents may also request an additional meeting at any time.

These meetings are collaborative and affirming, focusing on the child's strengths, emerging skills, and ways we

can work together to encourage their development.

Family Events and Faith Community

Throughout the year, Guiding Light hosts **family engagement events** such as:

- Open Houses
- Holiday Programs (Christmas, Easter)
- Parent Prayer Breakfasts and Devotionals
- Family Fun Nights or Service Projects
- Preschool Graduation

These opportunities strengthen our sense of Christian community and partnership. Families of all faith backgrounds are warmly invited to attend and participate.

Parent Concerns or Grievances

If a concern arises, we encourage direct, respectful communication in a spirit of unity and grace. Steps to address a concern:

1. **Speak directly with your child's teacher.** Most issues can be resolved through open conversation.
2. **If unresolved, contact the Director** to schedule a meeting and review the concern together.
3. **If still unresolved**, families may contact the **Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families Division of Licensing** for further assistance.

DCYF Licensing Division
P.O. Box 64242, St. Paul, MN 55164-0242
📞 (651) 539-8300

We value all feedback as a means to strengthen our ministry and improve our service to children and families.

Confidentiality and Respect

All child and family information is kept **strictly confidential**.

Information about your child's development, behavior, or family circumstances will be shared only with:

- Parents or legal guardians
- Authorized staff directly involved with the child's care
- Licensing or health consultants as required by law

Staff are trained to handle all records and communication with discretion and respect.

Cultural and Family Diversity

Guiding Light honors the God-given diversity within our families.

We value each family's unique traditions, backgrounds, and experiences. Curriculum, celebrations, and classroom materials reflect inclusivity and respect for all children as part of God's family.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."
— *Galatians 3:28*

Family Support and Referrals

We understand that parenting can bring both joys and challenges.

If a family needs additional support (e.g., speech, behavioral, or family services), the Director can provide **referrals** to community agencies, early intervention programs, or faith-based resources.

Our goal is always to encourage the wellbeing of every child and family entrusted to our care.

XI. Special Programs & Activities

Purpose and Philosophy

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, we believe learning extends far beyond the classroom. Special programs and activities give children the opportunity to explore God's world, develop new skills, and connect their learning with real-life experiences.

We carefully plan all enrichment opportunities to align with our mission to **teach children about Jesus' love** and how to share His love wherever they go.

"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." — *1 Corinthians 10:31*

Enrichment Activities

Our program includes a variety of faith-based and developmental enrichment opportunities, such as:

- Chapel and worship time
- Guest visitors (community helpers, local artists, pastors)
- Themed weeks and seasonal celebrations
- Service projects and giving opportunities
- Gardening, nature walks, and science exploration
- Family literacy events and reading challenges

These activities are designed to foster curiosity, creativity, empathy, and spiritual growth in each child.

Field Trips

Field trips are occasional, age-appropriate extensions of our curriculum. They allow children to explore God's creation and community in meaningful, hands-on ways.

Guidelines for Field Trips:

- Parents will receive **written notice** and a **permission slip** at least one week before any scheduled field trip.
- Only children with **signed parental consent** will be permitted to attend.
- Supervision ratios follow or exceed **DCYF Rule 3 requirements** at all times.
- Staff will bring emergency contact information, first aid kits, and cell phones on every trip.
- Children must wear **Guiding Light identification tags or shirts** when leaving the premises.
- Transportation, when used, will comply fully with **Minnesota state laws** regarding child restraints, seat belts, and driver qualifications.

Parents are always welcome to volunteer as chaperones. Chaperones must complete a DCYF background study if participating regularly.

Walking Trips

Occasionally, classrooms may take short walking trips in the neighborhood or to nearby parks. Parents provide general consent for walking trips on the enrollment form. Staff maintain close supervision, bringing a first aid kit, attendance list, and emergency contacts.

Transportation

Guiding Light does not provide regular transportation to or from the center. Parents or guardians are responsible for safely transporting their children each day.

For field trips or special outings requiring transportation:

- A **licensed and insured vehicle** will be used.
- Only **qualified, background-checked drivers** employed or approved by Guiding Light may operate the vehicle.
- Children will be properly secured in **age-appropriate safety restraints** according to Minnesota law.

