



Family Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Little Acorns is a private, year-round early learning center providing high quality childcare and early education to Potomac since 1988. Little Acorns is licensed by the Maryland Department of Education, accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and enrolled in the Maryland Excels Program. We serve infants with full-time care, toddlers and preschoolers with full- and part-time care and provide before-and-after school care to elementary school children. We accommodate children with special needs whenever possible. With an international enrollment and staff, Little Acorns values diversity and does not discriminate on the basis of race or color, age, disability, sex, religion or national origin, marital status or sexual orientation.

MISSION

Little Acorns mission is to promote children's learning through developmentally appropriate planned and supervised play, while providing enriching experiences in a safe, nurturing environment.

PHILOSOPHY

Little Acorns recognizes the value of children's relationships with adults who are able to convey love, understanding, respect and commitment to children's well being. Children learn in many ways; for young children, exploratory play is the primary vehicle for learning. Little Acorns serves as a resource for learning about the physical world, social skills, emotional expression and cooperation. To achieve these goals, our experienced and skilled staff work to create an enriched and stimulating environment for children, providing the settings, materials and support with which learning is facilitated. We seek to foster social skills, receptive and expressive language skills, school readiness, gross-motor and fine-motor coordination and creativity.

THE PROGRAM

Our program is play based. We use a state approved curriculum called Frogstreet as a framework for our daily curriculum. The daily program alternates physically active play with quieter activities throughout the day to best promote the child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth. Different schedules for separate age groups reflect our recognition of the very different needs and competencies of children of different ages. Our groups have monthly thematic curriculum plans, which can be found posted by the classroom doors and will be emailed home. Our daily communication is through Tadpoles. Families can download the app and receive daily reports and pictures of their child's day. You can indicate if your child will be absent and why. Friendly reminders and notes can be exchanged through the app. Daily information is entered into tadpoles by parents/guardians and staff allowing for direct and accurate exchange of information and continuity of care between home and center.

“Littlest Acorns,” “Acorns” and “Sprouts”. Our infants and toddler programs serve 18 children between the ages of 2 months and 24 months. Each baby has a full-time staff member designated as their primary provider. We recommend children of this age group remain with their primary teachers for at least nine months unless otherwise discussed with the family. The youngest babies are responded to according to each one's unique moods, needs and daily routine. In addition to the lesson plans for the group, staff develop individualized plans of developmentally appropriate activities for each infant.

Our “Sprouts” group, have a more scheduled, group-oriented day. We do not have individual feeding and nap times in this class. We begin working with language concepts, self care skills and hands-on projects, including play dough, finger painting, sensory exploration, water play, dramatic play, stories, songs and plenty of outdoor play. *Staff ratio: 1:3*

“Seedlings”. This group of 2-year-olds has a day filled with exploratory play, large muscle activities, music and language games. There is outside time two to three times a day, story time and fine motor activities. Hands-on art, science and cooking projects round out the program. Teacher's work on potty-training skills when families and staff agree the child is ready. These little one's rest about two hours each day. We recommend that children of this age group remain with their primary teachers for at least nine months unless otherwise discussed with the family. *Staff ratio: 1:6*

“Saplings”. This group of 3-year-olds and young 4's spend more time working in small groups with manipulative games, projects and teacher directed activities, which promote reading and math readiness skills. Circle-times are longer and more involved for the Saplings and include discussion of calendars and weather. Block area and dramatic play keep a child of this age occupied for long periods of time. Stories, songs and music, science, art activities and nap time round out their busy day. *Staff ratio: 1:8*

“Oak Trees”. The 4- & 5-year-old program features teacher-directed activities in math, language, reading readiness, social studies and science. Problem solving skills are emphasized, as children now have the ability to follow instructions, understand a “team” concept and take turns. Music, dance and cooking are loved activities for our “overconfident” older preschoolers. Circle-times are longer and more involved for the Oak Trees and include discussion of weekly learning topics and current family events. This group enjoys art, free play, outside time and still has a short rest period. *Staff ratio: 1:10*

“Mighty Oaks”. This group of kindergarteners through 5th graders fit a lot of action into their before and after school hours! Snacks, outdoor play including group games, art and cooking projects, indoor games, reading/homework time and sometimes even field trips make for an enriching program. Cooperative interaction is emphasized. *Staff ratio: 1:11*

Special Note: The Mighty Oaks Group is not active at this time.

Transition Between Groups. Although our program groups are organized roughly by age, decisions on when to move an individual child from one group to the next are made on the basis of the child’s individual development, not by age. Other factors such as availability of slots in the next group can also affect the timing of a decision to move a child. Management will discuss with teachers and parents/guardians when they feel a transition time is approaching and give families formal notification one month before a scheduled move. At that time, we also give families information about the new group’s goals, routines and expectations. Teachers help the child practice in the new group for two weeks to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of care. We will continue communication with families from both classes to promote good adjustment to the new room and new teachers.



THE STAFF

Little Acorns promotes quality care in the childcare environment by employing competent, caring, psychologically sound staff. Because we strongly believe that a quality staff is the heart of a quality program, we employ appropriate screening techniques, including background checks, medical reports and ongoing observation of staff, to ensure that all staff consistently provide the highest quality of care for our children. The staff at Little Acorns is headed by owner, Libbi Helfman, who has over 30 years of experience in the field of childcare and program management. Many of our staff reflect the diverse cultures and languages found among our enrolled families. Each group of children is headed by a lead teacher, also experienced in childcare and trained in child development and childcare curriculum. All of our teachers have a Bachelor’s Degree, Associate’s Degree or Child Development Associate (CDA). All lead teachers are assisted by an assistant teacher. Assistant teachers have also had training in childcare curriculum and child development. All our full-time staff are required to be certified in first aid, infant/child CPR and a health and safety training.

