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Mission Statement: To positively impact child development by nurturing healthy and responsive relationships during the critical early years.

Baby TALK's Parent Handbook

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A. General Information

Policy Council- Join Us!

What an opportunity! Please consider being a Policy Council member! Baby TALK is always looking for parents/guardians who are interested in being involved and making a difference in the lives of children and families.

What is Policy Council?

- Policy Council is a group of parents/guardians and individuals from the community who work together to assist in the decision making process about the overall design and operation of the Baby TALK program. The members of Policy Council engage in an open discussion, and provide guidance, and insight to the Baby Talk Family.
- Policy Council is composed of center-based and home-based parent/guardian representatives. Also, three community representatives serve on the Policy Council along with a member from the Baby TALK Board of Directors.
- Policy Council meets at least once a month (currently the second Monday of each month), but more if deemed necessary for the benefit of the program. The council does not meet during the month of July.

Confidentiality of Children's Records

All information about a child, child's development, child's family, and classroom activities are held in confidence. Discussions will be limited to individuals within Baby TALK that need to know specific information in order to provide quality education, care, and services. Consent to exchange information with doctors, school personnel, and other relevant professionals will be requested.

Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS)

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services licenses Baby TALK's program to provide safe and appropriate care for the children enrolled in the center. Baby Talk is monitored by DCFS yearly to ensure all guidelines are being met.

Head Start Performance Standards

Our program follows all of the guidelines of the Head Start Performance Standards and Prevention Initiative Standards. These guidelines are available online at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/> or www.state.il.us/dcf/docs/407.doc or <https://www.isbe.net/Documents/block-grant-pi-checklist.pdf>

Mandated Reporter

All Baby TALK staff members and volunteers are mandated reporters. A mandated reporter is someone who is required by law to report known or suspected abuse or neglect to a child. The Department of Children and Family Services must be called if we suspect child abuse or neglect.

Home Visits

Enrollment requires families and children to be a part of home visits.

- For full year classrooms, a Family Support Specialist (FES) will meet with your family every other month.
- For partial year classrooms, an FES will meet with your family every other month AND your child's teacher will meet with your family weekly in the summer for 90 minutes.
- For children enrolled in home-based services, these visits will occur on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, year-round.



A Baby TALK staff member will schedule these visits with you. These visits allow time for you and your child to interact with Baby TALK staff in your home environment. Other supportive family members and/or siblings may also attend the visits and other events.

*Families must keep their 90-minute weekly or bi-weekly visits to remain enrolled in the program.

B. Program Policies and Procedures

Transportation Policy

All parents/guardians are responsible for transporting their own child (ren) to and from the Baby TALK Early Head Start program.

At this time, Baby TALK is able to provide transportation for families enrolled in the Family Literature Adult Education program and the Foundations Teen Parent program. Transportation will also be available on a first come, first serve basis for the Early Intervention Baby TALK STEPS program.

All individuals utilizing Baby TALK transportation will -

- Be required to participate in the Transport and Rider Safety Education training before using Baby TALK transportation. (STEPS program monitor will also have this training)
- Load bus within 2 minutes of bus arriving at your home for pick-up.
- Be given assigned seating on the vehicle.
- Always be secured properly by seatbelt or car seat before vehicle can proceed.
 - All children must be properly secured into a height/weight/age appropriate car seat with a well-fitted, five-point harness. There are no exceptions.
 - Driver will check that riders are safely secured before moving vehicle.
- Not have weapons, alcohol, drugs, or drug paraphernalia in their possession on Baby TALK transportation.
- Not be under the influence of alcohol/drugs including cigarettes or vape devices.
- No yelling, use of swear words, or physical confrontations will be allowed.
 - Fighting (physically or verbally) on Baby TALK transportation causes a distraction to the driver and is reason for immediate and long term dismissal from Baby TALK transportation.
- Contact Baby TALK's front desk (217-475-2234) if you will not need Baby TALK transportation to pick you up on a day that you would usually ride.