If transportation is provided by a contracted service or partner organization, families will receive written details in advance.

Special Events and Celebrations

Throughout the year, we hold special events to celebrate faith, community, and learning, such as:

- Christmas Program
- Easter Celebration
- Thanksgiving Family Feast
- Week of the Young Child
- Grandparents' Day or Family Fun Night
- Preschool Graduation

Families are invited and encouraged to attend and participate.

Events reflect the joy of Christian community, with emphasis on gratitude, worship, and fellowship.

Photography and Media

Photographs and videos of children may be taken during daily activities, events, or programs for classroom use, newsletters, and Guiding Light's website or social media.

Parents will be asked to **sign a Media Release Form** at enrollment indicating whether photos of their child may be used. Children's names will **never** be published alongside photos without written permission.

Service and Mission Opportunities

As part of our Christian mission, Guiding Light provides opportunities for children to experience the joy of giving and serving others. Activities may include:

- Collecting items for local food shelves
- Making cards for nursing home residents
- Praying for missionaries and community helpers
- Participating in child-friendly mission projects

These experiences help children see how their small acts of kindness can make a big difference in the world.

"Serve one another humbly in love." — *Galatians 5:13*

XII. Discipline & Guidance

Philosophy of Guidance

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, we believe that discipline means **teaching, not punishing**.

Our goal is to help children grow in self-control, empathy, and respect for others while learning to make choices that reflect God's love and goodness.

We guide children with patience, grace, and consistency—just as Jesus lovingly guides us.

All staff model positive behavior, use encouraging language, and help children understand that every action has consequences within a caring, forgiving community.

Guidance for toddlers focuses on redirection, modeling appropriate behavior, and meeting developmental needs. Staff understand that toddlers are still learning communication, emotional regulation, and impulse control. Expectations are age-appropriate, and guidance is gentle, consistent, and focused on teaching rather than correcting.

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”

— *Proverbs 22:6*

Objectives of Guidance

Our approach to discipline seeks to:

- Promote self-control and problem-solving skills.
- Teach respect for self, others, and property.
- Encourage cooperation and empathy.
- Ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children.
- Build a classroom community based on love, grace, and forgiveness.

We understand that children are still learning emotional regulation and social skills. Staff provide **gentle redirection, positive reinforcement, and choices** to help them learn appropriate behaviors.

Behavior Guidance Techniques

Teachers use the following **developmentally appropriate** methods:

- **Redirection:** Guiding a child’s attention to a new activity or environment.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Praising desired behaviors and efforts.
- **Modeling:** Demonstrating appropriate communication, problem-solving, and self-control.
- **Natural and Logical Consequences:** Helping children understand the results of their actions in a calm, fair way.
- **Problem-Solving:** Encouraging children to talk about feelings, identify issues, and work toward peaceful solutions.
- **Quiet Reflection:** Offering a short, calm space for children to regain control before rejoining the group.

Behavior guidance always maintains the child’s dignity and focuses on teaching rather than punishment.

Prohibited Practices (per DCYF Rule 3)

The following practices are **strictly prohibited** under Minnesota Rule 9503.0055 and are never used at Guiding Light Early Learning Center:

- Corporal punishment (hitting, spanking, shaking, slapping, biting, pinching, etc.)
- Emotional or verbal abuse (name-calling, ridicule, shaming, threatening, or yelling)
- Isolation that prevents a child from being under visual supervision
- Withholding food, rest, or bathroom privileges as punishment
- Use of physical restraint except when necessary to protect a child or others from immediate harm
- Public humiliation or intimidation of any kind
- Forcing a child to apologize or pray as a disciplinary measure

All staff are trained in appropriate child guidance methods and receive annual updates in positive behavior support and trauma-informed care.

Persistent or Challenging Behavior

When a child exhibits persistent behavior that disrupts the learning environment or endangers self or others, staff will:

1. Observe and document patterns of behavior.
2. Communicate regularly with parents to share concerns and strategies.
3. Collaborate with parents to create a **Behavior Support Plan** tailored to the child’s needs.
4. Seek support or referrals from early childhood specialists when appropriate.

