



**Heritage United Methodist Church
Three Year Old and VPK
Parent Handbook
2023-2024**

And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him. Luke 2:40

Welcome to the Growing Place!

Our entire staff would like to extend a warm welcome to your family. We are so pleased that you have chosen our program for your child. We are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment and look forward to continued growth and communication in our new relationship with you.

This handbook will assist you in understanding the philosophy, policies and procedures of our child development program. Please read it carefully. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact your classroom teacher or the front office.

Blessings,

Jennifer Luck
Director

The Growing Place Preschool

2680 Landmark Drive

Clearwater, FL 33761

Phone # 727-479-0420 www.TGPheritage.com

A Christian Preschool Ministry of Heritage United Methodist Church

For Three and Four year olds

Safety and Emergency Procedures

Communication

1. Each teacher carries a two-way radio that puts her in touch with other staff members and the Director at all times.
2. The Director can be contacted by calling 727-479-0420.
Examples would be:
 - a. A parent cannot pick up a child on time.
 - b. A parent has an emergency situation with a family member and needs to notify school.
 - c. A parent needs to reach the school immediately regarding a child.
3. Each class will have a safe and secure BAND site, available by invitation only.

Fire, Tornado, Storm Warnings, Etc.

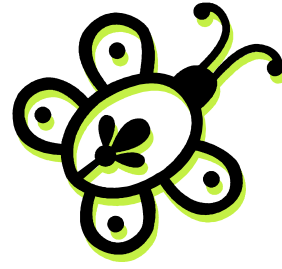
1. Fire drills are conducted monthly.
2. An Evacuation Plan is posted in each classroom. The plan also lists areas for duck and cover for tornado warnings.
3. If our school building needed to be temporarily evacuated, children would be taken to Leila Davis Elementary School at the south end of the parking lot or Fellowship Hall in Building A at the north end of the parking lot. Parents would be notified via phone and/or BAND.
4. Identification tags are prepared for each child with emergency phone numbers of parents listed on the back. Children will wear them whenever there is the possibility of an emergency situation.
5. A “Lockdown” procedure is in place should the school be threatened by an outside source. Parents would receive information via phone and/or BAND.
6. A weather radio is on at all times in the preschool lobby.

The Growing Place is closed when Pinellas County Schools are closed for any and all emergency situations.

Basic Safety Procedures

1. Parents are notified of playground rules by a listing in the Parent Handbook, and on a sign permanently placed on the playground.
2. Staff is trained in CPR and First Aid.
3. A master list of children with allergies is posted in all classrooms.
4. Emergency Release Forms signed by parent or guardian, and notarized, are placed in each child’s file.
5. A sign-in and name badge procedure is in place for all volunteers at the preschool.
6. All those who volunteer at our preschool, must be background checked through HUMC. These are valid for three years.
7. A dismissal plan is in place, which puts the safety of our children as its first priority.

Note: Parents will be notified in writing of any changes to the above procedures.



Curriculum

We feel preschool children should have the opportunity to work and play with their peers in a Christian atmosphere of love and understanding.

Here are a few of our most important goals for the school year:

1. Help the child make a happy adjustment to school and feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in the group.
2. Help the child develop love for God, their family and playmates.
3. Help the child become aware of, and have an interest in, God's world about them through observations.
4. Teach each child to think and act for them self.
5. Help the child enlarge their vocabulary and feel at ease while talking in a group.
6. Teach the child good manners, sportsmanship, and simple health and safety rules.
7. Follow the child's progress in all phases of growth through observation and communication with parents.

Our 3's learn to function independently in a social situation with their peers. Our thematic curriculum provides many opportunities, using various materials, for creative expression. The children are exposed to experiences daily that increase their language development and readiness in math and science. Each classroom has a maximum of 15 children, a teacher and a teacher assistant. Observations are made daily and are used to determine the interests and needs of each child. Formal assessments are conducted twice a year to determine where each child is in the academic process at that point of the school year. Those assessment results are shared with that child's parents as a written report. They are kept in a locked location in the classroom or preschool office for confidentiality. If at any time a parent or the teacher has any concerns about a child, a conference can be requested.

