

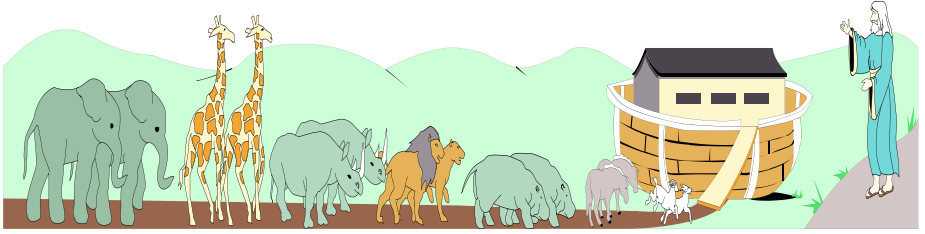
PARENT HANDBOOK 2021-22



at Oakdale Church
3425 Emory Church Road
Olney, Maryland 20832
(301) 774-5369
www.oakdale.church/ark

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The Ark Children's Center

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The Ark Children's Center is a Christian education program that celebrates children; building foundations in social development, spiritual growth and academic readiness in a nurturing, caring and safe school environment.

Parents enrolling children at The Ark Children's Center agree to follow the policies and procedures of the preschool. Parents are responsible for reading, understanding and being in compliance with the policies communicated in this yearly Parent Handbook.

HISTORY

Oakdale Church has been the site of many quality education programs for the last thirty years. It housed YWCA programs (1968-92) and a preschool program under independent and secular leadership, known as The Children's Center for Discovery (1995-97).

In February of 1997, Oakdale's Administrative Board voted to form and implement its own Christian preschool known as The Ark Children's Center. This ministry outreach program serves children ages 2 years through 4 years with class offerings, Monday through Friday. The school program is managed by an on-site director and is governed by a Board of Directors, who are all Oakdale Church members.

PHILOSOPHY

We believe that every student is an individual who has been created by God and has been blessed with special gifts. Our Christian preschool celebrates children in a caring, safe and nurturing environment. Our program promotes play, self-discovery, problem solving, social and emotional growth, developmentally appropriate learning, sensory experiences and pre-academic readiness. Our Christian focus encourages children to learn about God, practice daily prayer and treat others with respect. By modeling Christian attitudes and encouraging moral development, we believe our students can make profound differences in our community and in the world!

Our preschool environment encourages social awareness and provides many opportunities for children to serve others. Throughout the school year, children will be encouraged to use their "hearts and hands" to serve others in our local and world communities.

LICENSURE

The Ark Children's Center is a non-profit organization licensed by the State of Maryland (MSDE) for operation of a non-public nursery program. We hold additional licensure through the Child Care Administration for operation of our **Extended Care** Program. We comply with all regulations set forth by both licensing entities. The ARK participates in the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Non-Public Textbook Program that provides our families a cost savings for the preschool program and offsets, maintains and allows affordable tuition fees for the geographical location of Montgomery County.

CLASS OFFERINGS & HOURS

The Ark Children's Center operates part-time Christian preschool programming from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. September through May. Class size ranges from 10-13 students per class, with a lead teacher and assistant teacher.

2S PROGRAM

(Children must be 2 by September 1 of enrolling year)
Monday & Tuesday or Thursday & Friday

Our 2s program provides opportunities for play, exploration, active discovery and social interaction within a small group setting. Classes meet twice a week for four hours with a smaller class size to make their first school experience a success!

3S PROGRAM

(Children must be 3 by September 1 of enrolling year)
Monday & Tuesday or Wednesday-Friday

Our 3s program offers rich classroom experiences (see activities listed above), a focus on social and emotional skills and an emphasis on sensory experiences, developmental play and concept development/pre-academic readiness skills. Children are not required to be potty-trained for the M, T class option, but must be independent in toileting skills to participate in the W-F option.