Continuing education in all aspects of the child-provider relationship (curriculum, child development, community, special needs, health, safety and nutrition, and professionalism) are required of all Little Acorns staff.

To ensure this, we financially support staff participation in county, state and private training programs. Our teaching staff participate in the Maryland Child Care Credential Program, which recognizes childcare providers who go beyond the requirements of state licensing and regulations. It is important to us that our staff maintain the highest professional level of skill and motivation for their very challenging and rewarding work.

HOURS AND DAYS OF OPERATION

Little Acorns is open year-round, 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday. We are closed on the following holidays:

New Year's Day	Labor Day
Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Independence Day
President's Day	Thanksgiving Day + the day after
Memorial Day	Christmas Day
Juneteenth Day	

Our snow policy generally conforms to that of the Montgomery County Administrative Offices, as announced in the media. If the administrative offices open late due to snow, or close early, we will also have reduced hours. We do reserve the right to make a decision that we feel is safest for our staff and families. We have to take into account the entire county and where our staff commute from, not just the centers location. We ask that families allow extra afternoon commuting time in inclement weather, so we may close on schedule. To find out our hours of operation in the event of questionable weather, you can call the center (301-983-4372) around 6:00 AM, by which time we will have placed a specific message on our voicemail. You will also receive a text/email from Tadpoles once the decision is made.

REGISTRATION AND ENROLLMENT

To have your child enrolled at Little Acorns, we ask first that parent/guardians visit the center, with or without your child, to talk to the director and/or staff and to see our program. We will give you information about the group your child will be joining, and we encourage you to ask us questions. We require the following completed forms for registration:

- Little Acorns Contract for Care
- Little Acorns Registration Form
- State of Maryland Health Inventory Form which includes the immunization record and a lead test, signed by both a parent/guardian AND a physician
- State of Maryland Emergency Form
- Handbook Signature Page

All paperwork must be received before the first day of care. We require a non-refundable registration fee and a refundable deposit at the time of registration.

We enroll children throughout the year, depending on availability in a given group and developmental appropriateness of a child for the group. Priority is given to siblings of currently enrolled children, to children of our staff and to children of Montgomery County employees. Otherwise, we enroll children from the waiting list in order of the date they were placed on the list. Uncommonly, enrollment decisions may be based on other factors, such as our ability to serve a child's special needs or our appraisal of a family's ability to work with center staff. Little Acorns management reserves the right to deny enrollment, or refuse to continue care, to any family for these or any other legal reason. If you wish, introduction of your child to the center can be done gradually over the first few weeks to facilitate adjustment to the new setting.

FEES AND FEE PAYMENT POLICIES

Registration Fee and Deposit. There is a \$100 non-refundable registration fee and a \$1000 refundable deposit required to hold your spot when offered. If you sign a contract and accept a spot and then choose not to begin care as designated on the contract for any reason, you will FORFEIT the deposit. You must have attended the program as designated on your signed contract for at least one month and give a written one calendar month notice of withdrawal to be eligible for a full refund of your deposit. Your deposit will then be applied to your last monthly tuition statement. There is no mid-month withdrawal. We do not pro-rate final months of care, a full month tuition will be charged regardless of the last day of care during that month. We do not give refunds of any fees paid.

Tuition and Payment Schedule. Note that tuition rates are subject to change; we increase our rates annually. Tuition is payable MONTHLY, by the 1st day of the month for which services are rendered. Payment may be made by check or automatic debit from your bank account. You can set up an ACH debit and we will automatically debit your account the first of every month. Accounts are considered delinquent by the 15th of the month. If monthly payments present financial hardship, please speak with management about arranging a payment schedule.

Tuition During Forced Closures. If there is a “forced closure” due to a public health emergency, such as COVID-19, a government shutdown or Act of God, tuition for the current month will not be refunded. Tuition for following months will be assessed accordingly. If there is a “temporary closure” due to a public health exposure, tuition is expected to continue and will not be refunded.

Material Fees. There is a non-refundable \$150 material fee charged annually per child in January.

Account Statements. We generate an account statement for each family on the first of each month, which will be emailed to you. Your statement shows all charges billed and payments made within the previous month, and your account balance. Please review your statements upon receipt and see management promptly if there appears to be an error in your account.

Discounts. We offer tuition discounts for families with two or more children using our services. The sibling discount is 10% off the lowest tuition being charged to the family. Little Acorns also accepts Child Care Aware and Child Care Scholarships to assist families with economic needs.

Extra-day charges. If you request additional care beyond what is scheduled, Little Acorns will bill you for extra day charges, which are payable with the following month’s tuition. Families of school age children, please note that we charge extra if children are in the center for public school half-day or full-day holidays.

Absences/Vacations/Holidays/Emergency Closings. Little Acorns determines tuition rates annually, taking into account for absences, vacations, holidays and emergency closings. It is financially impossible to hold a child’s spot without payment when absent for any reason. THERE ARE NO TUITION ALLOWANCES FOR ABSENCES DUE TO ILLNESS, VACATIONS, EMERGENCY CLOSINGS, EXTENDED TRAVEL, LEAVING FOR THE SUMMER, LEGAL HOLIDAYS OR ANY OTHER ABSENCE. We do not give refunds, make-up days or allow children to attend on another, unscheduled weekday to make up for an absence.

Late Fees. Half-day children must be picked up by 1:00 PM. If you are late picking up your child, you will be charged a late fee of \$10.00 per 15 minutes (or any portion thereof) until 1:30. After 1:30 your child will be placed on a cot for nap and you will be charged a full day rate. Little Acorns closes at 6:00 PM. If you are late picking up your child, you will be charged a late fee of \$20.00 per 15 minutes (or any portion thereof). We regret the need to impose this fee, but respectfully our staff work hard and deserve to go home on time.

Lunch Fee. Families are responsible for bringing their child's lunch or enrolling in our lunch program. There is a \$5.00 charge if your child has no lunch and we provide one.