Curriculum for our VPK classes uses age appropriate activities, developed around various units that will prepare each child for kindergarten. The children are involved with many early literacy activities (i.e. identifying letters and sounds, writing names, and using children's literature for awareness of the printed word.) Your child will be encouraged to progress at his/her own pace. Above all, we strive to help your child become an independent, self-confident five-year old, who is comfortable and secure in a school setting and is "ready to learn." Each classroom has a maximum of 17 children, a teacher, and a teacher assistant. Observations are made daily and are used to determine the interests and needs of each child. Formal assessments are conducted three times a year to determine each child's progress as they prepare for Kindergarten. Those assessment results are shared with that child's parents as a written report. They are kept in a locked location in the classroom or preschool office for confidentiality. Parent conferences are held twice a year or at any time a parent or teacher may have a concern.

Classes for the 3's & 4's also include Bible moments, chapel, music, outdoor play, snack.

Enrollment Policies

All students registering for a class must be the age of the class that they are registering for by September 1st. Parents must fill out The Growing Place enrollment forms completely. In addition, a \$100 registration fee for children entering the three year old program is also required. If the child is entering the VPK program, the parent must provide the preschool with a Certificate of Eligibility in place of the registration fee. Registered students are placed into a classroom by the Director of The Growing Place Preschool. When placing students, boy/girl ratios, new student ratios, and balancing birthdays are considered. The Growing Place Preschool retains high quality staff that exceeds the criteria for Early Childhood. In addition, ongoing Early Childhood training is required for all staff members. For these reasons, verbal and written requests for a specific teacher will not be honored.

The Growing Place admits, and does not discriminate against students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Growing Place does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admission policies, and scholarship program. However, we reserve the right to dismiss a student if the child or the parents are unable to adjust to the program.

Confidentiality

In order to keep student information confidential, records are kept in a locked cabinet in the preschool office at all times. Only designated preschool staff and regulatory authorities may have access. A file may not leave the Director's office without approval. Parents or legal guardians are asked to notify the Director if they need to make changes to their child's enrollment record.

Arrival and Dismissal Policies

If your child is to be picked up by anyone other than the parent or contact listed on the enrollment form, you must send written permission. School begins at 9:00 a.m. Please bring your child to the designated exterior door at your designated time. We ask that you do not arrive earlier than your designated time. However, it is important for your child to be on time. School will be dismissed at 12:00 p.m. (3's) and 12:30 p.m. (VPK). Please be prompt. It is important to your child not to have to wait to be picked up to go home. **The Growing Place reserves the right to charge a \$5.00 fee for every 10 minute increment that your child is supervised by a staff member outside of their scheduled class time.**

If a child needs to be picked up before the normal dismissal time, the parent or approved person will come to the front door. Your child will be brought to you there. Please let the office know that you will be picking up early. Contact the Director if further assistance is needed.

Supervision

Children are supervised by two adults at all times. This is accomplished through continual visual and auditory observations by the assigned preschool staff or approved substitutes. Children remain with the same teaching staff and group of children for the entire school year in their assigned classroom. The class transitions as a group to the playground and back to the classroom, as well as to other locations as needed.

Student Teacher Ratios

| | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 3 Year Olds | 15 students | 4 Year Olds (VPK) | 18 students |
| | 1 teacher | | 1 teacher |
| | 1 assistant | | 1 assistant |

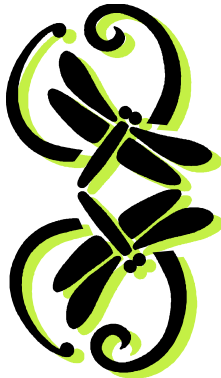
Tuition Policy

All tuition will be paid on a monthly schedule this school year. This will eliminate the need for reimbursements in the event of a closure. All payments are due on or before the **5th of the month**. Any payment received on or after the 6th of each month will be assessed a \$25.00 late fee.