4S PROGRAM

(Children must be 4 by September 1 of enrolling year)
Wednesday-Friday or Monday through Friday

Our 4s program is designed to nurture social, emotional, and spiritual growth, communication skills, independence, decision-making skills and to develop readiness skills necessary for success in Kindergarten. Our curriculum is the same for both the three and five day sessions, with additional extension opportunities offered in the 5 day program. Children must be independent in toileting skills to participate in all 4's classes.



STAFF

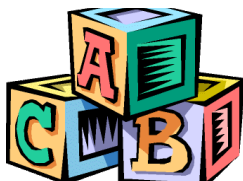
Staffing is a key element to successful programming. Our staff members believe in Christian education and practice Christian principles each day in their actions and words. They are committed to providing the best learning experiences for healthy physical, social, emotional and spiritual growth and development in young children.

Staff credentials are in compliance with education requirements established by Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). All staff participate in Continuing Education classes annually and have fingerprint clearances issued from the State of Maryland and Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI). Our staff members participate in CPR and First Aid training annually.

CURRICULUM

Serving children from age 2 years to 4 years requires dynamic programming with rich curriculum offerings. Our program is designed to meet the many needs of the “whole child” across 9 domain areas: physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science & technology, social studies and social-emotional development. We strive to nurture social, emotional, physical, moral and cognitive growth in all of our students. We employ many different teaching strategies to encourage children to be successful in their learning process. The Ark Children’s Center offers a variety of creative school experiences and learning opportunities including:

- Arts & Crafts
- Creative Movement
- Circle Time
- Bible Discovery & Song
- Sensory Play
- Cooking
- Learning Centers
- Music
- Science Exploration
- Dramatics & Play
- Math Readiness
- Concept Development
- Cultural Arts Assemblies
- Library Time
- Outdoor Learning Lab
- Gross Motor Play
- Fine Motor/Manipulative Experiences



DISCIPLINE POLICY

We believe in Positive Discipline! By employing many different discipline strategies, such as redirection, modeling, guided choices, and positive reinforcement, children can work cooperatively and have positive outcomes. When difficulty arises between preschoolers, our staff encourages children to use words to talk about actions and feelings. Teachers intervene when it is not headed in a positive direction. Children who are in danger of hurting themselves or classmates are taken to the office for “cooling time”. The director will address the problem, talk about different choices the child might have used, and (when appropriate) return the child to the classroom. The child will return to their classroom when: a) he or she regains self control, b) verbalizes how their hands, feet, or words hurt others, c) verbalizes that he/she is ready to return to the classroom and “re-do” situations for a more positive outcome.

We believe in communicating child successes and challenges with parents. We believe that children are more successful in mastering challenges when there is **good communication** and a commitment toward **teamwork** between home and school.

Behavior contracts are always discussed between the director, parents and teachers before implementation. Contracts are used to highlight positive choices and behaviors and to communicate areas of needs, in an effort to improve behavior and classroom interactions.

At The ARK we strive to meet the needs of our individual students. On the rare occasion when we are still unable to adequately meet the needs of a student (after numerous conferences with parents, action plans, interventions and adjustments to programming), the director will suggest withdrawal from The ARK. The director will help to find alternative programming placement that might better serve the child’s specific needs.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT TRAINING

Our staff has been trained to identify physical and behavioral indicators of neglect and child abuse. In Maryland, the child abuse and neglect law requires that all persons report suspected abuse or neglect directly to Montgomery County Child Protective Services. Parents are welcome to review our Child Abuse and Neglect Policies by contacting the Director.

ADMISSION POLICY

The Ark Children's Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion or national origin. When choosing The ARK, it is understood that Christian values will be taught within the classroom.

REGISTRATION

Registration for preschool classes occurs in late January for the following school year. Community members may contact the office at any time to be put on the mailing list to receive registration information for the upcoming school year. All currently registered students will receive registration information and be eligible to participate in early registration. Priority registration is given in this order:

- Current In-House students and siblings
- Oakdale Church Members, ARK Alumni
- Community Members

Following the registration process, students will be accepted as space permits until all classes are filled. Once classes have been filled, we will start a waiting list for students who wish to be considered for placement.

Health forms will be given to parents upon confirmation of preschool placement in early February. The Health Inventory and Immunization Certificate must be completed by the physician and returned to the preschool before May 1st of the enrollment year. Medical forms are required before children can attend our program. (Forms are also available at www.oakdale.church/ark)

TUITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Ark Children's Center has a tuition assistance program for a limited number of qualified students. Applications are reviewed by the committee on the 20th day of each month. To receive further information and an application please contact the director.

FEES & FINANCIAL AGREEMENT

At time of registration, parents are responsible for the following financial commitment to enroll their child into our preschool program:

- **Application Fee**—NON-REFUNDABLE at any time.
- **Materials Fee**—NON-REFUNDABLE after June 30th of the enrolling year.
- **Health & Safety Fee**—collected in August of the enrolling year.
- **Tuition**—Our yearly tuition is divided into ten installments for our nine month school year. **The first payment is collected with registration**, followed by nine monthly payments (September through May).

Tuition is due on the 1st of the month. Tuition payments are paid monthly. Due to COVID-19 and efforts to reduce manual processing of payments, we require that your payment be made electronically via Brightwheel. Brightwheel allows for direct debit from checking and/or savings accounts or credit card payment, with associated fees. Please sign-up for autopay to avoid late payments.

Late charges will be assessed for any tuition payments received after the 10th of the month (a \$5.00 late fee). Thereafter, a \$10.00 fee will be incurred on the 20th and 30th days of the month if payment has not been received. Past due tuition and other fees are subject to collection interest at 1.0% per month. Associated court costs, and attorney's fees will also be assessed.

When enrolling children at The ARK parents acknowledge that they have registered their child for our program and will meet all financial obligations in a timely manner. Inability to honor and/or refusal to comply with the following financial commitments can result in your child's immediate dismissal from our preschool program when:

- repeated attempts to collect an overdue account are unsuccessful.
- tuition falls two months delinquent.
- an account becomes overdue for more than two occurrences in a school year.
- numerous efforts to collect delinquent tuition are unresolved by established deadline dates.

Families with three or more children enrolled at The Ark are eligible for a 20% discount of the oldest child's tuition expense.

WITHDRAWALS

Requests for withdrawals from our program must be submitted in writing. Please include the date of correspondence, the date of withdrawal request, your child's name, reason for withdrawal and the class for which your child was enrolled. All withdrawal requests should be addressed to the director and emailed to the school.

- Written withdrawals post-marked before June 30th of the enrollment year will be considered for refund of the Materials Fee and the first Tuition payment.
- Withdrawals made after June 30th of the enrollment year are not eligible for refund.

Withdrawal requests made during the school year require 30 days notice, in writing. Withdrawals without the 30-day notification will be subject to the current month's tuition payment and an additional monthly payment.

SUMMER MAILING & STUDENT FORMS

All families with confirmed enrollment for their child will receive an information packet in July. The summer mailing will include information on the upcoming school year, school calendar, emergency card, what is needed for the school year ahead.

Our school office is closed from mid-June through mid-August. Registration forms are available at www.oakdale.church/ark. Please return all student forms by email before classes begin. Records must be complete for your child to attend school. No exceptions!

INJURY AT SCHOOL

Any injury occurring at school will be reported to parents through Brightwheel. While the injury may be minor, this report will document what happened, where the injury occurred and the First Aid steps taken at school. This report is a precautionary measure just in case there are symptoms later in the day.

The emergency card requests three names of emergency contacts. Please be sure to provide available and dependable emergency contacts who have means of transportation in the event of illness or injury. In case of a head injury or a child who loses consciousness, we will call 911, and then contact the parents.

COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is a two-way process. Communication breakdowns occur when information isn't provided, or isn't read! We communicate school news and class happenings regularly with parents. It is important that you read notices and emails and check Brightwheel regularly.

Our staff is committed to sharing information and answering questions about your child. It is difficult to have extended conversations at pick-up; please feel free to leave a message for staff in the office or through Brightwheel.

If you hear about something that happened at school that is of concern, please call us so we can look into the situation and clarify the details. We look forward to a partnership with parents.

Class News is available on Brightwheel. It will highlight themes for the month, events and things happening in the classroom. Information is constantly being posted for parents to appreciate the many ways children learn at The ARK.

Important Weekly Reminders are e-mailed to parents every Wednesday. These messages will remind you of events, deadlines and special announcements for the upcoming week.

CONCERNS, ALLERGIES, MEDICATIONS

Any parent who would like to discuss their child's medical needs, allergies and/or custody concerns should call the office to schedule an appointment with the director. We are eager to work as a team to develop a plan and make your experience and your child's transition into preschool as smooth as possible.

While it is not our intent to pry into your personal life, we do find it helpful to be notified if your family is under any unusual Please keep us informed about new joys (i.e., birth of baby, new home, adoption, etc.) and difficult transitions (i.e., divorce, custody changes, shared living situations, etc.). Sharing "family changes" can help us better understand and support your child.

We are happy to pray for you! Please let us know how we can best support your family. Schedule a call with the director or send an email.

SCHOOL CLOSURE/DELAY OR EARLY DISMISSAL

In the event of an emergency school closure, delayed opening or early dismissal, you will be notified via Brightwheel text alert. Announcements are also listed with WTOP (WTOPNEWS.com).

In the event of a Delayed Opening we will operate with the following schedule: 10:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. and children should bring lunch.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN

Every school needs a comprehensive emergency plan in case there is a need to evacuate our building. Situations that might require an early closing of our school, such as building damage, loss of power, heat, or water in our facility and other unforeseen emergency conditions.

Should an emergency evacuation be necessary at The Ark Children's Center you will be notified via Brightwheel using text alert.

If the Emory Hall educational building is not operational, children will be moved to the Historic Oakdale Chapel located on the property of Oakdale Church. This building will safely accommodate our students and has direct phone service (301-774-2030).

Students will remain under the supervision of staff in each of these emergency evacuation situations and **will only be released to parent(s) or authorized pick up adults indicated on the child's Brightwheel profile. It is extremely important that information on Brightwheel is up-to-date with names and numbers of authorized persons for pick-up.**

DROP-OFF & PICK-UP PROCEDURES

Entry into our building will be limited to Doors A, B & C. Each class is assigned a specific entry door. Parents and approved adults are responsible for signing children into and out of school using Brightwheel.

At pick-up, parents should meet students in designated outside areas for dismissal and check their child out using Brightwheel. On severe weather days, dismissal will occur at drop off doors.

Children who have not been picked up at dismissal will be taken to the office. Parents late for pick up will be billed an Emergency Late Fee of \$ 5.00 per half hour.

ABSENCES, SICK POLICY, COVID PROTOCOL

Please contact the school if your child will be absent. Provide your child's name, room number and nature of the absence so we can inform the teacher. If your child has visited the physician and is diagnosed with anything communicable or contagious in nature (i.e., chicken pox, strep throat, conjunctivitis, lice, pinworms, etc.), please notify the office so we can send home a fact sheet about the health situation.

Keep children home when they show any sickness symptoms

- Fever - Children must be fever-free (without use of fever-reducing medications or on prescription medications for 24 hours before returning to school. Thick and colored discharge from the nose
- Cough
- Tummy ache or diarrhea and loose bowel movements
- Child is fever-free, but vomited during the night or woke up saying, "I don't feel well."
- Child complains about a headache and/or ear ache
- Acting out of sorts or have had a sleepless night

If traveling out of state with family members, allow 5 days of quarantine with no symptoms before returning to school. Follow CDC guidelines for COVID testing based on the positivity rate of the state you visited.

Contact the school office/leadership if your child or family member has confirmed symptoms of COVID-19 and/or they receive a positive COVID-19 test result. The family and student name will be kept confidential. We need to know this information and are REQUIRED to report this information to the Local Health Department and Office of Child Care for their decisions and recommendations for school closures.