Delinquent payments. If you are about to fall behind in your fees, please speak with management. Interest of 4% per month will be charged on accounts more than one month delinquent. Little Acorns may refuse further care until a payment arrangement is made. Repeated delinquent payments may result in disenrollment. Delinquent accounts may be referred to a collection agency. If we refer you to collections, a collection-processing fee will be charged to your account. There is a \$35.00 charge for checks returned to us for non-payment. Should this occur two times, we may ask that future payments be made by ACH or money order.

WITHDRAWAL, DISMISSAL OR CHANGING A SCHEDULE

Withdrawal. Families may withdraw from Little Acorns at any time during the year. However, please notify us in writing at least one calendar month in advance if you intend to withdraw your child. Without such notice, you will forfeit your deposit. There is no mid-month withdrawal. We do not pro-rate final months of care, a full month tuition will be charged regardless of the last day of care during that month. We do not give refunds of any fees paid.

Temporary Withdrawal. We cannot hold spots for temporary withdrawals without tuition payment. Families who wish to withdrawal for international travel, summers or for any duration of time during a pandemic, tuition must be paid to guarantee your spot upon return. If you do not wish to pay during this temporary withdrawal, we will gladly add you to our waiting list.

Changing your schedule. Changing your child's schedule: Families may decrease a child's schedule with a one-month notice to the office. You may add days to your child's schedule as they come available at any time. Please see the office if you would like to increase the amount of time your child attends Little Acorns.

Dismissal from the center. Little Acorns reserves the right to refuse service to families under the following conditions:

- Behavior management problems presented by a child; or
- Payment of fees at least one month in arrears; or
- Repeated lateness (center closes at 6:00PM); or
- Communication and/or management difficulties between families and the staff or management of Little Acorns.

In these matters, we always attempt to deal with problems before resorting to a dismissal. A decision to dismiss a family always takes into account not only the child and family's well being, but also the well being of our staff and the other families we serve.



FAMILY INVOLVEMENT & COMMUNICATION

We need parent/guardian's and other family members interest and involvement for Little Acorns to provide the best quality care for your child. We communicate with you and invite your involvement in the following ways:

- **Tadpoles:** We use a software program called Tadpoles. Families can download the app and receive daily reports and pictures of their child's day. You can indicate if your child will be absent and why. Friendly reminders and notes can be exchanged through the app.
- **Volunteers:** One of the best ways you can be involved in your child's program is to volunteer. You can do this in many ways. You can come in and help in the classroom, read a story, do an art activity, or share your talents with the group.
- **Bulletin Boards:** Bulletin boards can be found in the hallway containing information about curriculum, upcoming special events and other items of interest to families. Boards inside and outside each classroom may also be posted with lesson plans and information of special interest to each group.
- **Email:** We send out the majority of our information via email and post a master copy on the bulletin board in the hallway. We encourage you to check your email daily. If your email changes, please notify us of your new address.
- **Website:** Our website is a great source of information containing our menus, calendar of events, forms and program policies. www.littleacornselc.com
- **Phones:** We have two phone numbers you may reach us on. We have the main number (301) 983-4372 which rings only in the office and the family line (301) 983-1429 which rings in both the office and the infant/toddler classrooms. If you call and you receive our voicemail, we will return your call as quickly as possible. We try to always answer the phone, but our first priority is the children.
- **Family Nights:** At least twice a year we have get-togethers with parent/guardians and staff members for education, information or just for fun. Our September "Meet & Mingle" provides orientation to each classroom and is a great way to meet our teachers and other families. Our family picnic features fun and games and a chance to mingle informally with our community.
- **Group Activities:** We appreciate your engagement with your child's group in whatever way suits your time and talents. Join us for field trips and parties; read to your child's group; stop by for lunch with your child; introduce us to your family's culture and customs or help us with a special project. We welcome your ideas!

We also communicate with individual families, both formally and informally, regarding your child's progress and needs within our programs:

- **Open Door:** If you would like to speak with us about anything taking place at home which may influence your child's behavior, or if you have some suggestions for, or concerns about, our curriculum or methods, the staff and management are always ready to listen.
- **Parent/Guardian-Teacher Conferences** are conducted annually during the month of March to share each child's progress and goals.
- **Feedback** is provided to families when our teachers observe evidence of a child's emotional, behavioral or social maladjustment, or when children demonstrate developmental milestones and other notable behavior.
- **Referral:** We act as a referral source for families when a developmental or psychological evaluation is deemed advisable.
- **Resolving Differences:** Occasionally differences arise between families and teachers, or between families and management. If you have a concern or problem involving the classroom, please talk with the lead teacher. If you feel a need to negotiate some difficulty or disagreement, we will be happy to arrange for a conference with all concerned parties. We resolve differences through mutual communication and respect for the roles of both parents/guardians and child care providers in the life of the child. Serious grievance should be communicated in writing to the executive director.
- **Family Confidentiality:** Children's files are confidential. No one other than office personnel and your child's teachers will have access to your child's file. Both verbal and written information remain confidential. We do provide classroom lists containing parent/guardian emails, addresses and phone numbers upon request for birthday invitations and play dates. If you do not wish to have your information on these lists, please let the office know.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT POLICIES

At Little Acorns we understand that some misbehavior occurs because a child is tired, hungry, or sick and having trouble managing him or herself. We also know that misbehavior is more likely to occur when the environment is not arranged and managed well. Teachers maintain an orderly environment through age-appropriate classroom routines and lesson planning, so that discipline problems are less likely to occur. Positive reinforcement is also a powerful means of preventing behavior problems. Children have a strong desire to please adults. Rather than focusing on negative behavior, staff try to notice and encourage positive behaviors with praise. Appropriate discipline is very sensitive to the developmental level of the child. Therefore, discipline techniques at Little Acorns differ by age group. We redirect children so their attention is focused elsewhere and discuss better choices. We provide lots of choices throughout the day to be proactive in preventing problems among the children. Infants and toddlers are simply redirected with a simple sentence about the behavior. We talk to the older children if they are doing something problematic. Rather than just tell them “no” or “don’t do that”, staff encourage children to accept responsibility for generating positive alternative behavior. We sometimes help the child “make amends” for misbehavior toward another child. We believe that children need to learn the tools for appropriate behavior, and they need to practice and be reminded often before we can expect them to get things right. Staff may never use physical punishment, psychological abuse, or coercion when disciplining a child. Yelling at a child, ridicule or name calling, threatening or bribing, withholding of food, toilet or nap, isolating a child in another room or out of sight, hitting or shaking are absolutely forbidden at Little Acorns.