Any parent whose check is returned to The Growing Place by the bank for insufficient funds will be assessed a \$12.00 insufficient funds fee. Payments may also be made through the online system,

<https://churchteams.com/m/Register.asp?a=Q1VzYzM3UjNNdzg9>, there is however a service charge of 3%. Problems regarding tuition will be handled in confidence between the parent and the Growing Place Director and Financial Assistant. Tuition must be current in order to register your child for the next school year.

Tuition Schedule for the 2023-2024 School Year



| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 3 day-3 year olds | \$280 per month (9 pays) |
| 5 day-3 year olds | \$405 per month (9 pays) |
| 5 day-VPK | FREE |
| 5 day private pay VPK | \$425 per month (9 pays) |

Supply Fee

Each 3 year old and private pay VPK student attending The Growing Place is required to pay a \$200 Supply Fee for the school year. VPK students attending are asked for a \$200 donation in place of the required Supply Fee. The purpose of the Supply Fee is to cover the rising cost of consumable materials that are used by our children during the school year. *The Supply Fee is due August 1st.* A check may be written, **PAYABLE TO HERITAGE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH (HUMC)**. Please indicate "Supply Fee" in the memo section of your check.

Withdrawal Policy

If your plans change with regard to your child's attendance at The Growing Place, please let us know as soon as possible. This would greatly benefit another child and parent. Your first tuition payment, due September 1st, will be refunded to you if you notify The Growing Place Director, in writing on or before the child's first day of school . If it is necessary to withdraw your child between September 1st and the end of the school year, you must provide 30 day written notice and are responsible for that month's tuition.

Dress Code

Dress your child in:

Clothes suitable for art, the playground, etc. that are simple, sturdy, safe, not too tight, and easy to manage. (Label jackets and sweaters.) Please make sure that your child wears closed toed shoes with rubber soles. They should also be the right size and safe for climbing activities. Socks are advised.

Attendance Policy

If your child is going to be absent, please call the office to give that information on the day of the absence. It is extremely important this year for us to know the reason for the absence.

If a child does not attend a minimum of 6 classroom days in succession, without communication with the school, and tuition is delinquent, the child will be dropped from the class. If a parent communicates with the school, and provides tuition owed, the child will be retained on the class roster. All tuition and fees must be current in order to register a child for the next school year.

Health Policies

Pull-Ups are **not** allowed. Children must be **fully toilet trained**.

You MUST Keep your child home when he/she has:

| | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|----------|----------------|
| Nasal drainage | Sore Throat | Rash | Chronic cough |
| A fever or chills | Inflamed eyes | Diarrhea | New Medication |
| Nausea or Vomiting | Open Sores | Impetigo | |
| Head Lice | Earache | | |

Your child must be free of the above symptoms for 24 hours without the use of medicine before returning to school. If your child has a doctor's appointment due to a chronic symptom or condition, please keep your child home that morning until the doctor can make an assessment. **We require a doctor's note, if your child has an ongoing cough and runny nose, due to allergies or to asthma. Your child will need to wear a mask in the presence of the symptoms mentioned if the doctor deems it safe for them to be at school.** These guidelines are in place for your child's good health, as well as that of the teachers and other children in the classroom.

It is at the discretion of the Director as to when your child may return to school or be sent home from school. This policy will be adhered to in the strictest manner.

A child will have their temperature taken during the day if they exhibit any symptoms of illness. If there is a reading at any time of 100.4 or higher that child may not attend school.

If a child has a persistent and/or productive cough, they may not attend school.

If a child has nasal drainage present they may not attend school.

If your child is not well enough to participate in class activities and those on the playground, please keep your child home.

If a child becomes ill during the school day, the teacher will notify the Director. The child will be removed from the classroom immediately and taken to the isolation area, per CDC guidelines. The parents will be called to pick up their child. **If a child is sent home due to an illness, they can't return to school the next day.**

Smoking is prohibited on the premises of The Growing Place Preschool and Heritage United Methodist Church. This includes the use of e-cigarettes and vaping. This is a Pinellas County License Board rule.

