



St. Jerome Early Childhood Center  
**Family Handbook**  
2024-25 School Year

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Diocese of St. Petersburg  
Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children  
State of Florida Quality Gold Seal School  
State of Florida VPK Provider  
Pinellas County License #C900209

*This handbook is a 'living document' that may be revised according to guidelines issued by the CDC, the State of Florida, the Florida Department of Education, other health agencies and after consultation with the Office of Catholic Schools and Centers of the Diocese of St. Petersburg.*

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Welcome to St. Jerome ECC! Congratulations on choosing a faith-based, nationally accredited center. We are very blessed to have your child in our early childhood program. We look forward to working closely with you, as we support parents as the primary educators of their young children. It is our hope that through open communication and ongoing dialogue between our school, classroom teachers, and families, we can provide experiences that will nurture each child and foster his/her growth and love of learning.

In choosing a NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accredited center, you can be assured of a quality program as we strive to provide the best possible early childhood environment for our children and families. St. Jerome ECC has been nationally accredited since 1993. Currently, we are the only *nationally* accredited, *Catholic* early childhood school/center in Pinellas County. Additional information about NAEYC can be found on our ECC website.

St. Jerome ECC is a Catholic Early Childhood Center and is part of the Diocese of St. Petersburg Schools and Centers. As a Catholic school, our purpose is to provide a faith-based, developmentally appropriate learning environment for children two to five years of age. Sharing faith with our children and families is our reason for existence. It is our hope that you are encouraged and supported in your own ongoing faith journey, as you walk these steps with your young children.

As a ministry of St. Jerome Catholic Church, we welcome you to our faith community. All are invited to become a part of our parish community and to journey together in faith with other young families. What a great support system you can be to one another!

Our Family Handbook, along with additional communications from our school, gives families an overview of our ECC program and the policies and procedures that are in place for the safety and well-being of all. Families are asked to carefully read and refer to the information enclosed during your time with us. We are here to support decisions related to your child and to assist families with transitions from home to school and from program to program. Please recognize that this is a living document that may alter form over time.

Family involvement in our program is appreciated, encouraged, and welcomed. Families are encouraged to regularly contribute to decisions about your child's goals and progress while enrolled in our program. Family involvement is a vital part of St. Jerome ECC, and you are encouraged to be part of your child's journey, in a way that will best allow your child to find comfort and security in his/her new environment.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these policies and/or your child's transition into our EC program, please feel free to contact me.

May God continue to bless all we do in His Name.

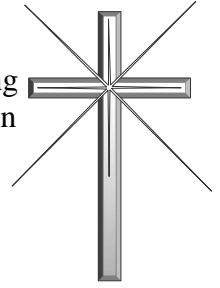
Sincerely,

*Holly Andrade*

Holly Andrade, Director  
St. Jerome Early Childhood Center

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

St. Jerome Early Childhood Center, a Catholic community, provides a loving and accepting environment that fosters respect for all people by modeling Christian values as our children grow and learn.



## **PHILOSOPHY**

St. Jerome ECC encourages children to be actively involved in the learning process, to experience a variety of developmentally appropriate activities and materials, and to pursue their own interests as members of a Catholic community and God's world.

## **GOALS OF ST. JEROME EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER**

- To create an atmosphere where spiritual values are taught and developed.
- To cultivate in each child: compassion, tolerance, and acceptance of other people, to eliminate prejudice and discrimination of all kinds.
- To know and understand the families we serve.
- To invite and involve our families in the total school program.
- To support our families with regards to decisions affecting their children.
- To maintain a stimulating and positive learning environment which encourages successful academic accomplishments.
- To aid our families with children's transitions from year to year and from program to program.
- To provide an equal learning environment and leadership opportunities, regardless of gender.
- To cultivate in each child a healthy respect for self and others, including his/her own innate talents.
- To provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum that strives to meet the individual needs of children.
- To develop and refine communication skills through the understanding and use of written and spoken language.
- To broaden each child's knowledge of his/her community and the many diverse cultures and peoples within it.
- To develop physical coordination and skills.
- To assist each child in exploring, discovering, and respecting the environment around him/her and to encourage sensitivity toward all living creatures.
- To provide a multitude of hands-on activities designed to instruct, in a more tangible way, mathematical and scientific concepts.
- To provide hands-on opportunities with current, developmentally appropriate multimedia.
- To support our teaching staff with resources and professional development opportunities that will encourage ongoing growth in the field of early childhood education.



## **HISTORY OF ST. JEROME EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER**

In the fall of 1990, St. Jerome Early Childhood Center opened its doors for the first time in response to the needs of parishioners who were seeking a quality educational facility for pre-school age children.

Our center offers preschool programs for two-, three- and four-year-olds. Morning and afternoon extended day hours are also available for all the above age groups.

St. Jerome ECC is licensed by the Pinellas County License Board. In 1993, St. Jerome Early Childhood Center first received accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Reaccreditation is required and sought every five years. Although NAEYC accreditation is not a licensing requirement, St. Jerome ECC sought this national accreditation, which calls us to a higher standard of quality early childhood education. Additionally, St. Jerome ECC is a VPK provider and a Gold Seal School. We undergo a rigorous re-accreditation process every five years.

The curriculum at St. Jerome ECC encourages children to be actively involved in the learning process, to experience a variety of developmentally appropriate activities and materials, and to pursue their own interests in the context of life in the community and God's world. All children are involved in an integrated religious program building on Christian values, which helps to foster their Catholic faith life. Faith development is the foundation of our program, as the children grow in acceptance of others, a love for God, and a friendship with Jesus, our brother.

Incorporating the most current Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for 2-, 3-, and 4-year-olds, our daily schedule is planned to balance activities, which include indoor-outdoor, quiet/active, individual/small group/large group, large muscle/small muscle, and child-initiated/teacher-initiated experiences. These activities are selected to foster self-concept; develop social skills; encourage children to think, reason, question, and experiment; encourage language development; develop physical skills and creative expression; and enhance sound health, safety, and nutritional practices.

Families are the first educators in a child's life, and we welcome parents as observers and contributors to our program. Throughout the year, families will have many opportunities to volunteer their time and share their talents and treasures to enhance the early childhood program offered to your children. Families are continually encouraged to participate and to offer input into our early childhood program.

The St. Jerome Early Childhood Foundation, recently named The Monsignor Brendan Muldoon Endowment, was established in 1993 within the guidelines set forth by the Diocese of St. Petersburg for the purpose of funding the operational and capital expenses of St. Jerome Early Childhood Center. Through family, parishioner, and business contributions, it is the goal of our foundation to provide an affordable, well-maintained, Catholic environment for children in their early developmental years.

We know St. Jerome Early Childhood Center will grow and flourish in the years to come as we continue to nourish the hearts and minds of all the children who pass through our doors. We respectfully welcome children of all faiths and backgrounds with the belief that together we form one human family of God.

**ACCREDITATION & LICENSING:** St. Jerome ECC has maintained a voluntary, ongoing national accreditation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children since 1993. Visit <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/for-families> to learn more about the NAEYC standards and additional family resources. Our center is licensed with the Pinellas County License Board. Regular inspections by licensing specialists, as well as the Health Department, help ensure compliance with the expected standards of care. Visit the license board at [www.pclb.org](http://www.pclb.org) for additional information.

**NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY:** St. Jerome Early Childhood Center admits students regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, and/or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to the students at the school. All decisions concerning the admission and continued enrollment of a student in the school are based upon the student's emotional, academic, and physical abilities and the resources available to the school in meeting the student's unique needs.

**PARENT/FAMILY:** The use of the term "Parent/Parents" in this document will refer to natural parents and/or legal guardians. The use of the term "Family/Families" may refer to the entire family or just natural parents or legal guardians. **RIGHT TO MODIFY:** St. Jerome ECC reserves the right to alter, amend, or otherwise modify these guidelines, in its sole discretion, without prior notice.

**WELCOMING FAMILIES:** St. Jerome ECC warmly welcomes new and returning families to our center. Inquiring families tour our facilities; meet our staff; ask questions; and receive school brochures, curriculum outlines, and additional pertinent materials to assist with the transition from home to school. Our website offers information about our program from staff biographies, age-level curriculums, photos, parent testimonials, and more. Open House is held just before the start of school giving children and family members an opportunity to explore our classroom settings together. Parent Orientation will be held before the start of school for all ECC families to address important topics and answer questions.

**ADMISSION POLICIES:** St. Jerome ECC offers early childhood programs for children ages two, three, and four. Children must be two, three, or four on, or before, September 1<sup>st</sup> of the school year for which they are registering. (Exception: Two-year-olds may begin the year once they turn two, up to January 1 and if space allows, and must repeat the two's the following year.) Registration for the upcoming school year begins in early February. St. Jerome ECC maintains low teaching-staff/child ratios. All Catholic families are encouraged to be registered, supporting members of their Catholic parish. Desiring to remain fair and impartial, teacher and classmate requests will not be accommodated. Enrollment shall be granted without regard to a child's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, or gender, and without regard to a parent or guardian's race, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, gender, pregnancy, or disability. Parents can apply for the enrollment of their child at St. Jerome Early Childhood Center by taking a tour and completing the Application form. Both parents and the child must attend the tour. (An absentee parent must come to the school office to meet the staff before the application process can be considered complete.) Our application decision committee, comprised of administration and teaching staff, will meet to review all applications, and notify families of the school's decision. If accepted, the family will pay the \$200.00 NON-REFUNDABLE Application Fee and obtain the Enrollment Packet. VPK families will pay the \$100 VPK Deposit Fee. Initial enrollment is contingent upon receipt of the completed enrollment application, signed Family Handbook Acknowledgment form, Florida Department of Health Physical Exam Form, and Immunization Certificate. Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg do not recognize religious objection to immunizations effective as of the 2011-2012 school year. The Enrollment Application and Fee Agreements are not meant to serve as contracts guaranteeing service for any duration. St. Jerome Early Childhood Center reserves the right to decline admission and/or dismiss any parent or child at any time with or without cause. Continued enrollment at St. Jerome Early Childhood Center is contingent upon the parent's, emergency contact persons, and child's adherence to the policies and procedures of St. Jerome Early Childhood Center as outlined in this handbook including, but not limited to, timely payment of all fees and tuition. Parents are required to notify St. Jerome Early Childhood Center immediately, should any of the information collected at the time of enrollment or any time thereafter change. Failure to do so may result in the child(ren) being disenrolled from the program and forfeiture of any deposit.

### **PROGRAMS & RATIOS:**

The following Early Childhood Programs are offered at St. Jerome E.C.C. All children registered in our program are accepted with an initial probationary period of 30 days (see pg. 13) as administration and staff determine the appropriateness of placement in this school venue. **Children in our three and four-year-old programs must be completely toilet-learned (able to use the toilet independently without frequent accidents).** Our core program is offered each morning as outlined below, specific to the various age groups we serve. Note the NAEYC ratio guidelines, as applied to our school day program, which allow for fewer students per adult than is required by the Licensing Board.

	Programs		Ratio of Teachers to Students
EC4s	Monday-Friday	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:10
EC3s	Monday-Friday	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:9
	Mon/Wed/Fri	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:9
	Tues/Thurs	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:9
EC2s	Monday-Friday	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:6
	Mon/Wed/Fri	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:6
	Tues/Thurs	9:00 am – 12:00 pm	1:6

### **EXTENDED DAY PROGRAM**

The following extended day hours are also offered:

Monday-Friday beginning at 8:00 am

Monday-Friday beginning at the end of the core program (12:00 pm - 3:00 pm)

Families have two options concerning scheduling their extended day needs. ‘Routine Care’ is paid in ten monthly installments for those families using our Extended Day program on a routine daily basis. Please refer to the Fee Schedule for various payment options based on the number of days and number of hours in your routine extended-day plan. If your needs change, please notify the office in advance to adjust your plan. The rate for ‘As Needed’ Extended Day is \$12.00 per hour, which will be billed via Brightwheel at the end of each month for hours used. All enrolled children may stay on an ‘as needed’ basis, provided families notify the office **two days** before the day their child plans to stay for extended hours. Families planning to use our Extended Day program are asked to complete the Extended Day Form and return it to the ECC office. The various time options are noted above. Billing will be based on one of these options. Between the hours of 12:00 pm - 3:00 pm, extended-day children will have lunch, a rest period (as required by licensing), and an outside playtime. Some children have difficulty with self-soothing and resting away from home. If your child is not yet ready for Extended Care, we will notify you. Children are given a 20-minute grace period to settle into rest time. If unable to remain quiet on their cot, you will be called to pick-up your child, so that other children can rest. See the Rest Time Policy on page 10.

**ENROLLMENT RECORDS:** Children must have the following forms fully completed and on file before they may attend the center. Forms are to be updated each year. It is the parent’s/guardian’s responsibility to immediately inform the ECC Office in writing of any changes in phone numbers, email addresses, physical addresses, emergency information, health conditions, etc.

Families will be notified before the expiration of any items noted below. A child will not be permitted to attend school if either of the Health Records are expired. See important details below.

1. Health Records:
  - A. Current Physical Examination (Date valid for 2 years)
  - B. Certificate of Immunization (Current & Updated)

\*As per diocesan policy, Religious Exemptions with regard to Immunizations are not accepted.

\*\* If an immunization record indicates that the child’s shot record has expired, the child cannot return to the program until the record is updated. (see p.19)

2. Emergency Medical Release – Notarized and renewed annually if there are any changes.
3. Child Enrollment Record

4. Emergency Record Card
5. Handbook and Policy Agreement Form (Both parent/guardian signatures required)
6. Promotional Media Release (Both parent/guardian signatures required)
7. Permit to Remove Form (Both parent/guardian signatures required)
8. Parent Communication Form
9. Field Trip Form/Liability Waiver (Signature Required)
10. "The Flu" A Parent Guide (Signature Required in September)
11. Distracted Driving Flier (Signatures Required in September and April)
12. Certified copy of the Shared Parental Responsibility of the Final Judgment of the Disillusion of Marriage (If applicable), to include the approved Parenting Plan.
13. Medical Support Plan (for children requiring medication during school hours)
14. IEP's – (Individualized Educational Plans for children with diagnosed special needs.)

Additional Records for Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (4-year-olds)

These additional forms are necessary as part of the VPK program:

1. Certificate of Eligibility
2. St. Jerome ECC VPK Agreement/Attendance Policy
3. Monthly Attendance Verification Form Signed by Parents
4. Pledge consideration (Optional)

**T-SHIRTS and TOTE BAGS:** Every Monday will be T-shirt Day at St. Jerome's (Tuesday for T/TH students). St. Jerome ECC T-shirts, \$10, may be purchased in the center office. Children are also encouraged to wear their St. Jerome T-shirts on special event days. SJECC tote bags are available for \$10. These can be used by students in place of backpacks. They are a good size for student belongings and can be machine-washed.

**CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

**CONTINUITY OF CARE:** Open Houses are scheduled yearly to allow families to visit our school, tour our facilities, meet our ECC staff, and visit the classrooms prior to registration. Parent Orientation at the beginning of the school year is designed to help children and families become acquainted and to help ease the transition into school life. The classroom teaching staff meets with the families assigned to their classroom to provide additional information specific to their age level and/or classroom environment.

Once the school year begins, we hope to minimize the transitions children are required to make throughout the school year. Children are assigned to teaching staff for one full school year as a means of providing ongoing personal contact, meaningful learning activities, supervision, and immediate care as needed to protect the well-being of each child. Throughout the school year, our program plans activities that combine the three-year-old and four-year-old classes so that the younger children become familiar with the four-year-old teachers and the overall school setting.

To assist our families with transitions from our program to kindergarten, St. Jerome ECC provides information on enrollment procedures for both our local Catholic Elementary Schools and Pinellas County Public Schools. Information is sent home to families throughout the year, with additional information posted on our ECC website. St. Jerome ECC works collaboratively with these programs to keep our families informed of timelines, requirements, procedures, and scholarship opportunities, and to assist with a smooth transition to kindergarten. Each year, St. Jerome ECC hosts a 'Kindergarten Readiness Class' for families to provide information and expectations about our local kindergarten options.

**CURRICULUM:** As a Catholic school, St. Jerome ECC strives to infuse our faith beliefs throughout every aspect of our early childhood program. Instilling our Catholic faith in the minds and hearts of the children and families we serve is the purpose of our being. St. Jerome ECC provides a faith-based, quality, developmentally appropriate early childhood program for the children in our care.



The National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation criteria states that a developmentally appropriate curriculum reflects the knowledge that young children learn through active manipulation of the environment and concrete experiences that contribute to concept development. Children are encouraged to be actively involved in the learning process to experience a wide variety of activities and materials. The curriculum guides the teachers' development and intentional implementation of learning opportunities that align with our philosophy of early childhood education and allow us to meet the goals we have set for our program. Adaptations and modifications within our curriculum ensure access for all children. Curriculum goals and objectives guide teachers' ongoing assessments of children's progress and support individualized learning. Families will receive a copy of the age-appropriate curriculum from your child's teacher. Each curriculum follows the current Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for the specific age level, as well as our Faith Formation curriculum and Safe Environment Curriculum (Ages 3 & 4).

St. Jerome ECC utilizes the following curriculum resources.

- ◆ Religion: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (infused); Pflaum Weeklies (Ages 3 & 4) (adapted for Age 2), Diocesan Standards & Benchmarks for Safe Environments (Ages 3-5)
- ◆ Florida Early Learning & Developmental Standards for 4 to Kindergarten, 2017
- ◆ Florida Early Learning & Developmental Standards, Birth to Kindergarten, 2017
- ◆ NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Early Childhood (All ages)
- ◆ Frog Street Curriculum (for Toddlers, Threes, and Pre-K) with Conscious Discipline
- ◆ Lively Letters Curriculum by Reading with TLC
- ◆ Family Involvement – Your participation allows our program to reflect your families' home values, beliefs, experiences, cultures, occupations & language into our curriculum.

**ASSESSMENT AND SCREENINGS:** St. Jerome ECC conducts assessments as an integral part of our program. Our curriculum goals and objectives guide the ongoing assessment of children's progress. To support children's learning & to ensure we are meeting our goals, a variety of assessment tools & strategies are used to assess individual child development. Utilizing a variety of assessment methods allows for sensitivity to family differences and the differences in children's abilities and learning styles. Assessments obtain information on all areas of children's development including cognitive skills, language, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, health, and physical development, including self-help skills. An initial screening is completed for all children within the first months of the school year. Teachers and other professionals associated with our program use assessment methods and information to design goals for individual children as well as to guide curriculum planning and monitor progress. Children are assessed by a familiar staff member. Our teaching staff have completed the Behavioral Observation & Screening DCF training course to conduct proper screening and assessment of children. The VPK Director and VPK Teacher are additionally trained to administer the VPK Progress Monitoring Tool (FAST: Star Early Literacy Assessment). A copy of our Assessment Plan is posted on our website. Depending on your child's age, abilities, and specific needs, the following resources are utilized in assessing child development at St. Jerome ECC. Our teaching staff works to achieve consensus with families about assessment methods that will best meet their child's needs. Access to the results or copies of the assessments will be made available to parents as requested or needed. Families have the opportunity to raise questions or concerns about how the assessment methods will meet their child's needs.

- ◆ VPK Progress Monitoring Tool (FAST Star Early Literacy Assessment – (Four-Year-Olds - September, January & May)
- ◆ Frog Street Curriculum Pre & Post Assessment Instruments based on the Florida State Standards (Specific to ages 2, 3, or 4)
- ◆ Ages & Stages Behavioral Assessment & Development Screening Tool identifies & monitors normal development and possible developmental delays. (As warranted)
- ◆ Ages & Stages Social and Emotional Development Screening Tool (As warranted)
- ◆ Creative Curriculum Assessment (Available)
- ◆ Teacher-Developed Assessment Tools (Ongoing)

- ◆ Student Support Plan and Individual Education Plans (as appropriate for children with specific learning needs)
- ◆ Input from Family/Teacher Conferences
- ◆ Individual Child Portfolios—an ongoing sampling of work from each child is collected & reviewed throughout the year.
- ◆ Observation & Interaction – The teaching staff continually observes and interacts with children daily, monitoring their progress and developmental needs.
- ◆ Family Input: The various assessment tools utilized involve input provided to us by parents, as we strive to see the whole child in his/her school and home environments. (These tools include but are not limited to Ages/Stages Developmental Screening; St. Jerome ECC Initial Questionnaire; and NAEYC Family Survey; Child Enrollment Record; and teacher-developed questionnaires.)
- ◆ FDLRS/Child Find (Florida Diagnostic Learning & Resource Service) of Pinellas County provides developmental screenings (speech, hearing, vision, behavior, developmental delays, and language) for all children. Families may initiate a screening and/or teachers may suggest a screening if observations and other sources of information indicate a concern in these areas. (See the FLDRS handout in the back pocket of your Welcome Packet.
- ◆ Centers for Living – A community resource available to assist families with child and family concerns, including behavioral issues.

Using the above tools, an appropriate plan will be developed for individual children based on their age, developmental level, and specific learning needs (i.e. physical, dietary, behavioral, etc.).

**REST TIME POLICY:** St. Jerome ECC will ensure that all children have appropriate opportunities to sleep, rest, and relax per their individual needs. Pinellas County Licensing Board requires that preschool children have a designated daily rest period of 60 minutes. **If after 20 minutes of rest time a child is unable to settle in and sleep, a parent will be called to pick up the child.** This allows the other students to get the quiet rest they need.

**St. Jerome ECC staff will:**

- Provide a Rest Time Questionnaire via Brightwheel before your child participates in the extended care program to better understand your child's needs.
- Consult with the family about their child's sleep and rest needs. Educators will be sensitive to each child's needs so that sleep and rest time will be a positive experience.
- Work with the children to help them learn about their need for sleep and rest. Children will be encouraged to communicate their needs.
- Always provide adequate staff/child ratios.
- Provide an individual, labeled cot with a cot sheet for each child. Cots are sanitized weekly (immediately if needed). If soiled, linens will be washed immediately and otherwise weekly.
- Arrange cots to allow for direct supervision and easy access for children and staff.
- Create a relaxing atmosphere for resting by reading stories, dimming lights, playing soothing music, and ensuring that children are comfortable.
- Ensure that at no time is a child's face covered with their bed linens.
- Ensure that children sleep in their shoes in case of an emergency evacuation and as required by licensing.
- Gently wake children who are still sleeping at the end of the rest period. Staff will gradually turn up the music, turn on lights, and provide quiet activities for those children who are awake.