*We reserve the right to remove any individual from Baby TALK transportation for not adhering to Baby TALK, state, and/or federal rules and regulations for transportation riders.

Drop-Off/ Pick-Up Policy

Classroom 2-12: Early Head Start/Prevention Initiative Rooms

Parents/Guardians are responsible for transporting their child (ren) to and from Baby TALK.

Baby TALK expects:

- Children to arrive no later than 8:30 AM so they can participate in breakfast and other learning activities completed in the morning. If a late arrival is unavoidable, please call the center (217-475-2234) to inform staff of the circumstances.
- Families are to pick up their child (ren) between 2:45-3:15 PM.
- A 3:30 pick-up time may be available for working families. Please contact the Early Care & Education Manager.
- Drop off and pick up is a great opportunity to speak with classroom staff about your child's needs or concerns.



Classroom 15: Family Literacy/Foundations Room

- Family Literature students are to arrive at 8:45 AM and attend until 11:15 PM Monday – Friday
- Foundations students are to arrive at 12:15 PM and attend until 3:00 PM Monday – Friday

Classroom 14 & 16: STEPS Program

- STEPS students are to arrive at 9:00 AM and attend until 12:00 PM Tuesday – Friday. Please talk with your child's teacher about their specific schedule.

Attendance

Our funders require children to attend 90% of days. Regular attendance promotes healthy routines, pre-school readiness, and age appropriate socialization. If your child falls below this percentage, you will be contacted by program staff to make a plan to improve attendance.

Prohibited Substances/Activities

In order to provide a safe environment, the following substances/activities are not allowed on or near Baby TALK property or while attending an event sponsored by Baby TALK:

1. Use of alcohol, cigarettes, vapes, marijuana, or illegal drugs
2. Any type of physical punishment
3. Weapons or dangerous materials
4. Abusive, profane, or derogatory language (including yelling and belittling)
5. Also, Baby TALK is a fragrance-free childcare facility

Child safety is our upmost concern. If Baby TALK staff suspect that the person picking up a child is impaired and that the child could be in immediate danger, the child will not be released into the care of that person. Another person from the child's approved pick up list will be called to pick up the child.

Emergency Drills and Trainings Policy

Baby TALK staff is trained in CPR, First Aid, and other emergency procedures. Emergency evacuation procedures are practiced on a routine basis. These procedures include tornado drills, fire drills, earthquake drills, and lockdowns.

Parent/Community Complaint Policy

Any parent/guardian or community member with a complaint should first talk with the Baby TALK staff most directly involved, in an attempt to resolve the issue. If the person issuing a complaint is not satisfied with the response of the Baby TALK staff member, they may talk with the staff member's supervisor, or whoever is appropriate for the issue. Please contact the Director of Programming if the concern is not immediately resolved.

Parental Consent and Other Required Information

Parents/Guardians are required to complete consent forms during the registration and enrollment process. Consents consist of but are not limited to: video/ photography, hearing and vision screenings, and release of health information. Please ask Baby TALK staff if you have questions about these consents.

Guidance and Discipline Policy

Baby TALK staff provides positive behavioral support using Conscious Discipline curriculum and the Conscious Discipline Brain State Model to understand the behavior of the child.

Baby TALK Educators:

- Welcome each child into the classroom family
- Use Baby TALK language of softly spoken words at the child's eye level
- Communicate to children about the environment around them using the five senses
- Respond to each child's individual needs
- Model self-regulation and create a safe environment, such as cozy corners in classrooms
- Make connections using teachable moments
- Foster skills of patience, communication, and cooperation.
- Engage students in I Love You Rituals (from Conscious Discipline) to provide one-on-one interactions that build loving bonds while increasing attention span and promoting language and literacy
- Believe that all behavior is a form of communication



Transition Procedures

Transition is an ongoing process to ensure that children and families will have appropriate information and support whenever there is a change in typical routines. Transition activities can occur when a child's enrollment status changes, such as when a child is moved from home visiting to a center based classroom or when a child exits the program.

The Head Start Performance Standards state: To ensure the most appropriate placement and services following participation in the Baby TALK program, transition planning must take place for each child and family at least six months prior to the child's third birthday. The process must take into account the child's health status and developmental level, progress made by the child and family while in our program, current and/or changing family circumstances, and the availability of Head Start and/or other Early Childhood services in the community. Parents, Teachers, Family Engagement Specialist and the Family Resource Specialist are involved in the transition process. The Family Engagement Specialist along with the parent will develop a transition plan to be followed during the transition process.

Prior to exiting the program each family will receive a transition folder with documents needed for their preschool/daycare journey one - two months prior to their child exiting the program. Each child transitioning will receive a transition send-off on their last day of attendance which includes a celebration walk and ringing of the journey bell. An individual and family photo will be taken. Children will also receive a book bag filled with school supplies and a Baby TALK Certificate of Achievement Award.

C. Early Education

Attachment Caregiving

Children at our center will have one identified adult as their primary caregiver and this Baby TALK staff member will remain with your child until he or she transitions to a different program, ideally at the age of three. The goal of attachment caregiving is to allow the Baby TALK staff to create a loving and trusting bond with you and your child.

Daily Schedule

The daily schedule for children will be based on his/her needs. It will always include developmental activities/routine and nurturing care.



Daily Communication Form/ Signing in and Out

Each child at the center will have a daily communication form that the parent/guardian is responsible for signing the child in/out on. The purpose of this form is to let parent/guardian know when their child (ren) ate, toileted, slept, or any other important information.

Drop-off/pick-up is a good time to communicate specifics about your child.

Emergency Contact Form

Only adults approved by the parent/guardian/family listed on the emergency contact forms will be allowed to pick up the child from the center (ID may be required for entrance at the front desk).

*Please keep authorized emergency contacts up to date.

Diapering

Diapering will typically be done by the child's teacher. Baby TALK provides diapers, wipes and ointment. If a request is made to use a specific brand of diapers, wipes or ointment the parent/guardian must provide a medical note from the child's physician.

Supplies from Home

We ask that you keep at least one extra full set of seasonal appropriate clothing. All outside toys, food and personal items should be left outside the classroom.

Outdoor & Messy Play

Outdoor play includes the use of Baby TALK's playgrounds and/or walks around the areas surrounding the center. We encourage learning through messy play. Please send your child in "play clothes" as play is the work of our young children!

Curriculum

Everyday moments with infants, toddlers and twos present opportunities to build upon their natural curiosity. Baby TALK uses Teaching Strategies Creative Curriculum to build on daily



routines, create meaningful experiences, and interactions. These interactions will help your child to: regulate their emotions/ behaviors, participate in groups, develop relationships, and have confidence in their own learning. Our curriculum is based around ten objectives for development and learning: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies and arts.

Baby TALK also utilizes our own curriculum for home-visiting and group encounters, as well as Conscious Discipline to help support positive behaviors.

Assessment

Baby TALK uses Teaching Strategies GOLD to assess your child. The assessment is an authentic part of your child's everyday interactions with others and through daily routines/experiences such as meal times, indoor/outdoor play and art. Assessment reports will be available every October, February and June.

School Readiness Goals

The Head Start Approach to School Readiness means that children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning and schools are ready for children. Baby TALK has established goals that are appropriate for the ages and development of each child according to the following Early Learning Outcomes:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Language and Literacy
- Cognition
- Perceptual, Motor, and Physical Development

Implementing the curriculum and the assessment helps Baby TALK to measure progress towards the goals and individualize plans to ensure that each child is successful in reaching their goals.

D. Nutrition and Health

Sick Child Policy

If a child shows any sign of illness (see Communicable Illness Exclusion Policy), he/she should not come to the center, in an attempt to not expose other children and staff.

Every effort is taken to reduce the spread of illness by encouraging hand washing and following other sanitary practices.

Children will be visually screened when they arrive. In the event that a child becomes ill and needs to be picked up, the parent/guardian will be called. Families are expected to pick the child up as soon as possible, or within 45 minutes. If the parent/guardian cannot be reached, or has not arrived within 45 minutes, the emergency contact(s) will be called and asked to pick the child up.

By law, any disease outbreak occurring in the center must be reported to the Macon County Health Department

Hand Washing

Hand washing is one of the best and easiest ways to keep children healthy. Staff wash their hands thoroughly and often to model proper handwashing to the children in the classroom. Children wash their hands upon arrival, before meals, after outdoor/ gym play, after toileting, and any other necessary times.



Meals/ Breastmilk/ Formula

Meals

Breakfast, lunch, and snacks will be provided by Baby TALK. Breakfast and lunch are cooked and delivered to the center by Empowerment Opportunity Center (EOC). Meals are served family style in the classrooms. Menus are received by EOC, reviewed by Baby Talk and posted in the front entrance hallway/classrooms each month. The food choices and milk requirements must meet the nutritional requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) and be age appropriate. Baby food will also be provided in accordance with the CACFP guidelines. Families are expected to complete CACFP forms for each child at the center.

For Food Allergies, please see page 12.

*Parents/Guardians should NOT bring food from home.

Breast Milk

Mothers are supported in breastfeeding their child (ren). The Wellness Specialist, along with the child's teacher, will assure that breast milk is correctly stored. If a mother chooses to express milk or nurse at the center, they can choose to do so in the classroom and/or in the Breastfeeding Lounge.

Formula

Baby TALK will provide iron-fortified infant milk-based formula to children enrolled in center-based programming. Formula will be prepared and served according to standard directions (unless a prescription from your child's physician states otherwise). If you provide a note from your child's physician, we will provide an alternate formula. Parents/Guardians will need to complete the CACFP Infant Formula/Food Waiver Notification.

*Please notify your child's teacher immediately if his/her formula changes.

Medication Administration

If your child is prescribed medication or given orders from a medical provider to use over-the-counter medicine, you will be asked to:

- Fill out a medication administration form.
- Bring prescription or over-the-counter medicine in the original container, clearly marked from the pharmacy, labeled with the child's first and last name, and the order from a medical provider.
- Please do not leave medicine in a diaper bag, pockets, or other unsecured places.

The Wellness Specialists or other designated BT staff will administer the prescribed medication, as directed by the child's physician. The family is asked to discuss information about necessary medication with the child's teacher and the Wellness Specialists.

Health Services

Baby TALK supports families in obtaining comprehensive services needed to promote a healthy child and family. EHS and DCFS require that physicals, immunizations, lead, and TB screenings to be completed on a regular basis. Baby TALK staff will assist each family in finding a medical home, as well as support in obtaining the needed dental, vision, hearing, and mental health services. Baby TALK collaborates with dental professionals to provide dental exams and fluoride treatments for all enrolled children twice per year in addition to daily teeth brushing. Hearing and vision screenings are provided to children twice per year by trained Baby TALK professionals.



Food Restriction/Allergy Policy

Your children will be served a wide variety of foods, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Baby TALK is an allergy aware facility. Any severe allergies will be posted at the classroom door, on meal carts, and in the wellness office for student safety.

A note from your child's physician noting any allergies is required. If your family has food restrictions due to culture or religion, please communicate that to the Wellness Department.

Children who are allergic to any food on the menu or have food restrictions will be given a food substitute. Any concerns with the menus are welcomed by the Wellness Specialists.

Communicable Illness Exclusion Policy

Our goal is to keep all children, families and Baby TALK professionals safe. Therefore, we follow guidelines recommended by Head Start; specifically from the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education.

If you have any questions and/or would like a copy of our centers specific guidelines please contact the Wellness office or [click for full policy](#).