Please do not attach or place hand sanitizer in or on your child's school bag. It is considered a chemical and can be harmful if swallowed. This is a Pinellas County License Board rule.

Epi-Pens are the only medication that can be given at the preschool. Parents must fill out a medication consent form and provide an epi-pen in the original packaging from the pharmacy with the instructions and dose information on the label.

Health Related Epidemic Policy

Based on information indicating an outbreak/epidemic from the Department of Health, the Director will close the preschool. If this should be necessary, the Director will send out an email to all families of the preschool informing them of the closure and the reason. The classroom teachers will also send out a message via the class BAND site. There would also be a message concerning closure on our website. The preschool will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized. The Department of Health will instruct the Director when the preschool should be reopened.

The Director will maintain contact with the families via email and website as to the progress of the closure. When the preschool is considered a healthy environment, follow up emails will be sent out from the Director to all families as to when the school will reopen.

Playground Rules:

The playgrounds are only be used by children enrolled at The Growing Place and their siblings. Posted rules are required to be followed.

Conferences

Parent teacher conferences are held twice a year. This allows the teachers to have individual conversations with families about their particular child's progress. Written documentation from formal assessments will also be shared. However, families may request a conference with their child's teacher at any time.

Discipline Policy

The ultimate goal of our discipline policy is to promote healthy self-esteem in each child. We do this by:

1. Providing a loving Christian atmosphere for students and staff.
2. Building a positive attitude toward God, self, others and school.
3. Encouraging parental involvement.
4. Setting clear expectations for behavior.

We will not allow children to hurt themselves, others or destroy property. Our purpose is to use natural consequences, redirection, and positive reinforcement. Our staff is prohibited from subjecting any child to discipline which is severe, humiliating, frightening, or associated with food, rest, or toileting. Spanking, shaking or any other form of physical punishment is also prohibited by all child care personnel. If a child's behavior becomes a challenge in the classroom, a parent-teacher conference will be requested. A plan of cooperation will be formulated to correct the challenging behavior. In the event of an ongoing problem, The Growing Place Director and the HUMC Executive Director will confer with the teacher and parents to develop a plan appropriate for the particular child. If the team of adults feels more professional help may be warranted, an Early Childhood Specialist for the Pinellas County License Board will be consulted. This consultation will require written agreement from the parents, teacher, Director of The Growing Place, and HUMC Executive Director. However, in the event that the challenges are not resolved or that it is determined that the needs of the child are not being met, The Growing Place Director reserves the right to terminate the child from the program.

Specialized Consultants

Periodically a preschool teacher may refer a family to a specialized consultant in an effort to assist a child in participating fully in the preschool environment. The referral may be suggested to assist: a child with special needs or disabilities, a child with suspected developmental delays, or a child with behavior challenges. The teacher may also request classroom visit from a specialized consultant to assist the teacher with ways to enhance the learning environment for her students as a whole. The specialized consultants primarily used by our preschool are Florida Diagnostic & Learning Resources System and The Early Learning Coalition. There is not a fee associated with these consultants.

Reminders For The First Day

1. The child's Birth Certificate must be turned into the office before the first day of school if new to the program. (3's only)
2. The child's school physical and immunization record on HRS forms must be turned into the office before the first day of school.
**As of September 1, 2015 exemptions are no longer accepted **
3. The child's Emergency Release Form must be filled out, **notarized** and turned into the office before the first day of school.
4. All other required forms are to be in the office before the first day of school.

Each child will be given a school bag. We ask that your child come to school each day bringing their school bag, their individual snack and a water bottle labeled with their first and last name.

Volunteers

We welcome volunteers in the classroom. Starting in October, in coordination with your teacher you will be able to come in and assist as needed. You will need to see the front office for background check information prior to volunteering. Please plan ahead, the screening can take approximately two weeks to process.



Emails

Our main forms of communication this school year will be via emails, our website and your child's classroom BAND site. Therefore, it is very important that we have a current and correct email address for every family. Paper copies of the school newsletter will not be available but will be posted monthly on the website.