With your commitment and support, we can provide a safe environment for staff, students and families. We depend on parents to be considerate of the health of our school staff and family. Please use good judgment when making decisions about your child's return to school. Be sure to reinforce health & safety practices with thorough hand washing, sneezing and coughing into sleeves, not hands and wearing masks in public settings.

LUNCH POLICY and GUIDELINES

We are a NUT-FREE School!

(Please refrain from sending “soy, seed, or nut” butters in your child’s lunch as it is difficult for staff to determine whether or not these alternative spreads are nut based.)

We care deeply about the health and safety of all children in our care and work very hard to educate parents about the medical dangers associated with nut allergies. We have children in our program who are highly allergic to nut products. We need your commitment and cooperation to keep our school environment safe. Nut allergies are often severe; even a tiny amount of exposure (taste, touch, or smell) to nut particles or residue, can cause strong reactions. Without medical interventions, the person can die within minutes.

Please talk to your child about this food safety issue and prepare your child for making different lunch choices to help keep everyone safe at school. Some helpful suggestions and guidelines:

- No lunchboxes or thermoses, please send lunches in labeled paper bags, all uneaten foods will be disposed of after lunch.
- We will not allow your child to eat nut products at school! Encourage understanding of children with nut allergies by using words like, “It’s not okay to take nut products to school because it can make your friends sick”.
- We suggest non-perishable foods, lunches are not refrigerated.
- **No** candy or sodas, glass bottles, or glass containers.
- Involve your child in selecting a variety of healthy lunch choices. Ask your child what other friends are eating during lunch time.
- **Read labels carefully** and seek foods that are not processed in a plant that packages and produces nut products. Avoid bulk food, seasonal baked cupcakes, and decorated cookies as many of these items are processed in plants that also produce nut products.

Some fun lunch alternatives...

- | | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| • Applesauce | • Celery w/soft cheese | • Pita Pockets |
| • Fruit Cups | • Mini bagels | • Goldfish |
| • Graham Crackers | • Cheese Sticks | • Pretzels |
| • Leftover Pizza | • Mini Carrots | • Popcorn |
| • Yogurt | • Pudding Cups | • Dried Fruits |
| • Cold Cuts | • Hot Dogs | • Fruit Roll-ups |
| • Fresh Fruits | • Favorite Leftovers | • Cheese & Crackers |

WHAT TO BRING/NOT BRING TO SCHOOL

- **SMILES...More SMILES!** It is perfectly normal for children to be a little anxious about starting school in September and returning from long holiday breaks. Prolonged “goodbyes” make the separation process more difficult. Our staff are experts at calming upset children! Feel free to call the office after 9 a.m. for an update.
- **Nut-Free Lunch (see policy guidelines on page 15)**
- **A change of clothing, including underwear, socks and extra masks** for when accidents occur at school. Please place these items in a plastic bin labeled with your child’s name.
- School Supplies in a labeled zip top bag.
- **Rubber soled shoes and sneakers are the safest for school play, NO SANDALS, CROCS or DRESS SHOES, please.**
- Comfortable play clothes that will tolerate paint, glitter and markers. Avoid clothes that might be ruined if soiled or stained.
- Children will play outdoors every day (excluding rainy days or temperatures below freezing) and need to be dressed appropriately. Be sure your child has the necessary outerwear, i.e., jackets, mittens, and hat. Label all outer garments with your child’s name.
- **NO TOYS FROM HOME, please!**

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

If you would like to provide a birthday treat, please check with your child’s teacher before your child’s special day to make arrangements.

Guidelines:

- Keep it simple!
- **All snacks must be purchased.** Consider fruit cups, pudding cups, individually packaged rice krispie treats, cookies or ice cream cups. Read labels carefully products “processed in a plant that produces and packages nut products” are not safe for school.
- **NO GOODIE BAGS!**

We do not permit birthday party invitations to be distributed at school. Please be thoughtful about inviting school friends to birthday parties, as children talk about these “social events” and it can be hurtful when all class members are not invited.