**Parents will:**

- Provide a small blanket, a small pillow, and a familiar item from home, if desired, such as a small stuffed animal to be used during rest time only. The items will be stored safely at school and sent home each Friday to be laundered.
- Complete the child's Rest Time Questionnaire before his/her first day of Extended Care.
- Support teachers in maintaining a quiet rest time by promoting the positive aspects of this activity with their children.

**TOILETING POLICY:** St. Jerome ECC will partner with families to help children in the development of toileting independence skills. We will send a Toileting Questionnaire via Brightwheel so that you can provide us with information regarding your child and your family's approach to toilet training. **All students must be able to use the toilet independently upon entry to the EC3 class.** If we recognize the need for your child to use the toilet independently, and your child is not yet ready to do so, you will be notified.

### **GRACE & COURTESY / DISCIPLINE & EXPULSION POLICY**

#### **INTENT & PURPOSE:**

The goal of this policy is to limit or eliminate the use of suspension, expulsion, and other exclusionary measures.

Thank you for allowing our staff to support your child's development. St. Jerome ECC is committed to providing a safe, nurturing environment conducive to learning and growth. We strive to ensure all children are set up for success regardless of their needs or developmental level. We are committed to each child's social-emotional development. Behavior concerns tell us that children need more time, support and practice to develop their social and emotional skills. When serious concerns arise, we will partner with parents and professionals who specialize in supporting children's social and emotional health. On rare occasions, we may work with families to seek the best care for their child if our program no longer meets the needs of an individual child. Our Guidance and Discipline policy complies with federal and state civil rights laws.

The goal of maintaining a positive and safe atmosphere within the classroom is explained to the children. Following the guidelines of our Conscious Discipline curriculum, the students commit to staying safe by following certain expectations. The children assist the teaching staff in developing the following expectations:

1. LISTENING EARS - To be able to listen to directions and prepare him/herself to participate in planned class activities.
2. WALKING FEET - To help children walk indoors and to understand classroom limits while they use inside space.
3. HELPING HANDS - To help children understand how to use his/her body in a positive manner in the classroom.
4. BIG VOICE – To use respectful words for oneself and each other.

#### **DISCIPLINE:**

No child will be subjected to discipline, which is severe, humiliating, frightening, or associated with food, rest, or toileting. Physical punishment such as spanking, shaking, or hitting is prohibited. Staff does not engage in psychological abuse (such as shaming, name-calling, sarcasm, or frightening a child) or coercion (such as rough handling, forcing a child to sit or stay down, or physically forcing a child to perform an action). Childcare personnel never use threats or derogatory remarks and neither threatens to withhold water or food as a form of discipline.

When discipline is warranted, it is never determined on the basis of race, color, disability, age, national or ethnic origin, or gender of the individual.

#### **REASONS FOR EXPULSION, SUSPENSION, OR DISMISSAL**

Every effort will be made to prevent the expulsion or dismissal of children from our program. However, **St. Jerome ECC reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of a child** for reasons, not limited to, but including, the following:

- ❖ Non-payment or excessive late payment of fees/tuition.
- ❖ Failure to adhere to policies and procedures as outlined in our Family Handbook.

- ❖ The parent/guardian exhibits behavior that is detrimental to the health and well-being of the children and staff in a classroom or negatively interferes with the normal functioning of the classroom and/or program. This includes but is not limited to vulgarity, intimidation, harassment, yelling, making accusations, or violation of childcare licensing regulations. All parents should be familiar with and abide by the rules outlined in “A Code of Conduct for Parents, Guardians, Caregivers, Volunteers, and Visitors of Catholic Schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg”.
- ❖ Failure of the child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time; the child may not be ready developmentally at this time.
- ❖ The child has needs that we cannot adequately meet.
- ❖ The child’s behavior threatens the health & safety of him/herself, the other children, or staff.
  - Uncontrollable tantrums/angry outbursts.
  - Bullying or hurting other children (biting, pushing, kicking, punching, cursing, throwing items, etc.)
  - Threatening other children with violent words.
- ❖ Other – at the discretion of the EC Director

### **STEPS TAKEN PRIOR TO EXPULSION and/or EXCLUSION**

Positive Behavior intervention supports include:

- ❖ Screenings
- ❖ Classroom/environment assessments
- ❖ Reaching out to inclusion specialists, specialized care teams, and mental health consultants where available.
- ❖ Proactive Actions that will be taken to prevent expulsion:
  - Staff will try to redirect the child from negative behavior
  - Staff will teach the child appropriate skills to address challenging behaviors
  - Staff will reassess the environment, activities, and supervision
  - Staff will always use positive methods and language while disciplining children.
  - Staff will celebrate appropriate behaviors
  - Staff will always maintain strong connections with the child
  - Staff will consistently apply consequences for rules
  - The EC Director will be consulted and may speak with the child
  - An incident report is written and signed by parents/guardian
  - Family will be notified of disruptive behaviors that might lead to expulsion
  - Conference will be held with family, teachers, and the Director. Strategies and a timeline will be established.
  - Teachers will work with families to develop positive behavior support strategies for continuity between home and school.
  - With parental consent, a specialized care team will be formed to address how to best support the child, through observations, accommodations, and, if necessary, outside agency referrals. (FDLRS, Child Find, Directions for Living, Behavior Support, Developmental Screenings)
  - If inappropriate behaviors persist, the family will be called to pick up their child.
  - If the behavior does not improve upon the child’s return to the center, the child is suspended for a period of up to 5 days with the possibility of termination. During this time, the parents and professionals involved will meet to decide the best path for the student’s success. If consensus cannot be reached, or the family refuses to accept the team’s recommendation, then the student is withdrawn from the program. The EC Director has the right to request termination at any time.

## **COMMUNICATION: FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES**

We ask our families to...

- ❖ Communicate regularly with staff to ensure consistency in guidance between home and school.
- ❖ Partner with us and allow us time to work with all children, including those needing higher levels of support.
- ❖ Understand and acknowledge that children are learning appropriate behavior skills and the ECC strives to serve the individual needs of each child while ensuring the safety of all children.
- ❖ Know that to best serve children, we may need to partner with local professionals to help give a child the best foundation for their social, emotional, and academic success.
- ❖ St. Jerome ECC will assist families in accessing services and alternate placement.

## **TRANSITIONING TO ANOTHER PROVIDER**

On the rare occasion that another setting is warranted, we may work with families to seek the best care for their child if our program can no longer meet their needs.

**SCHEDULE:** Families will receive a copy of your child's daily class schedule from your child's teacher. The daily schedule for each age group includes indoor and outdoor activities.

## **SPECIAL & INDIVIDUAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN:**

**Specific Learning Needs:** Our center attempts to meet the educational needs of all children; however, for children with special needs, our center may only be equipped to provide an appropriate environment for those students with mild learning deficits. We are not equipped to care for children with certain special needs; therefore, any such care is conditional upon the consent of the center Administrator. All children who enroll in St. Jerome ECC are placed on a 30-day probationary period pending evaluation of the child's needs. Parents of children with special needs are required to be forthcoming and share all educational evaluation information (IEPs etc.), disabling conditions, allergies, prior specialized placements/identification, and familial issues, which may require special educational programming. The routine probationary period is still in effect, as this will allow the administration and staff the time to determine the appropriateness of placement in our center. At any time during the school year, the administration reserves the right to deem our setting inappropriate for a student. In all cases, the child must be able to participate and substantially benefit from our program without risk to himself/herself or to the other children. We make every attempt to work with children on an individual basis and it is important for us to know their strengths and weaknesses. If there is anything special, we need to know about your child (i.e. hearing or speech difficulties, changes in family structure, history of behavioral problems), please let your child's teacher know before school starts so she can meet with you. Our staff collaborates with specialists assigned to children to provide support and plan appropriately to meet individual needs. The more we know about your child, the better we will be able to meet those needs. St. Jerome ECC staff encourages and supports families in making the primary decisions about services that their children may need, and we encourage families to advocate for those needed services. If your child has been evaluated/observed/diagnosed by a professional, you must provide documentation for our records.

**Children's Interests & Individual Needs:** In our ongoing effort to respond to the individual interests and needs of the children we serve, our teaching staff:

- Reorganize their environments to help children explore new concepts, sustain their activities, and extend their learning.
- Scaffold the children's learning by modifying the schedule, intentionally arranging the equipment, and making themselves available to children.
- Use the children's interest in, and curiosity about, the world to engage with them.
- Use their knowledge of individual children to modify strategies and materials to enhance learning.
- Use their knowledge of the children's social relationships, interests, ideas, and skills to tailor learning opportunities for groups and individuals.
- Actively seek out children's ideas and discuss how they understand things.

## COMMUNICATION

**CONTACTING ST. JEROME ECC:** Telephone number - 727-596-9491; Fax number (727) 466-4614; Church telephone number: 727-595-4610. St. Jerome ECC's school email address is [preschool@stjeromeecc.org](mailto:preschool@stjeromeecc.org). ECC website: <https://www.stjeromeecc.org/>.

Families may contact the center by one of the above means. We recommend that you add the main phone number to your contact lists so that you recognize an incoming call should you receive one. We are required to list an emergency number on our voicemail message. Parents are asked to only call that number (the Church Office) in a true emergency, otherwise please leave a message on the ECC voicemail and your call will be returned in a timely manner. Notifications and reminders may also be sent to families using email and the *Brightwheel* App. To contact teachers, families should use the school email address above and your message will be forwarded to your child's teacher. Like us on Facebook and Instagram for frequent posts of ECC happenings and photos.

**COMMUNITY RESOURCES:** Additional resources are available from the following agencies:

Diocese of St. Petersburg/Schools/Centers	<a href="http://www.dioceseofstpete.org">www.dioceseofstpete.org</a>
CHILD FIND (Birth to 3) & FDLRS (FL Diag. Learning & Res Serv.)	<a href="http://www.fdlrs.org/child-find.html">www.fdlrs.org/child-find.html</a>
NAEYC (National Association for the Ed. of Young Children)	<a href="http://www.naeyc.org">www.naeyc.org</a>
ELC (Early Learning Coalition) & VPK	<a href="http://www.elcpinellas.net">www.elcpinellas.net</a>
Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital	<a href="http://www.allkids.org">www.allkids.org</a>
Health Department	<a href="http://www.pinellashealth.com/index.asp">www.pinellashealth.com/index.asp</a>
Directions for Living	<a href="http://www.DirectionsForLiving.org">www.DirectionsForLiving.org</a>

**'LANGUAGE' PREFERENCE:** If a language barrier prevents good communication, program staff will make every attempt to seek someone of the same culture who can translate the language and provide insight into cultural differences in order to promote positive dialogue. If you speak another language and would like to volunteer your services as an interpreter to help other families, please give the office a call. 'Family Language' – To assist our staff in communicating with your child, it would be helpful to know the family language, such as – specific names used for family members (nana, abuela, papa); body functions (go potty, tinkle) and body parts. Please communicate these preferences with your child's teacher.

**ECC SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR:** St. Jerome Early Childhood Center operates on a school year calendar, which is similar to Pinellas County Schools and our Diocesan schools. Please be aware that there are differences in our calendars and time options for each age group we serve. All families have received two parts of our school year calendar. One page is specific to the age level for your child and lists all school openings and closures. The other side is our Event Calendar (the same for all age groups) which lists all the special events and happenings planned for the current school year. The Revised 2024-25 calendars are included in your Welcome Packet. Please review both calendar components to stay informed. Our monthly newsletters will also list all the holidays and special activities for the month. If there are any changes in the calendar, you will be notified in advance. School year and monthly calendars can be located in the Document section of Brightwheel.

**COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES:** Throughout the year, parents will receive calendars, flyers, & forms to inform parents of various church, community, and educational activities available for families.

**FACEBOOK & INSTAGRAM:** 'Like' St. Jerome ECC on FB and Instagram to view announcements, photos, & classroom happenings.

**HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION:** St. Jerome ECC realizes the importance of good home/center communication. When you need to communicate with your child's teacher, we ask that you call the office (727-596-9491), and a message will be forwarded to your child's teacher. Additionally, classrooms have established daily and weekly routines, which the teachers share with families at the start of the year. Classroom Communication Folders are sent home daily and are used for school-to-home and home-to-school communications. Families are asked to check students' backpacks daily for any needed 'teacher-to-family communication'. Teachers send a Weekly Note to families each week via the Brightwheel

platform. This contains pertinent information including news about lessons and activities so that you can stay informed regarding what your child is learning at school. All families of students in our EC2 classes receive daily communication for ongoing and timely information regarding their child via Brightwheel. Please do not delay the start of daily class by detaining teachers without appointments. Family members walking into school are asked not to linger in class so the teachers may offer a consistent routine for the children. Parents are ALWAYS welcome to visit our ECC program. We ask that the office be notified if you plan to spend the day with your child. (See sibling policy.)

**MONTHLY CALENDAR:** Monthly calendars are posted in the Document section of Brightwheel each month indicating school happenings, as well as reminders of items due, children and staff birthdates, and more.

**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER:** A monthly newsletter is published in the first week of each month. The newsletter includes information about upcoming events, reminders, fundraisers, special announcements as well as literature for parents. Stay involved by reading the monthly newsletter which is sent to all ECC families via Brightwheel. Paper copies are available upon request.

**PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES:** Parent/teacher communication is very important to a successful experience. Family members are provided information (verbally or in writing) about their child's development and learning at least quarterly. Teachers will meet with parents twice a year for formal conferences. (Dates are noted on the calendars.) Parents will receive ongoing input about your child's progress throughout the year. Additional formal conferences may be scheduled as requested by the teacher or parents. *School will not be in session on the two conference days scheduled.* We ask that you make every effort to attend an in-person conference with your child's teacher on these specially scheduled days.

**NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION/CONFERENCE:** New students and families starting after the beginning of the school year will have an opportunity to meet with their teacher before their child's first day and once again within the first 30 days (unless the regularly scheduled Fall or Spring Conferences falls within that time frame).

**FAMILY (CAREGIVER) MEETINGS:** Some sessions are devoted to family fun and others will be meetings on informational topics. These will be held throughout the school year and announced in our newsletters and will be listed on our website. Your participation will make them a success.

**FAMILY ORIENTATION:** Parent Orientation is required for all ECC families at the start of each school year. Our Family Handbook will be reviewed to ensure a smooth transition for all. A make-up session will be held during the day in early January for those who were unable to attend in August.

**FALL KINDERGARTEN READINESS:** One of our Family/Caregiver meetings will address the topic of Kindergarten Readiness. We will provide information regarding local schools and registration requirements. We will discuss developmental skills for four- and five-year-old students and strategies for a successful transition to kindergarten. Families who miss the Fall Kindergarten Readiness Meeting will be provided with the Kindergarten Readiness packet upon entry. Time sensitive Kindergarten information such as Open Houses and registration deadlines will be distributed throughout the school year as we receive it from local entities.

**PROGRAM ASSESSMENTS AND SURVEYS:** Families and staff will have the opportunity to offer input and to evaluate various aspects of our early childhood program. Each May, families are asked to complete our ECC Annual Program Assessment. The input we receive from this important tool is shared with families and staff and used to make improvements to our program. Additionally, as part of our NAEYC accreditation process, families may receive Family Surveys to complete. Your input is crucial to the betterment of our program as we rely on your honest recommendations, suggestions, and comments so that we can continue to provide a quality early childhood program to our families. The results of these evaluations are made available to our ECC families and staff. Input from these evaluations are used to improve and update our program. Additional surveys and evaluations are distributed to families and staff

throughout the year to seek input on various areas such as, but not limited to, fundraising, technology, calendar and program time offerings, and more.

**REMINDER BOARD:** Our portable signboard will be visible from the car line each day. Please watch for daily updates and reminders as needed.

**TEACHER WEEKLY NOTES:** The classroom teachers will send a weekly note via Brightwheel to families each week with a recap of activities and a look ahead to the various events and topics for the upcoming week. They will also share general information regarding early childhood education and family activities. To contact a teacher, please call the school office or use the school email address – [preschool@stjeromeecc.org](mailto:preschool@stjeromeecc.org) and your child’s teacher will respond to your questions or concerns.

**WEBSITE:** Visit our website: <https://www.stjeromeecc.org/>. The website is maintained and updated with current information & communications including policies, curriculum, forms, resources, photos, and more. Families are encouraged to stay current with ECC happenings by viewing our website. Like us on Facebook for ongoing photos and event posts.

**IMPORTANT:** No communication is to be sent home through the center (cubbies, carline, etc.) without prior approval from the Director. No monies are to be collected from other St. Jerome families unless prior approval is given by the ECC Director. We do not promote individual businesses and will not send home any promotional materials.

### **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

**FAMILY PRESENCE:** Parents are welcome at our center at any time. Parents are encouraged to fully participate in their child’s early childhood experience. You may choose to spend the day with your child or assist regularly in one of our classrooms. Parents are asked to inform your child’s teacher in advance if they plan to spend the day at school. We reserve the right to limit the number of volunteers in a classroom on any given day. St. Jerome has several parent-child activities planned throughout the school year. Additionally, we plan many events where the entire family can be involved, such as picnics, Catholic Schools’ Week Events, and more. Please refer to the calendar and newsletters for further information. Licensing and insurance regulations restrict the availability of our program with regard to siblings or younger children in our classrooms. (Example: If a parent volunteers to assist in the classroom or chooses to spend the day with his/her preschooler, alternative arrangements must be made for siblings/young children). If a special event is occurring, where siblings/young children can be invited, you will be notified in advance.

**ADVISORY COMMISSION:** St. Jerome Early Childhood Center Advisory Commission is a committee whose purpose is to advise and support the ECC Administrator in the key areas of policymaking, fiscal review, and center/community relations. The Commission will also serve as a working commission from which committees function as needed. The Commission’s membership includes the ECC Director, members of the business community, parishioners, and ECC parents.

**COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES:** St. Jerome ECC strives to be actively involved in our church, our community, and our world. It is our hope that by working together with our families, we will instill the value of service and volunteerism in the hearts of our children to make this world a better place for the future of our children. To these means, St. Jerome ECC participates in various service projects. Your participation in these humanitarian efforts is most appreciated and encouraged.

Thanksgiving Food Drive	Fluff Animal Rescue
Lifeline Ministries Food Pantry	Diocesan Service Projects
Monthly Cards for the Parish Homebound	Lenten Service Projects

### **FAMILY INVOLVEMENT FORM:**

Our teachers will share our Family Involvement Form with families during their classroom presentation at Parent Orientation. Families are invited and encouraged to complete this form and share with us a part of your family’s experience. Plan with your child’s teacher a time for you to come into the classroom setting and share about your family’s culture, language, occupation, interests, or experiences. We love to learn from our families, and we know that you bring a wealth of knowledge to our program that will only serve



to enhance our curriculum and learning environment. (Check out the Family Share Days Book in the ECC hallway to view some of our past family experiences.)

### **FAMILY LIBRARIES @ SJECC:**

1. Family Resource Library: Books and other resources on a wide variety of topics are available from our Family Resource Library. Parents are asked to sign out the materials located in the ECC hallway.
2. Lending Library – The school has a set of Take-Home Bags for different learning experiences. Families are asked to check these out and enjoy them together at home.

**FUNDRAISING:** St. Jerome Early Childhood Center sponsors several fund-raising events during the school year. Through our fundraising efforts, we can stabilize tuition costs, retain and justly compensate quality teachers, and provide additional hands-on materials for the children. We ask that ALL families support our center through donations of time and materials. Parents are asked to plan, chair, volunteer, and give input into these various fundraising events throughout the year. Many hands are needed to make the events successful.

**PARTIES:** Any food treats brought to the center for consumption by the children must be store-prepared and in the original store packaging. It is a health department/NAEYC regulation that no homemade food is served at the center (The exception is class cooking projects). Gum, hard candy, or individual treat bags for children are not allowed.

**1. HOLIDAYS:** Teachers will share with families how classes will celebrate the following holidays in their classrooms – Halloween and Valentine’s Day. Parent volunteers can assist with the preparations under the teacher’s direction. No solicitation items are permitted to be included in “treats” provided by families. (School-wide, family events are planned for Thanksgiving & Christmas and volunteers will be sought through school-wide communications.)

**2. BIRTHDAYS:** Families are asked to celebrate their child’s birthday outside of school and **not bring treats or other items to school on birthdays**. Classroom teachers will recognize each child on his or her birthday, acknowledging the importance of the day. If families are having a birthday party outside of school and wish to invite classmates, parents may send birthday party invitations home through the classroom provided that ALL children in your child’s class are invited. Please do not write names on the invitations, just provide the number needed for the class. Invitations are to be given to the classroom teacher for distribution. Thank you notes to one another for birthday gifts, or birthday gifts themselves, are not to be distributed at school. Please use The School Directory to contact families.

**VOLUNTEERS:** Volunteers help enhance our program. Many parents and grandparents have special talents and gifts to share with their children. We especially encourage families to share cultural customs and family traditions with our classes. Our VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK is posted on our ECC website and serves to orient volunteers before working directly with children. Your signature on our ‘Handbook Agreement Form’ indicates an understanding of various aspects of our program detailed in the volunteer handbook that are required prior to assisting in the classroom setting.

### **FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

**APPLICATION/SUPPLY FEE:** A non-refundable, registration/supply fee of \$200 is due for each child when applying for enrollment. This fee covers the application process, school supplies for the current school year, and student accident insurance. VPK students are not required to pay the above registration fee. Students enrolled in state-funded VPK must be present on the first day of school in order to meet the requirements of participation in the program.

**TUITION:** Families will find the complete fee schedule on our website. Tuition is computed yearly. Tuition payment options are annually or in ten (10) equal installments. Tuition installments are due on the first of each month, beginning in August, and concluding with the final payment due May 1<sup>st</sup>. Annual tuition payments are due August 1. No adjustments are made for personal vacations or absences. A late fee of \$25.00 will be added if the tuition is not received by the tenth of each month. (This applies at all times – i.e., if your child attends only on T/TH, your payment is still due by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month.) We

are willing to consider an alternate payment schedule for those families experiencing financial difficulties or those who need an alternate 'due date'. Please see the EC Director to discuss the tuition fee schedule. Tuition can be paid by card (service fee added), ACH, cash, or check made out to ST. JEROME EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER. Parents should bring payments of any kind directly to the center office or mail to: St. Jerome ECC, Attn: Holly Andrade, 10895 Hamlin Blvd., Largo, FL 33774. Card payments can be made in person, directly through the Brightwheel app, or by calling the office. Please do NOT deliver a payment through the drop-off/pick-up line. We do not want your payment to be misplaced during this very busy time. You may bring payments to the front office or use the drop box located to the left of the center's front door to leave payments or paperwork. Parents are asked not to send payments to the center in your child's backpack. A fee of \$25.00 will be assessed for any returned checks. Cash payments must be for the exact amount due. Tuition is not charged for the 540 hour, VPK program. Families in the VPK program are encouraged to participate in the Four-Year-Old Pledge Drive to help offset the cost of our accredited program as the state's per-child fees for VPK cover approximately 60% of the actual per-child cost. These families are asked to contribute to our center in other ways such as volunteering and fundraising. Families enrolling in our EC2 and EC3 programs after the start of the school year and joining mid-month will be charged a prorated tuition for that month.

**EXTENDED DAY FEES:** For those families planning to use Extended Day hours, please access the Extended Day Registration form in the document section of Brightwheel or request one from the ECC office. Fees for Extended Day are outlined on the Extended Day Program form and offer options of 'Routine' or 'As Needed' extended day.

**'Routine Schedule'** – Families who choose the Routine Daily Schedule will pay the same flat fee each month based on the days/hours scheduled on your Extended Day Form. Adjustments will not be made for absences. Payments are paid in ten equal monthly payments, with monthly payments due on the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month, August-May.

**'As Needed'** - AM care is available from 8:00 am – 9:00 am. Children arriving at school before 9:00 will be charged the minimum hourly fee of \$12.00 for before care. PM care "Lunch Bunch" is from 12:00 – 3:00 pm. A flat \$36.00 fee is charged for this program **regardless of the child's pick-up time**. The Extended Day fees will be billed separately from the monthly tuition payments. During the first week of each month, families will receive an invoice via Brightwheel of your charges for the prior month's Extended Day. Extended Day payments are due the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month and are considered late after the 20<sup>th</sup>. **A late fee (\$25) will be applied if payment is made after the 20<sup>th</sup>.** **Parents are asked to pay Extended Day fees separately from tuition payments.** Extended Day fees apply to all participating students including those enrolled in the four-year old VPK program.

### **LATE PICK-UP FEES**

The car line moves quickly. Please ensure punctuality as it concludes ten minutes after the hour. A \$10 Late Pick-Up Fee will apply thereafter. For pick-ups after 12:15 pm (3:15 pm for extended care), an additional fee of \$5 per minute will be charged. Families must sign a Late Pick-Up Slip upon arrival, with payment due the following day.

\*Please ensure a punctual arrival at the center to promptly pick up your child. Consistency in timing helps your child feel secure and assists the school in managing costs, which could impact tuition rates. In case of emergencies causing delays, please call the office at 727-596-9491 so we can reassure your child. Late pick-up fees will apply to all students, including those in the four-year-old VPK program. \*

### **WITHDRAWAL POLICY**

Tuition fees are non-refundable if a family voluntarily withdraws their child. However, if a family is asked to leave the program, future tuition payments will not be required. If you need to withdraw your child during the school year, please contact the ECC Director to discuss your plans. We are committed to supporting families and can discuss alternate payment schedules if financial circumstances change during the school year to help maintain enrollment. A two-week written notice is requested for any child withdrawal.

## HEALTH & SAFETY

**ABSENCES / SICK CHILD POLICY:** Parents are required by licensing to notify the school of any absence prior to your child's school start time. Notification can be made by phone, and/or voicemail, email (to [preschool@stjeromeecc.org](mailto:preschool@stjeromeecc.org)), parent note before absence, a message in Brightwheel, or parent-to-staff conversation. Parents who do not contact the ECC will be called on the morning of your child's absence. If your child will be out for a period of time, please inform the office in advance. Parents are asked not to send children to school with signs of illness. Children testing positive for COVID-19 must follow the current protocol requirements. Please contact the school office to find out what they are at the time of your child's illness. The school will have a current Student Decision Tree which is issued by the Diocese of St. Petersburg and based on recommendations of the CDC and other governing agencies. Please have an alternative care plan when your child is sick, as ill children cannot attend school. Children with any of the following symptoms are required to be kept at home until they have been symptom-free for a forty-eight-hour period without medication. Symptoms to watch for include (but are not limited to) severe coughing, causing the child to become red or blue in the face or make a whooping sound; difficult or rapid breathing; stiff neck; diarrhea (more than one abnormally loose stool within 24 hours); any temperature above normal or higher; pink eye; exposed, open skin lesions; unusually dark urine and/or gray or white stool; yellowish skin or eyes; vomiting or any other unusual sign or symptom of illness. Parents will be called to pick up their children if they are, or become, ill. In the event you are called to come pick up an ill child, you must pick your child up within 30 minutes. While waiting to go home, an ill child will be supervised in the ECC office, keeping them comfortable and away from other children. If your child has (or has been exposed to) a contagious disease, please inform the ECC office immediately and bring a doctor's note upon returning to the center. Families will be notified about any unusual level or type of communicable disease to which your child has been exposed. The 4-year-old VPK children have specific attendance requirements. Please refer to the attendance policy received earlier and posted on our ECC website. All Families: "The Flu", A Guide for Parents form is posted on our website and will be given to you in September. It must be read by all families and the parent receipt portion must be submitted to the ECC office. Tuition will not be pro-rated for any absences.

If an immunization record indicates that the child's shot record has expired, parents must provide an updated form with an acceptable expiration date before the child can return to the program. Some children in care may be under-immunized (having a delayed schedule to receive but not currently having the recommended number or types of vaccines for his or her age according to the current national and local immunization schedules). If an under-immunized child has been exposed to a vaccine-preventable disease, the parents will be notified and asked to keep the child home until the threat of contracting the disease has passed. **Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg do not recognize religious or conscience objections to the immunization requirement.** However, properly documented medical exemptions will be considered on a case-by-case basis. All medical exemption forms are sent to the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for approval prior to the student's acceptance into the Catholic school.

**ACCIDENT / INCIDENT REPORTS:** In the event of an accident or unusual incident, parents will receive, in written form, an accounting of the event. The Pinellas County License Board requires parent (or authorized adult) signatures and the time signed on the accident/incident report. If your child happens to be injured by another child, we ask you to please respect the child's privacy by not asking us to reveal the name of the child. Not only is it confidential information per licensing, it puts our staff in an awkward situation and could cause a confrontation between our families. We will handle any behavior problems professionally and appropriately.

**CLOTHING / APPROPRIATE DRESS:** All children should wear comfortable, washable clothing that allows for easy bathroom use and that "could" get messy. The children will be actively involved in painting and other developmentally appropriate activities. All children are asked to have a spare set of labeled clothing (including underwear and socks). In case of a 'potty accident,' the teachers will clean the child immediately and change his/her clothing. In most cases, the children will be guided in their self-help skills by the teacher. Our regulations require that the handling of clothing soiled with urine and feces be minimized; in such a case, soiled clothing will be placed in a plastic bag and sent home to be laundered.

Parents will receive a note/sticker on the bag with information regarding the incident. Sneakers or rubber-soled shoes with socks must be worn for playground activities. Sandals, boots, crocs, or dress shoes are not to be worn to school. This is a safety issue. Children will not be permitted to engage on our climbing equipment with inappropriate shoes. Long dresses are not permitted as they are a safety concern on the playground equipment. Shaded areas are available on our playground, but families are asked to apply sunscreen and/or insect repellent at home as appropriate for your child. A sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection of SPF 15 or higher is recommended. All personal items: sweaters, pillows, lunch boxes, and backpacks must be labeled with your child's name. Jewelry and excessive headwear are safety hazards. (See items from home for additional items to limit at school).

**EMERGENCY NOTIFICATION & EVACUATION PLAN:** This emergency evacuation plan is designed as a preventative and informative statement to all concerned: parish staff, parents, school personnel, and the child license board. PCLB has a copy of our center's 'Plan for Evacuation and Care of Children during Emergencies and Disasters' (C-5201).

In the event of a school-wide emergency, St. Jerome ECC will contact all parents and initiate a controlled dismissal procedure. In the event a disaster such as a hurricane, tornado, or other catastrophe strikes our building, the ECC staff will accompany the children to the Parish Center building, the Ed Kilroy Outreach Building, or the main church depending on which area has been hit. Parents coming to the church grounds in the event of an emergency will wait for directions from emergency personnel so as not to interfere with emergency vehicles, which might be needed. Unless otherwise notified, St. Jerome ECC will follow the Diocese of St. Petersburg procedures regarding school closures in the event of severe weather. School Emergency Plans are in place and all ECC staff are aware of procedures to follow in the case of various types of emergencies. In case of an emergency affecting our local area, please call the ECC office or check the Diocese of St. Petersburg website. You can also listen to the local radio and television stations regarding the closing or lockdown of schools/centers. It is imperative that families keep their contact information current with the center as changes occur throughout the year.

**EMERGENCY DRILLS (FIRE/LOCKDOWN/TORNADO):** Emergency drills are held once a month. Teachers will practice lockdown procedures with their classes. A school lockdown practice will be held within the first month of school. Tornado drills are practiced within each child's classroom throughout the year. Each class' safe space during a tornado watch is with their teacher in their classroom bathrooms. All drills are conducted in a manner that respects the social-emotional needs of our students.

**HAND WASHING:** All children, staff, and volunteers in the classrooms are required to wash their hands upon arrival at school. Children, staff, and parent volunteers will also be required to follow strict hand-washing procedures throughout the day. (Following CDC & NAEYC guidelines for handwashing.)

We ask that parents monitor and assist children at home with the proper hand-washing techniques. Both children and adults (children, staff, volunteers, and visitors to school) are to follow the following hand-washing schedule:

- Upon arrival for the day.
- After diapering or using the toilet
- After handling body fluids i.e., blowing or wiping a nose, coughing on a hand, or touching any mucus, blood, or vomit.
- Before meals and snacks, before preparing or serving food, or after handling any raw food that requires cooking i.e., meat, eggs, poultry.
- After playing in water that is shared by two or more people.
- After handling pets or pet food and other animals or any materials such as sand, dirt, or surfaces that might be contaminated by contact with animals.
- When moving from one group or another that involves contact with toddlers/twos.

Adults also wash their hands:

- Before and after feeding a child.
- Before and after administering medication and/or caring for someone who is sick.
- After assisting a child with toileting

- After handling garbage or cleaning.

Proper hand-washing procedures are followed by adults and children and include:

- Using liquid soap and running water
- Rubbing hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds, including back of hands, wrists, between fingers, under and around any jewelry, and under fingernails, rinsing well, drying hands with a paper towel (a single paper towel or a dryer) and avoiding touching the faucet with just-washed hands (e.g., by using a paper towel to turn off water).

**INCLEMENT WEATHER:** Unless otherwise notified, St. Jerome ECC will follow the Diocese of St. Petersburg's procedures regarding school closings in the event of severe weather. Go to their website for up-to-date information <https://www.dosp.org/>.

**MANDATED REPORTERS:** Under the Child Protective Services Act, mandated reporters are required to report any **suspicion** of abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities. The employees of St. Jerome ECC are considered mandated reporters, under this law. The employees of St. Jerome ECC are not required to discuss their suspicions with parents prior to reporting the matter to the appropriate authorities, nor are they required to investigate the cause of any suspicious marks, behavior, or condition prior to making a report. Under the Act, mandated reporters can be held criminally responsible if they fail to report suspected abuse or neglect. We at St. Jerome ECC take this responsibility very seriously and will make all warranted reports to the appropriate authorities. The Child Protective Services Act is designed to protect the welfare and best interest of all children. As mandated reporters, the staff of St. Jerome ECC can not be held liable for reports made to Child Protective Services which are determined to be unfounded, provided the report was made in "good faith."

Schools/centers will reasonably cooperate with regard to any investigation by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) pertaining to allegations of child abuse. Since the school/center is on private property, DCF will be precluded from reasonable access to children at school unless consent of a parent or guardian is obtained. Absent such consent, the school/center will cooperate in allowing DCF to have access to children if DCF obtains, according to law, an appropriate court order or other legal authority, such as the presence of a police officer or deputy sheriff.

**MEDICATIONS:** Prior to accepting any medications (prescription or over the counter) for your child, the following two forms must be completed and on file in our ECC office: 1) Medication Plan – completed by your child's doctor and 2) Medication Record – Completed and signed by parents for each medication to be administered. Specific ECC personnel have been trained in medication administration and those staff members will administer medication as outlined on the Medication Record, signed by parents. Parents will instruct staff on how to administer a medication specific to their child. St. Jerome Early Childhood Center will administer **ONLY** those medications: 1) prescribed by a physician that is in the original pharmacy container; 2) prescribed specifically for that child (first and last name on prescription); **and** 3) that are within the expiration date noted on the medication. All medications must include how and when to administer and how to store the medication. Directions cannot state "as needed" but rather symptoms must be noted as when to administer medication. All medications will be stored in the ECC classrooms. All required medications are stored in a safe manner inaccessible to children. No undocumented medications will be given to your child. Preventative, over-the-counter medicines such as diaper creams require a Medication Record to be completed and signed by the parent with instructions as to how to administer them. Sunscreen and insect repellent will not be applied at school and should be applied at home before coming to school if and when applicable. A sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection of SPF 15 or higher is recommended. If/when public health authorities recommend the use of insect repellent due to the high risk of insect-borne disease, only repellents containing DEET are to be supplied by parents for their children and will be administered only once per day with written parental permission. For children with health needs, parents will authorize St. Jerome ECC to share that information with those on staff who need this access to best meet the child's needs.

**NUTRITION/FOOD SAFETY:** St. Jerome ECC is required to follow guidelines set forth by the USDA, the Health Department, Pinellas County License Board, and NAEYC (accreditation) with regard to nutrition and food safety. These guidelines are required for snacks and lunches being provided by families for their child/ren while attending St. Jerome ECC. Two food groups must be part of the snack/meal provided, with portions and choices appropriate for your child's age. Please refer to the Nutritional Packet included in your Welcome Packet (Parent Orientation) and posted on our ECC website. Families will receive a 'gentle reminder' note if their child's snack is missing or incomplete. St. Jerome ECC will supplement your child's snack on those occasions to ensure the nutritional requirements are being met. There will be a monetary fee for families who frequently need the center to provide a supplement to their child's snack. For more nutrition information please visit [www.myplate.gov](http://www.myplate.gov).

**PEANUT AND NUT SENSITIVITY:** Due to the extreme nature of allergic reactions to peanuts, nuts, and products containing nuts in some children, St. Jerome ECC does not allow nuts, and/or foods containing nut products on St. Jerome ECC's campus or at school-sponsored events. This includes products with a label stating, "may contain traces of nuts". Labels stating "processed in a facility with nuts" are acceptable unless a severe allergy is present in the classroom. Additional details can be found in our Nutritional Packet (in your Welcome Packet and on our ECC website.) Families will be notified if/when revisions to this policy are needed.

**SNACKS:** Families will provide their child's daily snack in labeled bags. Re-usable containers may be used when all parts and ice packs must be labeled with your child's full name. If labeling is not done at home, it will be done by our staff members. Containers will be returned daily for cleaning. (Lunch boxes are not to be used for daily snacks.) Families are asked to follow the guidelines noted above and noted in our nutritional resources available to families.

**LUNCH:** Those children attending the afternoon extended day program must bring a nutritious lunch and drink. We are not able to refrigerate or heat lunch items. Fast food lunches, junk food of any kind, candy, gummies, gum, and carbonated drinks will not be accepted and will be sent home. All lunch boxes and inside containers (all parts and ice packs) must be labeled with the child's full name.

### **FOOD SAFETY:**

1. **Treats:** Any food treats brought to the center, to share with a class, must be store-prepared and in the original packaging. It is a health department/NAEYC regulation that no homemade food is served at the center (The exception is class cooking projects). We ask that parents do not send gum or hard candy as treats. Parents are asked not to send in individual treat bags for children.

2. **Choking Hazards:** Children younger than four years of age should **NOT** be served the following foods: **hot dogs (whole or sliced into rounds), whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, raw peas, hard pretzels, raw carrots or meat larger than can be swallowed whole. We recommend cutting all food into bite-size pieces before sending it to school as teachers do have the time to do so.**

3. **Chilled foods:** Some foods brought from home for lunch and snacks need to stay cold with non-toxic ice packs, per licensing regulations. Some foods that need to stay cold include meat and poultry sandwiches or salads; tuna and egg salads; milk, cheese, or yogurt; opened cans of fruit or pudding; and peeled or cut fruits and vegetables.

4. **Allergies:** For children with specific food allergies (documented on your medical/ registration forms), parents may provide extra snacks to be kept at school to use as needed for 'special occasions'.

5. **Food Experiences at School:** Classroom cooking experiences will occur periodically throughout the school year. All families will indicate on their Child Enrollment Record if their child has any food allergies and what foods their child may not eat or handle while at school. A Food Experience form will also be provided so you can indicate your child's needs.

6. **Sharing of Food:** The children will be taught not to share their food with others at school for safety reasons, such as allergies.

7. **Food Handling:** All persons (staff and volunteers) involved with food preparation and service (snacks and/or cooking activities) must wear a proper head covering such as a hairnet or hat. To prevent contact with foods, you must use clean, disposable gloves, utensils, or similar items in the food preparation area.



**PETS:** (Class pets or pets visiting the ECC): Our accreditation criterion and licensing have strict guidelines regarding pets and/or animals, that may come in contact with children and staff members. Animals must be in good health and must have documentation from a veterinarian or an animal shelter that shows that the animal is fully immunized and that the animal is suitable for contact with children. No poisonous or aggressive animals may be on the premises. Parents are asked to contact the ECC office before bringing any animals into the school environment, as certain categories of animals are not allowed in our school setting.

**SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN:**

As mandated by the USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), for the protection of young children, all schools and centers in the Diocese of St. Petersburg participate in the Safe Environment Program. The diocesan policy is posted on our website. The following practices are in place at St. Jerome ECC as part of the Safe Environment Program:

- ◆ All persons with direct supervision of children (all employees, including substitute staff) have completed the diocesan-mandated Safe Environments training program, which includes initial and ongoing background screenings.
- ◆ ECC parents will be informed of the Safe Environments program (Overview at Parent Orientation).
- ◆ Our ECC program weaves the various age/level-appropriate Safe Environment Curriculum Standards into our program's daily classroom life through the use of our religion program, the Peacemaker Program (4-year-olds), and additional stories, games, songs, & learning experiences. These life skills will serve to empower the children to protect themselves and to respect others and their world. A copy of our Safe Environment Curriculum is posted on our website.
- ◆ Volunteers are encouraged to complete a background screening and the Safe Environment Training Course on CMG. Volunteers at St. Jerome ECC are never in a supervisory role with children, per our licensing and accreditation standards. Although we appreciate the extra help, our licensing restrictions limit people to 10 volunteer hours per month.
- ◆ When an employee is accused of child abuse or neglect, whether the abuse or neglect is reported to have occurred at the facility or not, they will be placed on investigatory suspension pending the outcome of the Child Protective Services investigation as well as any criminal charges filed against the employee.

**SECURITY ACCESS:** Our front door and outer classroom doors remained locked. The buzzer or doorbell will allow our ECC staff to provide access to persons visiting our center. All persons (parents, volunteers, and other visitors) entering the ECC area must sign in and out at the ECC Office and receive a badge to wear while on campus.

**SMOKE-FREE FACILITY:** St. Jerome ECC indoor and outdoor areas are always entirely smoke-free, including the use of e-cigarettes or 'vaping'. No smoking is permitted in the presence of children. Families and visitors are asked not to smoke on the property. Our smoke-free zone includes all areas in front of the Education Center as well as the ECC playground.

**SUPERVISION:** St. Jerome ECC teaching staff supervises all children primarily by sight, with short intervals by sound (bathrooms, tents, playhouses, etc.). Two-year-olds are always supervised by sight and sound.

**TRANSPORTATION:** No children are transported during the program day.

**WEAPONS AND FIREARMS:** No firearms or weapons as defined in Chapter 790.001, F.S., shall be allowed within any building or conveyance, or upon any person located on the premises, excluding federal, state, or local Law Enforcement Officers. Additionally, toys, games, or pictures depicting weapons or violence are strictly prohibited.

## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

**ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL:** The following procedures have been established for the safety of you and your children. All parents/drivers are asked to read and follow the policies outlined below. All children attending our program are to enter and exit the building through a car line formed on the north side of the Early Childhood Center. Drivers are to form a line and remain in their cars. The cars must keep moving for a safe and timely system. The car line begins at the white line on the pavement near the first overhang as you approach the EC entrance, so as not to block the entrance to the small parking lot just east of the car line. A route has been established for the drop-off/pick-up times for the Early Childhood Center. All parents/drivers are asked to be aware of this system that has been established for the safety of all St. Jerome families, visitors, and parishioners. All parents/drivers are reminded to observe the posted 15 MPH Speed Limit. Also, for the safety of all concerned cell phone use is not permitted during the carline. Your cooperation is necessary and greatly appreciated. (A map indicating the car line route from Hamlin Blvd. to ECC will be distributed in your Welcome Packets and are on the back of each car sign). **Please share this with family and friends who may be picking up your child.**

We strongly recommend that parents do not sit in or leave their vehicles idling in our parking areas, except if the vehicles need to idle in extreme heat to maintain interior or engine temperatures.

Parents are also asked to turn cell phones off when entering the Early Childhood Center, as a courtesy to others and to allow for a positive reuniting of parents and children at the end of your child's day with us.

**ARRIVAL:** Children will be escorted from their cars by staff members. No children should be brought into the building prior to the car line process. (Exception: AM Extended Day)

**Children need to remain seated and buckled until your car comes to a complete stop where your child will be exiting your vehicle. Children should not be allowed to sit in the driver's seat, lean out the window, or stand up in the sunroof area while in the carline.**

**DISMISSAL:** Children will be dismissed from the morning session and extended day - following the same procedure as for arrival. Teachers will assist children in getting into their cars; however, **parents must buckle their children into their car seats.** Drivers must have the required child restraints in place and must secure their children as required by law. This includes golf carts.

Parents are to have the 8 X 11 car sign in their front windshield which has the child's name boldly printed in black. Two signs are provided in the Welcome Packet. Please request a new sign if needed.

All center staff (office staff and teachers) will be involved in the arrival, when families are greeted and directed to their classrooms, and the dismissal system when children are reunited with their families to facilitate family interaction. During these times, staff will not be available to meet with individual parents for extended discussions. If you have business or a concern to discuss, please follow the arrival/dismissal procedures outlined, then park your car and enter the center or contact the ECC office to make an appointment to conference with the teaching staff. When parents need to park and enter the center, please park in our parking lot. When entering the building, please use the glass doors furthest to the east end of the building. **IMPORTANT:** At no time should cars be parked in front of the building entrances or the fire lane. Do not allow an unescorted child to leave your car to enter the building.

**LATE ARRIVALS OR EARLY RELEASES:** It is our hope, and what is in the best interest of your child, that he/she arrives on time and stays for the full morning each day. In doing so, you will provide a consistent smooth transition to and from home and school. In those rare exceptions when you might arrive late or leave early, the following policies are in place. Diocesan policy requires parents to sign children in/out in the event that they are tardy or being dismissed early. Parents must come to the office and complete the daily tardy/early dismissal log. This procedure is for the safety and protection of all the children. Children are considered tardy after the car line is complete. Early dismissal refers to any child being removed from a class prior to the morning dismissal carline. When picking up your child early, parents need to come to the ECC office and sign out their child. Early dismissals should be for appointments, illnesses, or emergencies. Parents with children in the extended day program sign their



child out at the front office if they are picking their child up at times other than the typical carline. Children coming or going at regularly scheduled times do not need to be signed in/out by parents.

PLEASE BE SURE THAT ALL PERSONS DROPPING OFF OR PICKING UP YOUR CHILD HAVE READ THESE PROCEDURES! (Grandparents, babysitters, carpool drivers, etc.)

**CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY:** Within St. Jerome ECC, confidential & sensitive information will only be shared with employees of the center who have a ‘need to know’ to most appropriately and safely care for your child. Confidential information about staff, other parents, and/or children will not be shared with parents as St. Jerome ECC strives to protect everyone’s right to privacy. Outside of St. Jerome ECC, confidential and sensitive information about a child will only be shared when the parent of the child has given express written consent, except when otherwise provided by the law. Parents will complete a ‘Consent to Release Confidential Information Form’ indicating what information is to be shared outside of SJECC, the persons with whom the information is to be shared, & the reason for sharing the information. Additionally, you may observe children who are disabled or who may exhibit behaviors that may appear inappropriate (i.e. biting, hitting, and spitting). Our Confidentiality Policy protects every child’s privacy. Staff members are prohibited from discussing anything about another child with you. The content of each child’s health and safety file is confidential but is immediately available upon request to: Administrators and teaching staff who have consent from a parent or legal guardian to access the records; the child’s parents or legal guardians; and regulatory authorities.

**COURT ORDERS AFFECTING CHILDREN:** In cases where an enrolled child is the subject of a court order (i.e. Custody Order, Parenting Plan, Restraining Order, or Protection from Abuse Order) St. Jerome ECC must be provided with a **Certified Copy** of the most recent order and all amendments thereto. The orders of the court will be strictly followed unless the custodial parent(s) requests a more liberal variation of the order in writing. In the case where both parents are afforded shared/joint custody by order of the court, both parents must sign the request for a more liberal interpretation of the order. Court orders will be followed until *written documentation* regarding changes has been received by our center.

**GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE:** Family-centered communication and involvement are very important at St. Jerome Early Childhood Center. Please feel free to contact the center office to discuss any concerns or ideas that you may have. The policy of this center encourages parents to relay their concerns to the person directly involved, whether that is a teacher, another parent, etc. If concern continues to persist after that approach has been exhausted, the Director will be more than happy to meet with you to discuss your situation or your child’s welfare, as we seek to provide a supportive and community-building environment here at St. Jerome ECC.

**HARASSMENT POLICY:** St. Jerome Early Childhood Center strives to establish a Christian, professional, and supportive educational community for administrators, faculty and staff, parents, and students. The Diocese of St. Petersburg has adopted and promulgated a harassment policy for its schools that addresses behaviors that interfere with fulfilling the school’s mission. We, at St. Jerome ECC, condemn any form of harassment and will address all credible allegations per the diocesan policy. Concerns should be reported directly to the center Director. All credible allegations will be addressed according to the Diocesan policy.

**ITEMS FROM HOME:** Please do not allow your child to bring items into the center unless requested by the teacher. Parents will be asked to leave items such as, but not limited to, toys, cell phones, jewelry, money, etc. in the car. Check your child’s bag daily to review (and remove) items coming home from school and to remove items that should not be coming to school. Please do not attach any items to your child’s backpack – dangling attachments – toys, stuffed animals, antibacterial soap, hand sanitizer, Chapstick, etc.

**PERSONAL BELONGINGS:** The following items are required on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of class:

1. A complete set of LABELED clothes (including underwear & socks) in a zip-lock baggie. (To be restocked as needed/soiled).

2. A labeled bookbag or backpack (to fit the child's cubby). If/when purchasing a bag, please choose one that allows room for the communication folder, etc. rather than one too tiny for items coming home. Totes available for purchase that can be used in place of a backpack for \$10.00.
3. PM Extended Day users: A labeled lunch box (with cool-pack, as appropriate). \*All items and containers must be labeled with the child's full name. Please also place the ice pack in a labeled bag. Students may bring a small blanket, a small pillow, and a small **stuffed** animal. These items will remain at school until your child's last scheduled day in Extended Care for that week. The items will then be returned home on the last day to be laundered. Please select items that can stay at school. Students should not be carrying stuffed animals back and forth each day for a variety of reasons.
4. Families are asked to use a bag labeled with your child's name to bring your child's snack (with cool-pack, as appropriate) to school each day in his/her backpack.
5. Two-year-olds - Additional items will be requested by your child's classroom teacher.

**PARENT CODE OF CONDUCT:** The Diocese of St. Petersburg's Parent Code of Conduct for Schools & Centers is included as part of this Family Handbook.

**PARENT'S RIGHT TO IMMEDIATE ACCESS:** Parents of a child in our care are entitled to immediate access, without prior notice, to their child whenever they are in care at St. Jerome ECC as provided by law. In cases where the child is the subject of a court order (e.g., Custody Order, Parenting Plan, Restraining Order, or Protection from Abuse Order) St. Jerome ECC must be provided with a **Certified Copy** of the most recent order and all amendments thereto. The orders of the court will be strictly followed unless the custodial parent(s) requests a more liberal variation of the order in writing. In the case where both parents are afforded shared/joint custody by order of the court, both parents must sign the request for a more liberal interpretation of the order. In the absence of a court order on file with St. Jerome ECC, **both** parents shall be afforded equal access to their child as stipulated by law. St. Jerome ECC cannot, without a court order, limit the access of one parent by request of the other parent, regardless of the reason. St. Jerome ECC staff will contact the local police should a conflict arise. **PERSONS APPEARING TO BE IMPAIRED BY DRUGS/ALCOHOL AT PICK-UP:** The staff of St Jerome Early Childhood Center will contact local police and/or the other custodial parent should a parent appear to the staff of St Jerome Early Childhood Center to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. The parent's right to immediate access does not permit the agency to deny a custodial parent access to their child even if the parent is or appears to be impaired. However, St Jerome Early Childhood Center staff will delay the impaired parent as long as possible, while contacting the other parent, the local police, and Child Protective Services.

**PERSONS PERMITTED TO REMOVE CHILD:** Children will be released only to the adults listed on the 'Permit to Remove' Form submitted to the ECC office each year. Staff are required to identify authorized pick-up individuals with a photo identification until known to them. A copy of the ID will be made while the driver pulls forward and parks. Parents should list their names first, followed by all family, friends, and babysitters who will be allowed to remove your child from the school. Parents/guardians may send in **written communication** – note or email permitting someone not currently listed on your Permit to Remove form to pick up your child for the first time. The person must then be added to the Permit to Remove form to continue picking your child up from school. Teachers and staff will not release your child to another adult unless they have your written permission. This applies to other St. Jerome's parents picking up your child, as well as relatives, etc. Written notification is required for changing the "permitted to remove" form. (Example: Calling the office to let us know someone not authorized to pick up your child will be coming to school that day to pick up your child, will not suffice.) Please notify the office when a change is being made in dropping off or picking up your child.

**SIBLINGS / YOUNGER CHILDREN:** In our efforts to provide an appropriate and safe environment for the children enrolled in our program, **St. Jerome ECC cannot permit siblings and/or other children in our classrooms during class time.** For class parties and other events that are held in your child's classroom, parents who plan to attend **must make other arrangements for younger children.** This

includes, but is not limited to parties, volunteering in the classroom, Mother's Day teas, etc. For school events that are not held in the classrooms (ex. Thanksgiving Feasts, Christmas Sing-along, Catholic Schools' Week Events, picnics) siblings are more than welcome to participate.

**SOCIAL MEDIA:** St. Jerome ECC will post photos related to school and school-sponsored events on our ECC website and other social media based on a family's consent or objection as noted on the signed Promotional Media Release Form. St. Jerome ECC allows families to take photos at school-sponsored events for their own use. St. Jerome ECC families and employees are strictly prohibited from including any information and/or photographs related to St. Jerome ECC, our staff, or the children and families served by St. Jerome ECC on any internet website and/or blog, including but not limited to, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat or Facebook. **St. Jerome ECC families may not "Friend" St. Jerome ECC employees (and vice versa) while your children are enrolled in our program.**

**STAFF EMPLOYMENT OR USE OF ECC STAFF:** Parents are prohibited from soliciting any ECC staff member for the purpose of employment. Employment refers to any relationship outside of the ECC's services, that involves an employee of St. Jerome ECC to interact with a current family of St. Jerome ECC. Such relationships include but are not limited to, babysitting, house-sitting, mother's helper, nanny services, and carpooling regardless of whether or not those services are voluntary or paid. St. Jerome ECC employees may not transport children who are enrolled in our center.

### **SCHOOL SUPPORT**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER FOUNDATION:** The St. Jerome Early Childhood Foundation, recently named The Monsignor Brendan Muldoon Endowment, was established in 1993. You, your family, or your business may participate in its growth and development. The future of Catholic education at St. Jerome Early Childhood Center depends on the support and generosity of families and businesses who seek a Catholic environment for the formative years of their child's development. Donations can be made on the Parish website or by cash/check, noting Msgr. Muldoon ECC Endowment and brought to the church or ECC office.

**FAMILY DONATIONS:** We appreciate the assistance of all families in providing some general items for our classrooms. Please see the current list in your Welcome Packet and the document section of Brightwheel. \*Please bring these items to Parent Orientation Night or during the first week of school. Your donations will be collected & shared with all our classes. All supplies are most gratefully appreciated.

**FOUR-YEAR-OLD PLEDGE DRIVE:** St. Jerome ECC has been a VPK provider since its inception in 2005. While the VPK program is offered at no cost to our four-year-old families, the state's contribution per child is approximately half of the actual cost of a quality program. Working together, with each family's support, we can offset this economic shortfall in order to continue to offer the *BEST* early childhood program for our children and families. St. Jerome ECC plans to remain a nationally accredited early childhood program, with quality, credentialed, faith-filled educators as the hallmark of our program. Four-year-old families received a pledge letter and pledge card to consider their family's contribution. We have suggested various pledge levels and payment options for your prayerful consideration. This pledge request is not meant as a mandatory obligation, but rather a hopeful invitation. A very heartfelt thank you to those families who have already pledged their support for the upcoming school year. If pledge levels noted are not possible, please consider an amount of your choosing.

**MONTHLY SCHOLASTIC BOOK CLUBS:** Order forms are sent home monthly to parents (with a due date). Orders may be placed directly online. Parents are offered an opportunity to purchase quality literature for their children while allowing St. Jerome to expand its resources through a bonus point system. Please feel free to share order forms with friends and neighbors.

**PLAYGROUND IMPROVEMENT DAYS:** Twice each school year, we will schedule a playground improvement day and invite staff and families (adults) to spend some time sprucing up our wonderful ECC playground and Outdoor Classroom. Your time and energy would be very much appreciated.

**SCHOLARSHIPS:** Families or businesses interested in sponsoring a child to attend St. Jerome ECC are asked to contact the ECC office for information. Full or partial scholarships are most welcome.

**FUNDRAISING:** St. Jerome Early Childhood Center sponsors several fund-raising events during the school year. Through our fundraising efforts, we are able to stabilize tuition costs, retain and justly compensate quality teachers, and provide additional hands-on materials for the children. Please keep the following events in mind, as we ask ALL families to support our center through their participation.

Poinsettia Fundraiser	Oct. Pre-orders/Dec. 3 2024, Delivery
Secret Santa Shop	December 9 – 13, 2024
Breakfast with Santa & Raffle	December 7, 2024
Scholastic Book Fair	January 26 - 31, 2025
Have a Heart Raffle	Drawing to be held February 14, 2025

**MATCHING GIFTS:** All ECC Families are asked to look into their employer’s policy with regard to matching funds to non-profit entities. Many businesses match the employees’ donations to non-profits (Verizon, Raytheon, and more!). Additionally, many businesses encourage their employees to volunteer in the community and will contribute funds to the non-profit entity to match the employee’s volunteer hours. Usually, these are monitored in a calendar year, so within a school year, you may have two opportunities to contribute. Four-year-old families who contribute to the Pledge Drive may be able to double their support to St. Jerome ECC through Employer Matching Gifts. St. Jerome ECC is a 501(C)(3) entity and as such all donations are tax-deductible.



## *The Value of an NAEYC-Accredited Program*

You want to make sure you choose the right program for your child, but figuring out which programs offer the quality you seek can be confusing. NAEYC can help parents make the right choice on a child care, preschool, or kindergarten program. For more than 20 years, families have relied on NAEYC Accreditation to ensure the quality of education and care provided in programs for young children.

Accredited programs have met NAEYC's 10 standards for high-quality early childhood education. These programs have demonstrated that they provide a safe and healthy environment for children, have teachers who are well-trained, have access to excellent teaching materials, and work with a curriculum that is appropriately challenging and developmentally sound.

NAEYC Accreditation helps parents find the best possible early childhood experience for their children. NAEYC-Accredited programs must:

- Promote positive relationships for all children and adults to encourage each child's sense of individual worth.
- Implement a curriculum that fosters all areas of child development: cognitive, emotional, language, physical, and social.
- Use developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches.
- Provide ongoing assessments of each child's learning and development and communicate the child's progress to the family.
- Promote the nutrition and health of children and protect children and staff from illness and injury.
- Employ and support a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children's learning and development and to support families' diverse interests and needs.
- Establish and maintain collaborative relationships with each child's family.
- Establish relationships with and use the resources of the community to support achievement of program goals.
- Provide a safe and healthy physical environment.
- Implement strong personnel, fiscal, and program management policies so that all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.

### NAEYC Accreditation: No Small Feat

Early childhood education programs are proud to be accredited by NAEYC because they know they have worked hard for that achievement. Using NAEYC tools and materials, they are continuously improving their programs to provide the best possible educational opportunities for children.

After an extensive application process, skilled and reliable NAEYC program assessors visit each program to determine that it is meeting NAEYC standards. Following accreditation, all programs are subject to random, unannounced visits by assessors to ensure that the programs continue to meet these standards

“In Unity We are One in the Lord”



*A Code of Conduct  
for  
Parents, Guardians, Caregivers,  
Volunteers, and Visitors  
of Catholic Schools  
in the  
Diocese of St. Petersburg*

*“Search Me, O God, and Know My Heart”*

*-Psalm 139*

This **Code of Conduct** applies to all parents, guardians, caregivers, volunteers, and visitors who interact with our schools and Catholic Education in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. It also applies to all parents, guardians, caregivers, volunteers, and visitors who are present at school and school sponsored activities, meetings, and/or functions within and outside of school hours. As parents, guardians, caregivers, volunteers, and visitors, there is an expectation of support for the Vision and Mission of Catholic Education in the Diocese of St. Petersburg.

# Code of Conduct for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg

The school is a multifaceted organization comprising a diversity of populations that have distinctive relationships to one another. Relationships are at the very core of our Catholic Christian belief in our Triune (three persons in one) God. The Holy Trinity is God in relationship! This beautiful doctrine inspires all of us in Catholic Schools, to attempt to be a living Christian community in relationship with God and others. It is essential in such a community that all members recognize and respect not only their own rights and responsibilities but also the rights and responsibilities of other members of the community and those of the school itself. “All rights have to be balanced by responsibilities because we are in relationship” (Putney, 2005).

The responsibility for promoting and upholding these core values of the school community must fall on all those with the greatest capacity to reason and control their actions. Therefore, it is the expectation of the school that all parents/guardians/caregivers/volunteers and visitors model acceptable behavior always within the school setting, at school sponsored activities or when the school can be involved in any social or professional media. “It is incumbent upon parents to cooperate closely with the school teachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated; and in fulfilling their duty, teachers are to collaborate closely with parents who are to be willingly heard and for whom associations or meetings are to be inaugurated and held in great esteem” (*The Code of Canon Law*, Canon 796, Para. 2).

As a parent, celebrate that you play a foundational role in the development of your child's sense of justice, equity, and worth of all members of the school community. You are one of the most instrumental role models within your child's life. “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965, para. 3).

This Code is designed to guide all stakeholders in their dealings with staff, other parents, students, and the wider school community. All staff and students at our Catholic schools are guided by similar codes. The Code is written in line with the school's values and expectations. The Code stands beside, but does not of course exclude or replace, the rights and obligations of individuals under common law. All Catholic schools are private property owned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg.

## **The Gospel and Our Values:**

We are called to emulate Jesus' call to love God and to love each other. We look to the values taught to us in scripture and the Christian belief to guide us, including: *Love* (1 John 4:7-19); *Promoting Life in Abundance* (John 10:10); *Inclusion* (Luke 19: 1-10); *Reconciliation* (Luke 15: 11-32); *Compassion* (Luke 10: 30-37); *Justice* (Matthew 25: 31-46); *Liberation* (Luke 4: 16-21); *Community* (John 15); and *Hope* (Luke 24: 13-35).

## **In living out these Gospel values, we strive to develop the following:**

- An inclusive approach including a non-judgmental and welcoming attitude towards all people
- An ability to appreciate the situation of others
- A cooperative attitude in working with others

- Open, positive and honest communication
- The ability to work civilly with other people
- Reverence for Creation
- Trusting relationships
- Responsible action

## **As a Parent, Guardian, Caregiver, Volunteer, and/or Visitor, we ask that you:**

- Support in words and actions the philosophy of Catholic Education
- Work in trust with the school for the common goal of achieving what is best for all
- Support your child/ren in all educational endeavors by giving praise and showing interest in school activities
- Help your child/ren to discover that it is more the process that is experienced, rather than the end-product, that makes it all worthwhile
- Model flexibility – encourage healthy problem solving
- Respect the decisions made by the administration, even if you disagree with them.
- Help your child/ren to understand that ‘giving of your very best’ is what matters rather than always comparing yourself against the capabilities or achievements of others
- Listen to your child/ren, but remember that a different version of the event may be interpreted by others
- Understand the importance of a healthy parent/teacher/child relationship and communicate any concerns to your school in a constructive and appropriate manner
- Validate that both parents and teachers work together for the benefit of the child/ren
- Observe the school’s policies, as outlined on the school webpage and/or the school’s handbook and endeavor to support them in the home
- Cooperate where your child’s behavior has overstepped accepted school standards, as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct, and follow specified protocol for communication with faculty/staff members
- Support the school in its efforts to maintain a positive teaching and learning environment
- Cast off gossip and hearsay by communicating with the school and always model good manners for your child/ren
- Sustain a positive and co-operative attitude and interact positively with other parents and members of the school community
- Encourage community building with other parents in your year, level, and across the school
- Value the school community and its reputation especially when engaging with social media
- Do not smoke or use offensive language on school premises

## **Rights of a Parent, Guardian, Caregiver, Volunteer, and Visitor:**

- To be treated with respect and courtesy by staff, students and other parents
- To be listened to, and clearly communicated with by the school, regarding your child/ren’s education and development
- To have confidentiality over sensitive issues respected by faculty/staff
- To be treated in a caring and polite manner
- To have a timely response to concerns raised, usually within 24-48 hours



- To be treated with professionalism by all faculty/staff members

## **Responsibilities of a Parent, Guardian, Caregiver, Volunteer, and Visitor:**

- Value and advocate for your school and its reputation. Be mindful of the hurt and damage social media may cause to faculty/staff members and other parents
- Under no circumstances approach another child while in the care of the school to address, discuss or reprimand them because of actions towards your own child/ren
- Respect the rights of faculty/staff members and other individuals
- Respect the reputation of teachers and be mindful of communications especially social media; e.g. tone of emails
- Follow the correct procedures to resolve a grievance or conflict, as outlined in the school's handbook
- Respect teachers' preparation time before, during, and after school. Make an appointment for long discussions at a mutually convenient time. If you wish to speak to a teacher, please do not expect a meeting unless pre-arranged
- To protect our children do not discuss any grievances or perceived failings in front of them regarding the school
- On excursions, helping in class or on campus, parents must follow the instructions and directions of the teacher. A parent may remind students of the rules but at no time issue consequences and should refer the student to the teacher if the behavior continues
- As valued members of the school community attend and participate appropriately in school liturgies or special events including athletics, concerts, academic and cultural events

## **Grievance Process for a Parent, Guardian, Caregiver, Volunteer, and Visitor:**

Our Catholic schools want to work in partnership with our families. If anyone has a **current complaint, criticism, or concern**, it is expected the following steps be followed in the first instance:

1. Speak to the appropriate school person involved (e.g. class teacher) first and try to resolve the concern with mutual respect and clear communication. Where/if possible make an appointment with the relevant person. Follow the chain of command.
2. If for some reason this is not possible, then make an appointment to see an administrator, or other designated leadership personnel
3. The Administrator (or designee) should attempt to mediate and find resolution in the presence of both parties.

4. If, having followed Steps 1-3 with no satisfaction, you may complete the online form found on the website of the Diocese of St. Petersburg - Office of Catholic Schools and Centers for further facilitation.

**It is important to note that criticism regarding a faculty/staff member will only be heard if it is related to their professional conduct.**

*Deliberate breaches and inability to respect the Diocese of St. Petersburg – Office of Catholic Schools and Centers Code of Conduct for Parents, Guardians, Caregivers, Volunteers, and Visitors, or exasperating complaints, may result in exclusion of a parent, guardian, caregiver, volunteer, and/or visitor from a school, and/or possible termination of enrollment of their child/ren.*

If your complaint relates to Sexual Abuse by a faculty/staff member towards a child in both an historical or current matter, you should, contact the statewide toll free abuse and neglect registry at 1-800-96ABUSE ( 1-800-962-2873) and/or law enforcement.

Parents, Guardians, and/or Caregivers, when signing off on accepting the school’s policies in the Application Form, and by the act of accepting enrollment at a Diocese of St. Petersburg Catholic School, are accepting of this Code of Conduct in its entirety.

*Excerpts of this policy have been used by permission of the Diocese of Townsville, AU.*