A class list of contact information for families is given out with parent permission to other families in the same class. That information is only to be used to set up play dates or invite children to birthday parties. Please do not use that information to solicit your business.

Photographs and Video

Photos and videos can be taken by family members for their own personal use. Under no circumstances are photos or videos of children other than your **own** child permitted to be shared online or placed on any form of social media such as Facebook.

Birthdays Are Special

You may send in a PEANUT FREE, special treat for your child's birthday. **Please discuss your plans with your child's teacher prior to their birthday.** We ask that you **DO NOT** send in cakes or cupcakes. Your individual teachers can give you suggestions of what to send in. Summer birthdays will be celebrated prior to the end of the school year.

NOTE: *Please do not send in treat bags for your child's birthday*



Classroom Snacks

Due to the Department of Health guidelines, home prepared food items, from staff or parents, intended for distribution among the children, are prohibited. Parents will provide an healthy, daily snack (this is not lunch) for their child only. **PLEASE BE AWARE THAT WE ARE A PEANUT FREE CAMPUS.** Examples of healthy snacks include yogurt, fruit (must be cut to prevent choking), pretzels, etc. Your teachers will provide a more detailed list of peanut free snack options. Parents will provide a daily water bottle for their child. This can be either disposable or a reusable water bottle. Names must be clearly labeled on their water bottles. No glass containers.

****If your child is in a classroom with food allergies, your child's teacher will send home adjustments to what is allowed to be eaten in the classroom.****

Lunch Bunch Program

Lunch Bunch will be available each day that your child attends school from 12:00 – 2:00 (3's) and 12:30 – 2:00 (VPK). There is a \$15.00 daily fee and each child brings their

lunch.

Scholarship Fund-Tuition Assistance Program

The Scholarship Fund of The Growing Place Preschool is designed to provide tuition assistance for parents or legal guardians who want their children to receive a Christian preschool education but cannot afford the full cost of such an education.

If granted, the scholarship is for a maximum of 50% of the applicable tuition. The scholarship shall be guaranteed until the applicant is financially able to resume payment of full tuition, or the end of the semester. The scholarship is not automatically renewed the following semester; therefore a new application shall be completed each semester. If you are in need of tuition assistance at any time, please see the Director of The Growing Place. All information concerning our scholarship applicants is confidential.

Mission Statement

The goal of The Growing Place Preschool of Heritage United Methodist Church is to teach children to know Jesus through a personal relationship with Him. We strive to teach children to love as Jesus loves and to develop compassion for those around them. We stress the importance of diversity in activities as well as teaching styles in order to reach each child at his or her level of ability and understanding, preparing them socially, physically and academically for the next step. It is our responsibility to nurture these children and their families as they grow spiritually, so they can live for Jesus in our community and in our world today.

Vision

Growing in God's Love.



The Growing Place Student Calendar 2023 - 2024

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|---|--|
| Wednesday, August 30 | Parent Orientation |
| Thursday, August 31 | Children's Open House |
| Tuesday, September 5 | First Day of School |
| Monday, September 25 | Prof. Dev. Day – No School Students |
| Monday, October 16 | Prof. Dev. Day – No School Students |
| Friday, November 3 | Conferences – No School Students |
| Monday, November 20 – Friday, November 24 | Thanksgiving Holidays – No School |
| Wednesday, December 20 & Thursday, December 21 | Family Christmas Parties & Shortened Day for Students |
| Friday, December 22 – Friday, January 5 | Christmas Holidays – No School |
| Monday, January 8 | School Reopens |
| Monday, January 15 | MLK Day – No School |
| Friday, February 16 | Prof. Dev Day – No School Student |
| Monday, February 19 | President's Day – No School |
| Monday, March 11 – Friday, March 15 | Spring Break – No School |
| Friday, March 29 | Good Friday – No School |
| Friday, April 26 | Conferences – No School Students |
| Friday, May 17 | Last Day of School |

Hurricane Make-up Days (if necessary)

**September 25, 2023
October 16, 2023
November 20 – 21, 2023
February 16, 2024**

****THESE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE****