



# PARENT HANDBOOK

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## A Partnership For Our Children

Dear Families,

Thank you for your interest in placing your child in our Center. Downtown Ithaca Children's Center (DICC) staff will be working closely with you to make sure your child receives the best care possible. Please feel free to talk with any of us about concerns, questions or ideas you may have. You are always welcome in your child's room to observe, visit, or help out!

The DICC began as a parent cooperative in the early seventies. Offering child care "by the hour", the Center provided a service that was unavailable anywhere else in the community. Through the years the Center became a not-for-profit agency with paid staff, but its cooperative spirit was maintained by parents who volunteered and served on the Board of Directors and its Committees.

In January 1996 the DICC became licensed by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and now provides full-day child care as well as Drop-In ("by the hour") child care. Then, in 2005 the "New Wing" was added. We now serve over 80 families.

The preamble to the DICC Philosophy Statement states that "The center is a community of children, parents, staff members and board members whose purpose is to provide quality, affordable child care for children ages six weeks to five years old." We hope to see your child here someday soon!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Scovronick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

David Scovronick  
Executive Director

## Our Staff

A quality child care program depends on quality staff. Caregivers must possess a broad range of skills and knowledge in order to provide the kind of care that supports children's development. Caregivers must also have some intangible but essential qualities: patience, flexibility, a love of and respect for children, the ability to communicate honestly and tactfully and the desire to grow and learn.

DICC staff have acquired their expertise in a variety of ways. Some have college degrees in early childhood related fields. Others have many years of experience and independent study to their credit.

Once hired, all Childcare Supervisors (Head Teachers) are required to earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. This involves at least a year of college level Early Childhood courses, development of a professional resource file, and a rigorous written and oral assessment by a representative of the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (CECPR). All staff members receive regular, ongoing training to ensure that they remain current in the field.

Our staff have all undergone an interview process consisting of a list of written questions, a face-to-face interview and at least one day of service in the Center. All final applicant references are carefully checked. Hired staff undergo screening for child abuse and a criminal background check.

Another exciting attribute of the DICC staff is the diversity of backgrounds represented. Children benefit by being exposed to people with a variety of cultural and language experiences. Being a part of a multicultural community on a daily basis helps children develop the perspective that "variety is the spice of life!"

## REGISTRATION & PAYMENT

The procedure for registration is as follows:

- Fill out a registration packet.
- Have a doctor fill out the Medical Form supplied by the Center and return it with registration. They can also fax any form with the same information to us at 607-272-4100.
- Pay an annual registration fee of \$25.
- Read the Parent Handbook.
- Read and sign Parent/Center Agreement. Full time registrants must also pay two weeks tuition deposit which will be used for the child's final two weeks at the Center as long as two weeks' notice is provided.

**Payment for the Full Time Program is expected weekly, at the beginning of each week.** There is a box by the main office for payments. You are welcome to pay ahead by the month, semester, or year, if that would be more convenient. **Missed payments could result in fines or other penalties.** If a financial problem arises, please see the Director to work out a solution before payments are missed (Director has information about emergency child care scholarships).

**The hourly fee for Drop-In Care is due at the end of each day.** To make other payment arrangements, see the Director.

## HOW WE DO THINGS...

### Arrival and Pick-Up

The Center opens at 7:30 am. **Please sign your child in when you arrive and sign out when the child is picked up.** This must be done with no exceptions.

The Center closes at 5:30 pm. Please plan to pick up your child and leave the building by 5:30.

It can be frightening or at least stressful for a child to be left behind when all the other children have gone. Our staff members also have families and other responsibilities to get to after 5:30. For these reasons, to encourage families to pick children up on time, **the Center charges a late pick-up fee of \$5 for every 5 minutes late.** If you are late, your child's Caregiver will have you sign a late pick-up slip when you pick your child up. You will then be billed for the late fee. Repeated lateness will be considered cause for terminating your child's space in the program.

If a child is left at the Center for more than 1 hour after closing and none of the child's parents or emergency contacts can be reached, we will have to consider the child abandoned and make a report to the Child Protective Service of the Department of Social Services.

Your child/children will have their own cubbies in which to put outdoor clothes and other articles from home. A drop-in child has cubbies available for their use, but it may not be the same one each time.

### Weather Related Closings

We will make every effort to keep our center open on inclement weather days. We will be sending out emails and/or text messages to all parents if our Center will be closed. **If you do not receive a text message or email from us stating that we are closed, then we will be open!** We will also send messages if we are closing early or opening late.

You can also check any station on Cayuga Radio Group (WHCU 870 AM, WTKO 1470 AM, WYXL 97.3 FM, WQNY 103.7 FM, L100 99.9/100.3 FM, Z95.5 FM, 96.7 FM, 97.7 FM, 98.7 FM). If you are checking on the radio please listen for updates as our decision may change at any time. We will report closings and delays to the radio stations by 6:45 AM and will report early closings by noon.

### In Case of Emergency

The DICC has created an emergency preparedness flip chart that is located in each classroom and the main office. The flip chart includes detailed information for the staff to use in many different emergency situations. It also includes emergency phone numbers. The staff have been trained by the Program Director and The Red Cross on how to use the flip chart. You may talk to the classroom teachers or the Program Director if you have any questions about this flip chart.

Smoke detectors are located throughout the building. The detectors are checked regularly and inspected annually. The detectors and emergency fire alarm pulls are directly wired to a third party, which will then contact the Ithaca Fire Department. When an alarm is set off, the fire department responds immediately. Fire drills are held monthly.

Local and National Emergencies – In the event that children and staff need to evacuate the building due to a national or local emergency, they will proceed to the water department next door or to the closest safe building as directed by the emergency personnel. The DICC will only be evacuated in the event the building is deemed not safe for occupancy by the police/fire department. Please tune into your local TV and Radio stations for more emergency information. **Please ensure that all information, telephone numbers and emergency contacts are updated and checked regularly throughout the year. The DICC highly recommends that each family has an emergency plan for picking up your child in the case of emergency.**

## Clothing Guidelines

All clothing should be clearly labeled with your child's name. A supply of clothes for changes should be sent with your child on their first day at the DICC. It should be checked regularly to insure an adequate supply. The children work with materials in the classroom that may result in their clothing becoming soiled or wet (water, paint, etc.), sometimes more than once a day. Your children appreciate the option of changing into clean dry clothes.

## Potty Training

Potty training must be initiated at home. The child must have had some moderate success with the same before the teachers will participate. Parents will need to bring extra clothing and the type of toileting products they prefer such as Pull-Ups. If you want them to wear cotton underwear, then please provide plastic pants to go over them until the teachers feel that he/she is doing well enough without them. The teachers will not force children to sit on the potty and will use only positive encouragement in order to promote using the potty. Send your child ONLY in easy on/easy off clothing until they are able to completely undress and dress themselves.

## Bringing Articles From Home

It is best for all, if children leave their own toys at home. **Children may bring a cuddly toy or blanket to serve as a comfort object.** Also, individual rooms may provide a "sharing time" so that children can show their treasures. In any case, **the following items must be left at home:** toy guns, candy, sweet cakes or gum, money, toys with many small pieces, and electronic toys. Talk with the classroom teachers about any questions concerning specific toys. **The DICC will not be responsible for any lost, stolen, or broken items.**

## Parent/Center Communication

Good communication between parents and Caregivers is essential. Caregivers try to exchange information at drop-off and pick-up times, but these are often rushed and busy conversations. There are a few other ways parents and staff can communicate:

Each classroom has its own method of daily communication. Please ask the classroom teachers how this will take place. Caregivers or the Directors can be reached by telephone. Parents can call and speak to their child's Caregiver at a time that is convenient for them both. A parent can request a conference with a teacher at any time throughout the year and your teacher may schedule additional conferences if necessary.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

### General Overview

The DICC program is designed to encourage the growth of each individual child in a warm, informal environment. Children are provided with a variety of developmentally appropriate materials and experiences which enable them to learn naturally, through exploration and discovery. Child care staff have experience and ongoing training in early childhood practices, offering support and encouragement for children as they grow in the following areas:

- Development of positive self-concept;
- Respect for cultural diversity;
- Development of social skills;
- Development of gross and fine motor skills;
- Development of logical thinking skills; the ability to reason, question, experiment;
- Language development;
- Creative expression;
- Sound health, safety, nutritional and personal hygiene practices.

A developmental checklist, which lists milestones appropriate to each age level, gives teachers a means of assessing the child's needs and strengths. This helps in developing individualized goals that are incorporated into the core curriculum. Parent teacher conferences are regularly scheduled once a year, in the spring or summer. A written schedule will be sent to all parents, in order to set up the conference on the designated parent teacher conference day.

Each room in the Center has a number of interest areas which include, for toddlers and preschoolers:

- Blocks
- Dramatic play
- Books/quiet area
- Table activities (small motor)
- Art/Science/Language development
- Sand/water

Each day will include a combination of individual, group and adult initiated activities; opportunities for outdoor play; a "quiet time" for rest or nap and relaxed "family style" snacks and meals.

- Outdoor play – Time outdoors is an important part of a child's day. It provides the fresh air needed to ensure good health and aids in the development of social and gross motor skills. Weather permitting, the children go outside every day. In the case of a light sprinkle, drizzle, or flurry the children may still go outside for a short time. Ithaca's weather is known to change frequently; therefore it is important to dress appropriately. Layering clothing is very helpful. Sometimes mittens and socks get wet during a play period. For children who attend all day, sending spare mittens, socks, and hats is also helpful.
- In order to meet the daycare regulations outlined by New York State, the DICC nap procedures require that children are offered a quiet place to have everyone lay down quietly for 20 minutes. This allows those who were going to sleep to do so without being distracted by the non-sleepers.

The Center's downtown location makes it possible for groups of children to take "walking tours" of the neighborhood and occasional field trips. Also, community members are invited to share hobbies or professions. These experiences enhance the children's sense of community, allow them to learn more about our world and are lots of fun!

## FOOD

The DICC serves breakfast, lunch, and a snack every day. Our meal program is vegetarian, and is based on the use of whole grains and beans, fresh fruit and vegetables, and home baked snacks. We buy organic grains and beans and local organic vegetables and fruits when possible. We believe this style of eating provides the children with the highest quality nutrition, and we try our best to serve food that is tasty and fun for the children to eat. Our meal program has been used as a model for other Centers throughout the state, and we work closely with the children's nutrition department of New York State in developing our menu. All of our meals meet or exceed the nutrition standards set by the State and Federal Government.

Our style of food is in many cases somewhat different than the food the children receive at home. There is sometimes a period of adjustment that is required by some children to get used to a new way of eating. For the most part the children eventually learn to love the food we serve and we have received numerous expressions of appreciation from parents.

Infant formula and baby food can be provided by the Center or by the parent.

**We ask that the children do not come to the Center with any food containing sugar, except for birthdays or special events.**

# INFANT & TODDLER PROGRAMS

## PROVISIONS FOR CHILDREN UNDER THREE YEARS OLD

### **Environment:**

Infants and toddlers are provided with materials and equipment appropriate to their developmental level including soft areas; textural areas; cuddly toys; objects they can safely explore by mouthing, rolling, squeezing, pulling and pushing; sturdy picture books; unbreakable mirrors; and sturdy furniture. Children are free to explore the environment, to roll, reach, creep, crawl, walk, jump, climb, push and pull with attention and supervision.

### **Sleeping:**

Each child has their own crib or cot space for sleeping or resting. Children are not forced to sleep or rest for long periods of time. Quiet activities are offered for children who do not nap.

### **Feeding:**

Parents can provide breast milk or formula for their infants. Parents provide and label bottles and containers with the child's full name and provide a written statement giving breast milk or formula and feeding instructions. Young infants are held when fed and older babies are seated in a low feeding chair. Toddlers sit together at a table.

### **Diaper Changing/Hygiene:**

Parents are required to provide diapers. Infants and toddlers are kept clean and comfortable at all times. Diapers are checked at least once an hour and changed when wet or soiled. A record for each child is used to keep track of the times of diaper changes for each child and any other relevant information. The DICC provides wipes as long as the child does not need a special brand of wipes.

The procedure for each diaper change is as follows:

- Caregiver puts on a fresh pair of latex gloves
- Disposable diapers are used unless other arrangements have been made
- Caregiver talks to baby, makes eye contact during diaper change
- Soiled diaper is disposed of in plastic lined, tightly covered trash can
- Changing table is sprayed with bleach solution and wiped
- Caregiver washes hands

Toys and play areas are cleaned and sanitized regularly.

### **Group Size and Staff-Child Ratios:**

The infant rooms have a group size of eight with two caregivers. The toddler rooms have a group size of ten with two caregivers. These ratios are supplemented by volunteers, work study students, student teachers, and other helpers in order to provide as much individual attention as possible, especially in the infant room.

## **PRESCHOOL & AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Children age three to five are invited to learn and grow in an environment rich with choices. Children are offered materials and activities which allow them to explore, create and interact. The staff to child ratio is 1:7.

The preschool and afterschool rooms have a group size of fourteen with two caregivers (the school age room has a group size of ten children with one caregiver). These ratios are supplemented by volunteers, work study students, student teachers, and other helpers in order to provide as much individual attention as possible.

### **DROP-IN CARE PROGRAM**

Flexibility is the key in a program with so many variables. As in the full-day program, children are provided with a variety of age appropriate materials and activities. Child care staff encourage children to explore their environment and support children's growth through a combination of individual, group and adult initiated activities. There are many opportunities for parents to participate with their children. Program elements in drop-in care are the same as those in the full-day program, with special emphasis on the social/emotional aspects of development. Children gain confidence in separating from parents and creating caring relationships with Caregivers and other children.

## GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

### Setting Limits:

Appropriate limits help children to develop self-control and provide a sense of security. Limits grow out of a set of simple behavior guidelines designed to protect the rights of everyone in the DICC community so they are free to learn and grow.

The DICC has developed a three component approach to dealing with challenging behaviors. The first is the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) checklist, which is a simple but comprehensive list to identify the areas of greatest emotional need. The second is a newly designed behavior support plan which identifies the frequency and time of day when challenging behavior presents itself. The team then develops a plan of action to reduce and eventually eliminate the difficult behaviors, and successfully create a means for the child to express emotions. The third component is a nationally recognized program called "Second Step" which provides children with the skills to find solutions themselves when they are feeling upset or out of control. It also helps the children develop empathy for the feelings of their classmates and better understand the effect their behavior has on others. All of these programs involve close cooperation of parents and family members.

### Behavior Guidelines:

- Keep yourself safe.
- Keep others safe.
- Help take care of your own things and the things in the room.
- Listen to others.

Children are taught these guidelines as soon as they are developmentally ready.

We use positive reinforcement of good behavior. Negative behaviors are redirected in a positive manner and never punished.

### Interventions:

Caregivers are experienced and receive ongoing training in guiding children's behavior. Techniques include redirecting children to an alternate activity, noticing and praising acceptable behavior, providing opportunities for children to express their feelings, and modeling positive speech and interaction with children and other adults.

The goal of any intervention is to help children develop the social and emotional skills necessary for appropriate interactions, cooperation, problem solving and mutual respect.

**STAFF WILL NEVER USE ANY FORM OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT THAT MAY JEOPARDIZE CHILDREN'S MENTAL OR PHYSICAL HEALTH.**

## HEALTH CARE POLICY

### Illness:

Upon arrival at the Center and throughout the day, each child will be evaluated by staff for signs of illness or injury.

#### Children who display signs of any of the following will not be admitted:

Exclude If:	Readmit If:
1) Child has a fever of 101.0, a call will be given when fever reaches 100.4 to warn families that the child is not feeling well.	1) The child must remain out of group care until the fever has been gone for at least 24 hours (without Tylenol® or other fever-reducing medication).
2) Diarrhea - stools with blood or mucous, and/or uncontrolled, unformed stools that cannot be contained in a diaper/underwear or toilet (two or more loose watery stools per day).	2) Diarrhea free for 24 hours.
3) Vomiting - green or bloody, and/or two or more times during the previous 24 hours	3) Free of upset stomach and vomiting for 24 hours.
4) Rash with fever or behavioral changes, unless a physician has determined it is not a communicable disease.	4) Skin sores are healed or note from clinic or physician stating child is not communicable.
5) Conjunctivitis (pink eye) bacterial and/or viral.	5) All discharge has ceased and note from clinic or physician stating child is not communicable and the child has been on antibiotics for 24 hours.
6) Impetigo, Skin Lesions, or Scabies	6) Skin sores are healed or note from clinic or physician stating child is not communicable.
7) Lice	7) After treatment and free of lice and knits.
8) Strep throat	8) 24 hours after treatment has begun.
9) Chicken pox	9) Until all lesions have dried and crusted (usually six days).
10) Pertussis (whooping cough)	10) Until five days of treatment with appropriate antibiotics.
11) Ringworm	11) After treatment and lesions are covered and a note from clinic or physician stating that a child is not communicable.

**For children's comfort children should be picked up within 1.5 hours of notification (subject to fees or penalties after 1.5 hours).**

Children should remain home for 24 hours without symptoms before returning to the Center. In the case of a (suspected) contagious illness or continuing symptoms, a doctor's note may be required before returning.

If a child develops an illness requiring immediate attention, staff will secure care for the child first and then notify parents.

### Health Consultant:

DICC staff consults regularly with a volunteer Health Care Professional who agrees to be available by telephone for questions. The Center also consults with Health Department personnel for advice about contagious illness and appropriate sanitary practice.

### Medication:

Children who are prescribed antibiotics must be on the medication for at least 24 hours before returning to the Center.

The DICC is not equipped to care for children who are ill. It is usually in the best interest of the children for them to be at home if they are sick enough to need medication.

In order to comply with NYS Office of Children and Family Services' regulations, **staff members are not permitted to administer medication.**

### **Injury:**

Parents will be told of any injuries that take place during their child's stay at the Center, no matter how minor. Injuries will be handled as follows:

1. One staff member will take charge of injured child, determine extent of injury and take appropriate action (staff have first aid and CPR training).
2. Other staff will supervise other children and be available to get further assistance, if necessary.
3. All adults present will remain calm and reassure injured child and others present.
4. Parent will be notified of injury once child is attended to.
5. After the situation is stabilized, injured child will be encouraged to talk about the event, to "tell the story" of what happened (when possible) and will be given further reassurance and support.

If your child is hurt or becomes ill, you will be notified. **In case of serious illness or injury requiring immediate medical attention, your child will be taken to Cayuga Medical Center emergency services and you will be notified so you can meet your child and his/her Caregiver there.**

### **Hand washing:**

Staff and children wash their hands whenever they are soiled, before eating, cooking, after using the bathrooms, after wiping noses, etc.

### **Hygiene:**

Children who are old enough to understand are taught basic procedures to prevent the spread of germs, for example: To cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze, or to blow their runny noses. Teachers model all these procedures.

### **Universal Blood Precautions:**

- Disposable gloves will be worn by staff, volunteers and parents whenever there is a possibility of contact with blood or bodily fluids (including during diaper changing, changing soiled pants or assisting with toileting).
- Disposable gloves must be disposed of after each use.
- A bleeding child must never be denied care because gloves are not immediately available.
- If blood is touched accidentally, the exposed skin must be thoroughly cleansed with soap and running water.
- Surfaces that have been in contact with blood or bodily fluids (including diaper changing table, toilet seats and handles) must be wiped with a germicidal solution.
- Clothes stained with blood or other bodily fluids will be removed and washed or placed in plastic bag to be returned to parents

## Special Rules and Requirements for Families receiving Department of Social Services (DSS) assistance

Below is a copy of a letter of understanding that must be signed by all families receiving DSS assistance.

- A \$300 deposit per child enrolled at the DICC that is receiving DSS assistance is required. You have the option of making payments for up to three months. Your deposit will be returned once your account is paid in full by DSS and yourself.
- In order to qualify for full-time DSS assistance, a child must attend at least 30 hours a week. If we notice that your child is attending less than 30 hours per week, we will discuss the option of moving your child to Drop-In care.
- Parent Fees will be expected on a weekly basis. Please speak to the Executive Director right away if there is any problem with payment. Anyone who is more than 2 weeks behind will risk losing their child's space in the program.
- I understand that I must submit proof of work (paystubs) to DSS **every month**. If I fail to do so, I will be personally responsible for the full amount of the charges for my child's daycare.
- I understand that **I must be working every day that I bring my child to daycare**. DSS will not pay for my child if I miss work because I'm sick, on vacation, laid off, take a personal day, quit my job, or miss work for any other reason. If I bring my child to daycare on a day that I am not working, I will be personally responsible to pay the **full charges** for that day.
- I must notify the DICC immediately if I lose my job for any reason. I will be personally responsible for the full amount of charges for daycare once I have lost my job.
- DSS will cover the cost for every day my child is absent **up to 12 days every calendar quarter**. If my child misses more than 12 days in a quarter, I understand I will be personally responsible to pay for the full cost of each of those days.
- I must enter in writing the time my child arrives and leaves, as well as my initials, on the daily sign in sheet in each classroom. If I ask someone else to bring or pick up my child, I will instruct them to do so also.
- I must periodically recertify with DSS as required by their rules and regulations. If I fail to do so in a timely manner, I will be personally responsible for the full charges of every day until I recertify.

**All of the above requirements will be STRICTLY ENFORCED**

**PLEASE SIGN AND RETURN THIS PAGE**

I have read and understand the information in the  
Downtown Ithaca Children's Center Parent Handbook.

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Name (Please Print)

Child's Name (Please Print)

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Signature

Date