Corrective Behavior. If a child is being very disruptive to a group and all else fails, staff may employ a brief (1 or 2 minutes) break in which the child is seated with the staff member slightly apart from the action. This time is used to discuss with the child alternative behaviors and how to make better choices. This time becomes productive rather than punitive.

Biting. While parent/guardian often find biting to be the most disturbing of children’s “hurting” behaviors, we find that it is a normal phenomenon experienced during the developmental ages of 13-36 months. We try to help the biter by treating him/her calmly and lovingly while viewing the event as an opportunity to teach correct behavior in volatile situations. Our focus is on understanding the reason for the biting behavior, which we do through observation. This allows us to discern what situations are likely to trigger the biting response.

Strategies we employ to diminish biting behavior include positive reinforcement when we observe the biter using words instead of hurting behaviors to express anger or frustrations and staying in close proximity to the biter to be proactive.

By the time children reach the age of three the incidence of biting decreases significantly; not coincidentally, this corresponds to the stage when children become more adept at verbalizing feelings.

Guidelines to Address Children with Challenging Behaviors.

We will work very closely with families when behavior issues occur and are disruptive to the class and/or endangering the child or others. When children have challenging behaviors that interfere with their ability to learn or interrupts their classmates learning, the following guidelines will be useful in providing positive behavioral support to them. The goal of these guidelines is to limit or eliminate the use of suspension or expulsion.

1. Assess

- We will assess the child's behavior, find out what is motivating the behavior. (attention seeking, desire of certain activities/toys) or avoidance (difficult work, discomfort, embarrassment)
- Be specific (Tommy speaks out loudly and argues with the teacher, rather than Tommy is disruptive in class) Identify what is not working, what the child is not responding to that teachers and parents have tried in the past
- Document exactly what happens before the challenging behavior, including setting, with whom and during the activity, are there any triggers.
- Document what happens immediately after the behavior. (did others laugh, was the child sent out of the class, did the child get out of doing an activity that he did not want to do)

2. Consult

- Consult with parents and other teachers who know the child. A collective effort is most helpful for providing the most appropriate support for the child.
- Is there something that could be contributing to the child's behavior (medical/health problem: vision, hearing, allergies; environmental triggers such as heat, noise, crowds; hunger, sleepy; family issues; review teaching styles)
- Determine the child's interests, strengths, and skills.
- Come up with a "best guess" as to the reasons for the challenging behavior

3. Implement Positive Behavior Support Strategies

- Determine specific behavioral goals for the child
- Identify desired behaviors to replace the challenging behavior
- Develop teaching strategies to address the replacement behaviors
- Provide positive behavior support as an ongoing process
- Monitor and review the positive behavior support strategies and ensure that the strategies are consistent with family and cultural values

Staff may never use physical punishment, psychological abuse or coercion when disciplining a child. Some examples of prohibited practices include, shaking, hitting, spanking, slapping, shaming, name calling, ridiculing, cursing at, etc.

When challenging behaviors continue in spite of positive interventions, there may be a need to discuss possible referrals to community resources. These resources include pediatricians, DHHS (Department of Health & Human Services, IECMH (Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health) and MCITP (Maryland Infants & Toddlers Program) in consultation with parents.

A united team and strong communication with families is extremely important. The last thing we want to do is ask a family to leave our care and find alternative care, but we do reserve that right after all resources are exhausted and there is an agreement that exclusion is in the best interest of the child. At that time management will assist you in locating another center. Program will always comply with federal and state civil rights laws.

Behavioral Special Needs. Sometimes an individual child's behavior may call for an individualized behavior management plan. Behavior plans may be called for when there is a problematic social behavior, such as frequent aggression, or a condition distressing to the child, such as a phobia or extreme shyness. Sometimes a family stress, such as parents' divorce or death of a grandparent, may cause temporary behavior problems to arise that require special attention.

At the time of enrollment, parent/guardians should describe special behavior management needs on Little Acorns' **Registration Form**. If a behavior management need arises at any time during your stay at Little Acorns, this form can be completed again. Parent/guardians are also encouraged to request a parent-teacher conference if you have a concern about your child's behavior. Teachers may also initiate a meeting if they feel the need for a specialized approach. Staff will work with families (and their professional consultants, if needed) to create and execute an individual behavior management plan whenever needed. **If your child has an IEP, please provide us with a copy.**



DROPPING OFF, PICKING UP & VISITING YOUR CHILD

Building security and access. Little Acorns doors are always locked. Families and staff have a code to enter the suite. Please remember to close all doors behind you. Please do not let others enter the suite that you do not know. They must buzz and get access from the office.

Length of Stay. Although Little Acorns is open 11 hours per day, *we recommend that children remain in care for no longer than 10 hours per day.* Long days in group care are stressful. We have found that children who are regularly left longer are more likely to develop behavior problems.

Dropping off. *Children must arrive by 9:30 am,* when our curriculum program begins. We have found that lateness disrupts the group and makes it difficult for the late child to adjust to the group's rhythm throughout the day. If you know you will be late, please call and let us know. Repeated lateness may result in denial of service for the day. We relax the late arrival rule in the summer.

Strollers and Car Seats: Unfortunately, Little Acorns does not have the space for families to leave strollers and/or car seats on a daily basis. Families need to take these items with them each day and be sure that they have enough equipment for each parent who will be picking up and dropping off.

You must escort your child into the classroom and be sure the teacher in charge knows your child has arrived. We understand how rushed mornings can be for working parent/guardians, but if you can allow 5 minutes each day to say good-bye in the center, it will add to your child's comfort and ease in making the transition between home and childcare center. If your child has difficulty with the morning separation, we may be able to recommend some different approaches to parting that will help. This time also allows for effective family/staff communication.

Absence. If your child is sick or for some other reason will not be attending on a scheduled day, please enter it into Tadpoles, call or email and let us know. We notice when your child is not here, and we worry!

Visiting. Little Acorns has an open-door policy for parent/guardians. You are invited to drop in at any time to observe your child's classroom, read a story or do a special activity. However, other relatives and non-relatives will not be permitted to visit unless we have prior permission from you authorizing the visit. If you want to talk at length to a teacher, please call during naptime (1 – 3 PM) or make an appointment. We want to always give the best care to the children; teachers cannot talk with you at length while supervising their classrooms. We have a family phone line for your convenience to speak to your child's teacher. **301-983-1429.**

Picking Up. Only custodial parent/guardians or those authorized by custodial parent/guardians may pick up a child from the center. When you pick up, make sure the staff know you are leaving with your child. Communication between families and staff is very important and we ask that you allow time for this. If your child is to be picked up by someone we do not know, you need to complete a Pick-up Authorization Form, found hanging outside the office. Please inform the person picking up that we will require some form of identification before releasing your child. This policy is for the safety of your child; please do not ask us to "bend" it. You or the person authorized to do so must pick up your child by 6:00 PM (See "**Late Fees**", above).

MEALS AND SNACKS

LITTLE ACORNS IS A PEANUT FREE CENTER

Little Acorns does not serve peanut products, nor do we allow families to pack peanut products in their child's breakfast or lunches. As we do our best to check the food being brought from home, we cannot guarantee that we will be 100% peanut free or that a child has not come from home with traces of peanut products on them. We do our best to provide a safe, peanut free environment for those who may be allergic. **If you are packing other "spreads" like cashew butter or almond butter, please label them clearly. It is very hard to tell if they are peanut butter or not.**

Little Acorns follows the USDA and CACFP food guidelines.

The program takes steps to ensure food safety while providing meals and snacks. Little Acorns meets with a nurse health consultant annually and a nutritionist looks over our menu content for nutritional value. We will make any corrections according to their recommendations.

The center provides snacks mid-morning and mid-afternoon; snack menus for the month are posted in the classrooms, outside of the office and on our website. Children bring their own lunches (and breakfast, if arriving before 8:15 am), with the center providing milk and water. Families have the option to pay for our lunch program. Prepared lunches are \$5 per lunch and must be ordered ahead of time. All fruits and vegetables served by Little Acorns are thoroughly washed prior to eating. We ask that you pack nutritious, wholesome lunches for your child.

We ask that you pack low salt, low fat, low sodium food items. We have microwaves in all classrooms, so we can heat lunch items if necessary. We cannot fully cook items because it would take too long. If items need to be heated, please pack them in microwavable containers approved for heating.

Please no glass, plates, plastic or polystyrene (Styrofoam) containers, bags or wraps that can not go in the microwave. Children are not allowed to use the microwaves.

If you would like help or suggestions on nutritious items to pack in your child's lunch, we would be happy to help you. All food items coming from home must be labeled with your child's name and date. Staff will discard foods with expired dates. Morning snack is served at 9:00 am, lunch is at 12:00 noon and afternoon snack is at 3:00 pm. Snacks and lunch are served with water and milk.

Infants and Toddlers. Little Acorns works with families to ensure that the food is based on the infant's individual nutritional and developmental needs. Little Acorns supports breast-feeding by accepting it in ready-to-feed containers labeled with the infant's full name and date and time that the breast milk was expressed. We will store it in the refrigerator and provide a comfortable place for breastfeeding mothers. Families of infants are expected to provide formula and baby food until children are able to eat our snacks. We do not allow bottles to contain solid foods unless the child's health provider supplies written instructions and a medical reason for this practice. Staff will discard after one hour any formula or human milk that is served but not completely consumed or is not refrigerated. All bottles are warmed in a bottle warmer; no bottles are warmed in a microwave. We do not serve solid foods to infants under the age of 6 months. For allergy purposes, all foods must be introduced to infants at home several times over the course of 3-5 days before we can serve them at the center. Teaching staff feed infants on demand, not in lieu of other forms of comfort. The program does not feed cow's milk to infants younger than 12 months and only whole milk to children 12 months to 24 months. There is refrigeration and storage space in the infant/toddler rooms for all personal food supplies. Staff will document the type and quantity of food your child eats and provide the information to families daily.

Breakfast. The center provides milk, dishes and utensils for breakfast service. Except for infants, families are responsible for setting up breakfast for their child. Staff will monitor and clean up the meal but cannot leave the room to get items from the kitchen and cannot prepare the meal. **Breakfast will be served until 8:15am only.**

Meals and snacks. Meal and snack times are a planned part of the days learning experience. An important aspect of this time for us here at Little Acorns is the social time spent with friends and an exchange of information and conversation. Children will not be forced to eat food. We put out all of your child's lunch and allow them to choose what they will eat and how much. With this in mind, please do not put anything in the lunch that you would be unhappy with your child eating before finishing something else.

Lunches. Nutritious lunches are recommended and encouraged. Little Acorns has a refrigerator and microwave in every classroom for lunches. Heating of lunches is only done by the teachers. All items must be labeled with child's name and date. We offer a lunch program that is optional if you prefer to enroll.

Prohibited food items. Please do not send the following for children under 4 years of age: hot dogs, whole or sliced into rounds; whole grapes; whole nuts; popcorn; raw peas; hard pretzels; peanut butter; chunks of raw carrots or meat larger than can be swallowed; raisins or celery. Foods should be cut into pieces no larger than ¼- inch square for infants and ½- inch square for toddlers/twos, according to the child’s chewing and swallowing capability.



CLOTHING

Little Acorns is where your child “works” every day. Since play is indeed the occupation of a preschooler, we recommend that your child’s work clothes be comfortable, appropriate to the season and sturdy enough to be played in. Your child may indeed return to you “wearing” some of their artwork. Shoes must have some tread (no sandals or flip flops in summer months), so they can function well for outdoor play and on climbing equipment. Appropriate footwear adds to your child’s ability to play freely without incident while at the center. Rainboots are optional as we have some great puddles after it rains that the children love to run and jump in. You may leave a spare pair of rainboots in your child’s cubby. In the winter, it is imperative that your child has a warm coat, gloves or mittens and hat for outdoor play. We go outside even when the weather is cold. Cold is not harmful if your child is properly dressed. We do not have extra staff to keep one or two children indoors when their group is out, so please provide appropriate outdoor wear. The children love to play in the snow, so yes, bring those boots and snow pants! Since, try as we might, mittens and hats are often misplaced among preschoolers, we suggest you buy more than one of each item at the start of each season and label all items with your child’s name. In the summer, we go outside in the early morning and the afternoon and want to protect your child from the sunrays. Your child should wear sunglasses and a big floppy sun hat.

Nap Time. Infants have individual cribs. We provide the crib sheets that will be laundered weekly. There are no items allowed in the cribs. Toddlers – Preschoolers in attendance for a full day’s care have a nap/rest time as required by the state of Maryland. We cannot keep a child up or keep them from falling asleep. All children have their own cots/mats labeled with their name on them. We provide the cot/mat sheets and a blanket that will be laundered weekly.

Change of Clothes. Please bring a change of clothing (outerwear, underwear, socks), to be kept in your child’s cubby. If your child has an accident, clothing will be put in a plastic bag in the cubby to go home. Please check daily to see if your change of clothes has been used and remember to replace them. This is especially important for 2-year old’s and 3-year old’s, where toileting accidents are still common, but it is also very useful when older children may have the occasional accident or simply get them wet. **Please label all clothing items with your child’s name.**

Lost clothes. If you cannot find your child's clothing, first check with your child's teachers. If they cannot locate the clothing, check our lost and found bin in the hallway.

Soiled clothing. Soiled clothing will be bagged immediately, as it is the most sanitary way. We are not permitted, per Maryland Department of Education, to rinse soiled clothing in our sinks. Our sinks are for drinking and handwashing only.

Little Acorns spare clothes. If your child has been sent home in an unfamiliar set of clothes, please return the clothes to your child's classroom staff as soon as possible! If your child has outgrown or worn-out pants or underwear, we appreciate donations so we can keep spares on hand.

OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor play is a crucial component of Little Acorns program. Children need outdoor play to develop gross motor skills, to explore the natural environment and to get fresh air. Little Acorns staff take the children outdoors to play each morning, mid-day and afternoon, weather permitting. If your child is in attendance at Little Acorns, he or she must be healthy enough for outdoor play and dressed appropriately.

Other weather conditions can also affect outdoor play routines. We adjust the timing and length of our outdoor sessions according to the time of year. For example, in summer we go outdoors early in the morning before it gets too hot and do not go outside mid-day when the sun is the strongest. We do not take the children outside on "Code Red" (unhealthy air) days, nor do we go out in winter if the temperature adjusted for wind chill is below 32°F. We factor in air quality and environmental safety conditions when deciding when we can go outside. We always provide drinking water outside during playtime. We ask families to apply sunscreen protection of SPF 15 or higher to children in the morning and to provide us with sunscreen so we can re-apply it before afternoon play. Children love to jump in the puddles and play in the snow. Please leave a spare pair of shoes or rainboots in their cubby and bring snow pants and snow boots on snow days.

CHILD EVALUATIONS

Staff will screen children's developmental progress 4 times throughout the year. The purpose of these screenings is to identify each child's strengths and weaknesses so teachers may plan individually appropriate learning activities. Screening also allows us to identify possible developmental delays, so we can advise families to seek further evaluation and treatment if necessary. Staff are trained through workshops and administration on how to conduct these screenings. Families are given reports about the progress of their child 30 days after enrollment and in March for parent/guardian-teacher conferences. This gives families an opportunity to raise questions or concerns about how the assessment methods will meet their child's needs. You may also request an appointment to discuss your child's developmental progress with your child's teacher, or with Little Acorns management, at any time during the year.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Field trips and Special Events. Out-of-center field trips and in-house special events are an important part of our program. They provide cultural enrichment, exposure to the arts and varied settings for experiential learning. We require your signature on a permission roster in order for your child to go on a field trip. Because of staffing and space considerations, our policy is that your child must attend the field trip if he or she is in our care that day. Otherwise, you must make other arrangements for your child's care on field trip days. If your child is enrolled part-time and a field trip is scheduled for a day he or she does not attend, your child may join the field trip if a parent/guardian or other adult comes along to chaperone.