If a child's behavior poses ongoing safety concerns despite consistent interventions, the Director may recommend suspension or termination of care. Every effort will be made to work collaboratively before this step is taken.

Partnership with Parents

We believe that strong collaboration between home and school leads to positive outcomes for every child. Parents are encouraged to share insights, strategies, or environmental factors that may help us better support their child's behavior.

Together, we strive to maintain a consistent, loving approach across both settings.

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." — *Ephesians 4:2*

XIII. Child Protection Policies

Commitment to Safety and Care

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, the safety and wellbeing of every child is our highest priority. We believe every child is a precious gift from God, deserving of love, dignity, and protection.

We are committed to maintaining an environment where children feel **safe, valued, and respected**, and where staff and families work together to safeguard their physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

"Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed." — *Psalms 82:3*

Mandated Reporting Policy

All Guiding Light staff members are **mandated reporters** under **Minnesota Statute 626.556**.

This means that if any staff person knows or has reason to believe that a child is being neglected or physically or sexually abused, **they are legally required to report it immediately**.

Reports must be made to:

- **McLeod County Social Services:** (320) 864-3144
- **Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Licensing Division:** (651) 539-8300
- **Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Maltreatment:** (651)-539-8222
- **Local Law Enforcement (for immediate danger):** 911

Staff do not need proof—only reasonable cause—to make a report.

Failure to report suspected maltreatment is a violation of both DHS rules and state law.

Internal Reporting Procedure

If a parent or staff member suspects maltreatment:

1. Report the concern directly to the **Director** as soon as possible.
2. The Director will ensure a report is made to DCYF or Child Protection within **24 hours**.
3. If the suspected maltreatment involves the Director, staff or parents should report directly to DCYF or local law enforcement.

All reports are confidential and handled with sensitivity and integrity.

Zero Tolerance for Abuse or Neglect

Guiding Light maintains a **zero-tolerance policy** for abuse, neglect, or inappropriate conduct toward any child. Immediate action will be taken in response to any allegation, including:

- Removal of the staff member from contact with children during investigation.
- Cooperation with all licensing and law enforcement authorities.
- Documentation of all steps taken.

The safety of children will always come before any other concern.

Staff Screening and Training

To ensure a safe and trustworthy environment:

- All employees and regular volunteers must pass a **DCYF fingerprint-based background study** before beginning work.
- Staff complete annual training in:
 - **Maltreatment of Minors Reporting**
 - **Child Development**
 - **Abusive Head Trauma (AHT)**
 - **Emergency Preparedness**
 - **CPR and First Aid**

This ongoing training reinforces our commitment to vigilance, awareness, and prevention.

Supervision of Children

Children are always kept **within sight and sound** of staff members.

At no time are children left unsupervised, secluded, or isolated from visual contact with a staff member.

Classrooms are designed to provide **clear sightlines**, and staff conduct frequent head counts to maintain accountability throughout the day.

Child Pick-Up Safety

Children will only be released to parents, legal guardians, or individuals listed on the **Authorized Pick-Up Form**.

Photo identification will be required for anyone unfamiliar to staff.

If a parent or guardian appears under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or otherwise unable to safely transport the child, another authorized individual will be contacted.

If no safe alternative is available, local authorities may be notified to ensure the child's safety.

Confidentiality and Documentation

All reports, records, and discussions related to suspected maltreatment or protection concerns are **kept strictly confidential** and accessible only to those authorized by law or required for the protection of the child.

Safety in Ministry

As a Christian early learning center, Guiding Light also strives to create an environment that reflects God's love and respect for every person.

All staff and volunteers are called to model Christlike behavior—showing gentleness, self-control, and compassion in every interaction.

Our goal is that every child knows they are loved, safe, and valued in the eyes of God and those who care for them.

"Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me." — *Matthew 18:5*

XIV. Personal Items & Dress Code

General Guidelines

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, we want every child to be comfortable, safe, and free to explore God's world through play and learning.

Children are active throughout the day—painting, running, eating, crafting, and playing both indoors and outdoors—so clothing should be **comfortable, washable, and appropriate for movement**.

“So whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” — *1 Corinthians 10:31*

Clothing Requirements

- Children should wear **play clothes** that can get messy.
- All clothing must be **seasonally appropriate** for Minnesota weather.
- **Closed-toe shoes** are required every day for safety during outdoor and indoor play. (No flip-flops or open sandals, please.)
- **Weather gear** such as coats, hats, mittens, boots, and snow pants must be provided during cold seasons.
- Lightweight jackets, sun hats, and sunscreen are needed in warmer months.

We recommend dressing children in **layers** for comfort as room and outdoor temperatures change.

Extra Clothing

Each child must have at least **one complete change of clothes** (including socks and underwear) stored in a labeled bag or cubby at the center.

If a child soils their clothing, staff will assist them in changing and will send soiled clothes home in a sealed plastic bag. Please check and replenish your child's extra clothes regularly.

Nap Items

Children who nap may bring:

- One small **blanket**
- One small **soft toy** (optional comfort item)

All nap items must be **labeled** with the child's name and will be stored individually.

Blankets are sent home weekly (or more often if needed) for washing.

Personal Belongings

To help prevent loss or damage, children should **not bring personal toys or valuables** from home unless it is for a special show-and-tell day or classroom activity.

Guiding Light is not responsible for lost or broken items brought from home.

If a child brings a comfort item for rest time, it must remain in their cubby or rest area during the day.

Labeling

All personal items—including clothing, lunch boxes (if applicable), water bottles, and nap items—must be **clearly labeled** with the child's first and last name.

This helps prevent mix-ups, ensures hygiene, and assists staff in returning belongings to the correct cubbies.

Jewelry and Accessories

For safety reasons:

- Avoid necklaces, dangling earrings, bracelets, or other small accessories that could break or pose a choking hazard.
- Hair accessories should be soft and secure.
- Please remove any items that could get caught during play or rest.

Seasonal Safety Reminders

- **Winter:** Snow pants, waterproof boots, mittens, warm hats, and layered clothing are required daily.
- **Summer:** Apply sunscreen before arrival (staff can reapply with permission), send labeled sunscreen and bug spray, and ensure children wear light, breathable clothing.

Lost

and Found

A lost and found area is located near the entrance. Unclaimed items are donated to a local charity every 30 days. Please check the area regularly for missing clothing or personal items.

Special Dress Days

From time to time, we enjoy themed days such as Pajama Day, Spirit Day, or Costume Day (with Christian-friendly themes). We'll notify families in advance through ProCare or newsletters.

Even on special days, please ensure clothing is **modest, comfortable, and appropriate** for play and movement.

XV. Special Services & Inclusion

Commitment to Inclusion

At **Guiding Light Early Learning Center**, we believe every child is a **unique creation of God**, designed with purpose and worth. We joyfully welcome children of all abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles. Our role is to create a nurturing, faith-filled environment where every child can grow, belong, and shine as one of God's "little lights."

"I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made." — *Psalms 139:14*

Inclusive Philosophy

We provide developmentally appropriate care and education for all children while recognizing that each child develops at their own pace. Our staff are trained to adapt activities, materials, and teaching methods to meet individual needs and to foster an atmosphere of compassion, patience, and understanding.

We work closely with families to ensure children with identified needs receive appropriate support and accommodations, consistent with DCYF Rule 3 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Individualized Care and Support

If a child requires special services or modifications, Guiding Light will:

1. Collaborate with parents to discuss the child's strengths, needs, and any professional recommendations.
 2. Develop a **care plan** that outlines strategies and accommodations to support the child's development and participation.
 3. Coordinate with outside professionals (e.g., therapists, early intervention specialists, or school district resources) with parental consent.
 4. Monitor progress and adjust strategies as needed, maintaining ongoing communication with families.
-

Referral Process for Developmental Concerns

If staff have concerns about a child's development, learning, or behavior, they will:

1. Document observations in a confidential and objective manner.
2. Discuss the findings privately with parents, offering encouragement and specific examples.
3. Provide **referral information** for community or school-based screening and support services.
4. Partner with families to follow up on recommendations and incorporate any suggested strategies in the classroom.

Our goal is to come alongside families in love and grace, supporting both the child's progress and the parent's peace of mind.

External Support Services

Guiding Light may collaborate with local early childhood professionals and programs, such as:

- Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE)
- Speech and language pathologists
- Occupational and physical therapists
- Behavioral specialists
- Public health or family service agencies

Such collaboration occurs only with **written parental consent** and always in the best interest of the child.

Confidentiality

All records, evaluations, and discussions regarding a child's needs or services are **strictly confidential**. Information is shared only with:

- Parents or legal guardians
- Authorized staff working directly with the child
- Professionals involved in the child's care (with written consent)

Transition Planning

When a child with special needs transitions between classrooms or moves on to kindergarten, our staff work closely with the family and receiving teachers to ensure a smooth, positive experience.

We share relevant developmental and educational information, with parental permission, to promote consistency and success in the next environment.

Faith-Based Support and Encouragement

We affirm each child as a beloved child of God. Our faith calls us to treat every person with compassion, dignity, and inclusion. We celebrate diverse abilities as part of God's creative design and teach children to show love and kindness to everyone.

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." — *Galatians 6:2*

XVI. Acknowledgment & Permission Forms

Parent Handbook Acknowledgment Form

Child's Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

I, the undersigned parent or guardian, acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the **Guiding Light Early Learning Center Parent Handbook**.

I understand that it is my responsibility to become familiar with the policies and procedures contained within, and I agree to abide by them as a condition of my child's enrollment.

I understand that Guiding Light Early Learning Center reserves the right to make necessary policy changes as required by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth and Families (Rule 3) or as determined by the center's administration.

Families will be notified of all updates or revisions.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Director's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Photo and Media Release Form

Child's Name: _____

At times, Guiding Light Early Learning Center may take photos or short videos of children participating in daily activities, classroom events, or special programs. These images may be used in newsletters, bulletin boards, class projects, or Guiding Light's website or social media pages.

Please indicate your preference below:

☐ **YES**, I give permission for my child's photo or video to be used for classroom and promotional purposes.

☐ **NO**, I do not give permission for my child's photo or video to be used.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent Permission

Child's Name: _____

To protect children from the sun and insect bites during outdoor play, staff may apply parent-supplied **sunscreen** and **insect repellent** as needed.

Please indicate your consent below:

- ☐ I give permission for staff to apply sunscreen to my child as directed.
- ☐ I give permission for staff to apply insect repellent to my child as directed.
- ☐ I do **not** give permission for staff to apply these products to my child.

All products must be:

- Provided by the parent/guardian.
- Labeled with the child's full name.
- Within expiration date and age-appropriate.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Walking and Field Trip Permission

Child's Name: _____

Guiding Light ELC occasionally takes children on short walks near the center or on approved field trips within the community. Children are always supervised and follow required DHS staff-to-child ratios. Please indicate your consent:

- ☐ I give permission for my child to participate in **walking trips** around the center neighborhood.
- ☐ I give permission for my child to participate in **scheduled field trips** that I will be notified about in advance.
- ☐ I do **not** give permission for my child to participate in off-site activities.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Emergency Medical Authorization

In the event of a medical emergency, I authorize **Guiding Light Early Learning Center** staff to administer first aid and to secure emergency medical care for my child when I cannot be reached.

I understand that staff will contact emergency services (911) if necessary and that my child may be transported to the designated hospital or nearest facility.

Hospital Preference: _____

Doctor's Name/Clinic: _____

Phone: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Parent Directory and Communications Consent

- ☐ I give permission for my family's contact information (name, phone, email) to be included in a classroom parent directory for communication about birthdays, playdates, and events.
- ☐ I do **not** give permission for my information to be shared.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgment Summary

Please review and initial next to each statement to confirm your understanding:

- _____ I have received and read the Parent Handbook.
- _____ I understand and agree to abide by the policies and procedures.
- _____ I have completed all required medical, immunization, and emergency forms.
- _____ I understand the tuition, payment, and withdrawal policies.
- _____ I give permission for emergency medical treatment if necessary.
- _____ I have reviewed the center's discipline, health, and safety policies.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Director's Signature: _____

Date: _____

"Whatever you do, do it all in love." — *1 Corinthians 16:14*