While we do not require you to volunteer as chaperones on field trips, we need and strongly encourage you to join us on occasion so that we have an ample adult: child ratio. You will find that it makes your child feel special when a parent/guardian attends a trip. If you chaperone a field trip, you may also be asked to drive. If a parent/guardian drives another child, we must have written permission by both families and the facility. Please feel free to suggest special learning experiences we may bring in-house. **Please make sure your child is dressed appropriately for weather conditions on a field trip. We sell Little Acorns t-shirts and we suggest your child wear a Little Acorns t-shirt while on field trips. This makes your child stand out in a crowd and easier to spot by chaperones.**

Enrichment Activities. We often coordinate special activity classes offered by the Montgomery County Department of Recreation or by independent instructors. Classes may center on language, dance, cooking, hands-on science, sports or music. We always notify families when new classes are starting. You may also see our bulletin board or stop by our office to inquire about current special activities.

Birthdays. Little Acorns is happy to help you celebrate your child's birthday by serving lunch or a special treat that you bring for your child's group. Birthday treats will be served with our AM snack. All food brought into the center for sharing among the children must be either whole fruits or commercially prepared packaged foods in factory sealed containers. If you wish to have an entertainer in the center for the party, you must clear it through management. Little Acorns staff are not able to assume responsibility for conducting a full-scale party on site. We do not allow balloons in the center! If you are having a birthday party outside Little Acorns, our office can provide a class email or address list for you. **If you wish for your child to not have a treat provided by a family, please let management know. We do not always have advance notice and do not email families when a birthday treat is being provided.**

Holiday Parties. Though Little Acorns is a non-denominational center, we recognize that holidays are important to our families. Teachers incorporate some holiday activities in their curriculum planning. We love when families come in and share traditions with us through stories, cooking, crafts, or whatever you would like to do. We have center-wide parties around Halloween, Valentine's Day, Thanksgiving and Winter Holidays. Families are welcome to attend all parties. We sometimes ask families to contribute treats for the parties. All food brought into the center for sharing among the children must be either whole fruits or commercially prepared packaged foods in factory sealed containers.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Emergency Notification. When you enroll your child, we ask you to furnish us with addresses, email addresses and phone numbers where you can be reached in case of illness or emergency. It is extremely important that you keep this information current. If you move, switch jobs, or change phone numbers, please stop into our office and revise your Emergency Form. If you are going to be working off-site for a day or more, we suggest you leave us a note or send an email containing contact information for the day.

Handwashing. Staff, parent/guardians and children are required to wash their hands upon entering the facility and re-entering the classrooms, before and after feeding children, before and after administering medication, after handling garbage and after cleaning. Teachers assist in washing the children's hands before meals, after toileting and after playing on the playground.

Diaper Changing. Staff change diapers every two hours and when soiled. Staff will check for wet or soiled diapers/training pants throughout the day. Staff will change diapers after nap time. The changing table is used exclusively by one designated class of children and cleaned with a bleach solution after every single use.

Potty Training. We will assist with potty training at the center for children 2 years and up. Once determined that a child is showing interest and ready, we will begin the process. Both teachers and families must be on the same page for potty training to be successful. We do not have the capability to potty train infants and toddlers.

Cubbies. All children have a cubby. There is space to hang jackets, an individually labeled bin for spare clothing and a spot to leave rain/snow boots.

Idling Vehicles. Please do not leave your cars idling in the parking lot, as this is bad for the environment. Unless a vehicle needs to idle in extreme heat or cold to maintain interior or engine temperatures. Never leave children unattended in vehicles.

Pet Policy. Pets or visiting pets have documentation from a veterinarian to show that the animals are fully immunized and suitable for contact with children. Teaching staff supervise all interactions between animals and children. Any children allergic to animals will not be exposed to the animals. Reptiles are not allowed as classrooms pets because of the risk for salmonella infection.

Illness. All childcare centers are required to inspect the health of each child, each day, for signs of illness. If your child is sick, we will send him or her home immediately. The following are indicators that your child should stay home:

- Temperature over 100.4°F orally (or 99° F axillary or 101° F rectal)
- Uncontrolled Diarrhea
- Chills
- Pain
- Vomiting
- Undiagnosed rashes or a rash with fever or behavior change
- Earache
- Head Lice (we have a no nit policy)
- Notable Change in Behavior
- Communicable Disease which requires exclusion (if your child is under-immunized and showing symptoms of a disease that is vaccine-preventable and puts the other children in the program at risk, you will promptly be excluded from care)

If your child develops these symptoms while in our care, we will call you to come pick up your child ***immediately. If your child has been sent home, he or she may not return the next day.*** Your child's temperature must be normal without medication for 24 hours before he or she may return to the center. ***If your child has had head lice, he or she must be free of lice and completely free of nits in order to be in our care.*** Communicable diseases have variable exclusion periods; please see management to find out how long your child must remain out of care.

Repeated failure to pick up a sick child promptly may lead to dismissal from the center. When your child is ill, it would be most helpful for the staff to know the symptoms of the illness so that we may keep a watchful eye out for the other children in the same group. If your child has been diagnosed as having a communicable disease, please let us know and we will inform other families of the exposure while maintaining confidentiality.

Medical Special Needs. If your child has a medical condition requiring adaptive care, or a condition that might require emergency medical care, it is critical that you inform Little Acorns of these needs in writing. For conditions like asthma, allergies, apnea, or even proneness to diaper rash, we need to know what to look for and what to do if signs and symptoms appear. There are several ways for families to notify the center:

- The **Emergency Form** solicits this information in great detail.
- The **Registration Form** solicits information about disabilities and chronic medical conditions.
- The **Immunization Form** with a list of required immunizations filled out by the doctor.
- The **Health Inventory** asks both the parent/guardian and the child's medical provider to list and describe special needs, including limitations on activity and need for adaptive equipment.

These forms are all completed at the time of enrollment. However, if a special medical need develops later, parent/guardian should complete one or more of these forms again and discuss the needs with Little Acorns.

Accidents. If your child has a minor accident (small cut, scrape, insect bite) while at Little Acorns, we will treat it on site and write an “Incident Report” for you to receive at the end of the day. If a more serious accident occurs (large cut, sprain, allergic reaction, bites), or an injury to the face or head, you will be notified immediately by telephone and you will receive a written “Incident Report”. If we cannot reach you, we may elect to seek urgent care at an emergency room or urgent care center. If your child ingests a poisonous substance, we will follow the instructions of the Poison Control Center.

Should your child require emergency medical care, we will call 911 and call you.

Medications. Little Acorns must have a prior written authorization by both a doctor and you in order to administer any prescription or non-prescription medications. Prescription medication must come in its original container with the pharmacy instruction label on it. If your child will be taking medication both at the center and at home, it is helpful to request that your pharmacist split the prescription into two containers, both completely labeled. We can apply topical treatments (diaper ointment, sunscreen) by written authorization of you, the parent/guardian. State of Maryland Medication Order Form can be found on our website or outside of the office. Medications must be given to Little Acorns staff, who will store them in our medication boxes in the kitchen, out of reach of children. Children may not possess medications. Only staff trained in administering medications will administer medications. Nebulizer treatments can be done if needed.

Child Abuse and Neglect. Signs of physical abuse include bruises, burns and other injuries that are recurrent or that do not seem likely to have resulted from normal activity. A child’s own report of abuse is also considered a sign of possible abuse. Signs of neglect include consistent hunger, poor hygiene and unattended physical problems or medical needs. Maryland’s Office of Child Care states the following:

In Maryland, the child abuse and neglect law requires that anyone who SUSPECTS a child has been or is being mistreated must report the matter to the Department of Social Services [or to the police]. Any professional who knowingly fails to make a required report of child abuse may be subjected to certain professional sanctions. And, any person who, in good faith, makes a report of abuse or neglect is IMMUNE from any civil liability or criminal penalty.

Little Acorns is therefore required to report suspected physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect.



EMERGENCY AND CRISIS PLANS

Little Acorns has plans to address several emergency/crisis scenarios. A crisis could include a fire in or outside of our building; a threatening person in or outside of our building; or extreme weather (e.g., tornado or hurricane). In case of a national or regional crisis, staff will listen to local news for announcements and will follow directions of emergency management authorities.

Emergency/crisis response options include:

On-Site Evacuation. For instance, in case of fire. Classes evacuate directly outside to the parking lot and/or playground, where staff take attendance and await further direction. Staff do not re-enter the building until management tells them it is safe.

Local Off-Site Evacuation. In case of a local or building emergency that requires vacating the facility for more than a short time, staff will evacuate children to a designated emergency location for pick-up. Transportation may include private vehicle or walking.

Our designated emergency location is:

Har Shalom Congregation

11510 Falls Rd., Potomac, MD

301-299-7087

Har Shalom is 0.2 mile north of us on Falls Rd., next to the fire station.

Shelter in Place. Two scenarios:

Weather:

This may be a tornado or hurricane.

Procedure:

- Close and lock all windows.
- Move children away from the doors and windows and into the hallway and office.
- Have radio or mobile phone to check when area is clear.
- Email families with important information and updates.

Public Safety:

Eminent danger inside or outside of the building.

Procedure:

- Call 911.
- Close and lock all windows and doors. Close curtains.
- Move children away from the doors and windows and into hallway and office.
- Email families with important information and updates.

****Classroom Emergency Bags.** As part of Little Acorns Emergency Response Plan, each class has assembled an emergency bag with essentials and busy items for each child. Each bag may be a little different based on the classroom's age. They will have spare underwear, socks and items like play dough and coloring books.



MISCELLANY

Staff babysitting. Little Acorns discourages center staff from babysitting for families in our care. We must maintain a level of professionalism between staff and families. Teachers who babysit for children may unintentionally show favoritism towards those children and family members.

As much as we discourage babysitting, we also understand that some teachers enjoy babysitting and need the extra income that they receive. When staff babysit for families the following applies:

Babysitting must not interfere with the operation of the center or the daily duties of the staff. Families must make arrangements with staff when they are not working and caring for the children in the center. Staff are not permitted to babysit during their work hours. They may not come in late or leave early. Staff are not permitted to take children home from the center. Staff members may not discuss any information about other children, families, staff or any aspect of the business. Little Acorns will not be held responsible for any incidents that may occur while babysitting. Staff are subject to termination if these policies are not withheld.

Screen time. Little Acorns does not allow screen time during the day. We may show a short learning video or song to the children if it relates to the curriculum.

Personal toys and electronics should remain at home. Please do not allow your child to bring toys or electronics from home. They often cause fighting and dissension among the children. We **do** allow a comfort item for your child's cot for napping purposes.

Please do not allow your child to leave with one of our toys. Small toys belonging to the center often go home in children's pockets. Over time, we lose a significant amount of equipment this way. If you find a toy in your child's pockets or backpack, please return it to a classroom teacher.

Money in the center. Please do not let children bring money into the center. Coins brought in by your child present a choking hazard. Even if you know your own child will not swallow coins, they could get into the hands of other children who will choke on them or swallow them.

School photos. We have a photography company come in for class and individual photos during the year. You are never obligated to participate in photo purchases.

Little Acorns takes pictures of the children throughout the year and may post them in the hallway for families to view. We also send pictures daily through Tadpoles for your enjoyment. If you do not wish for your child to be photographed, please let management know.

Family emails, phone numbers and address. Families often ask for emails; phone numbers or addresses of classmates for birthday parties and/or play dates. If you wish to not have your information distributed, please let management know. Photos will never be posted on our website or social media without your permission.

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE PAGE

Please sign and return this page to the office at Little Acorns Early Learning Center.

I have read the Little Acorns Family Handbook and I understand and agree to abide by the conditions and policies of Little Acorns Early Learning Center.

Print name of parent or guardian:
Signature of Parent or Guardian
Date:

Print name of parent or guardian:
Signature of Parent or Guardian
Date: